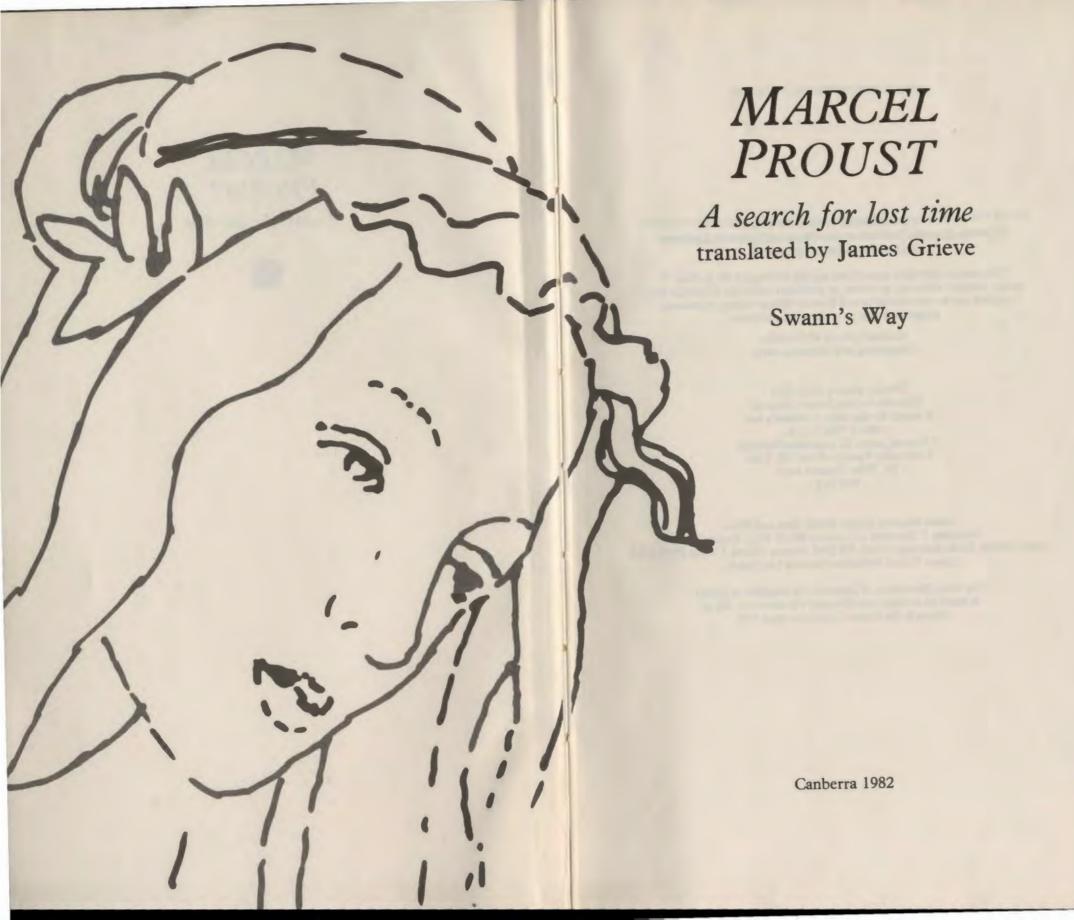


MARCEL PROUST

A search for lost time translated by James Grieve



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The cover illustration, of Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, is based on a detail from Botticelli's fresco on the life of Moses in the Sistine Chapel (see page 175).

This new Proust in English I dedicate to all those who once read him in the belief that he was abstruse; and to those who, in the same belief, never read him.

JG

"My Defign in attempting this Translation, was to prefent my Country with a true Copy of a very brave Original; How far I have fucceeded in that Defign is left to every one to judge; and I expect to be the more gently censured, for having myself so modest an Opinion of my own Performance, as to confess that the Author has suffered by me, as well as the former Translator; though I hope, and dare affirm, that the misinterpretations Ishall be found guilty of, are neither so numerous, nor so gross. I cannot discern my own Errours, it were inpardonable in me if I could, and did not mend them; but I can see his (except when we are both mistaken) and those I have corrected; but am not so ill natur'd as to shew where..."

(Charles Cotton the younger, in 1685, on comparing his translation of the Essays of Montaigne with that of John Florio)

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Marcel Proust was born in 1871; he died in 1922. Proust originally wrote A la recherche du temps perdu as a single novel. Exigencies of publishers and printers, the supervention of the Great War and Proust's own additions turned it into a much longer work in seven parts.

The first part, Du côté de chez Swann, here translated, appeared in 1913; the last part, Le temps retrouvé, came out posthumously in 1927.

The idea of attempting a new translation of Du côté de chez Swann grew out of my dissatisfactions with the old Scott Moncrieff version. At the time when I was working on this new version of Swann, I had not yet heard of the Kilmartin revision of Scott Moncrieff.

Too many have helped in too many ways for me to thank all by name here. Those who must be thanked, because of their great contributions to the work, are: Claude Abraham, Julie Barton, John Casey, Ian Donaldson, Lesley Foggin, Jeannie Gray, Grahame Jones, Christopher Mann, Jacqueline Mayrhofer, Aileen McCulloch, Bill Ramson, Derek Scales, Katharine Walker, Adrian Young. Without them, either the job would have been less pleasant or the book would not have been made.

Humanities Research Centre Australian National University Canberra September 1979

Combray I



IME WAS when I always went to bed early. Sometimes, as soon as I snuffed my candle, my eyes would close before I even had time to think, 'I'm falling asleep.' And half an hour later, wakened by the idea that it must be time to go to sleep, I would feel the desire to put away my book, which I thought I was still holding, and blow out the light. While I had been sleeping, my mind had gone on thinking over what I had just been reading, although these thoughts had taken an odd turn - I had the impression that I myself had turned into the subject of the book, whether it was a church, a string quartet or the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This conviction would stay with me for a few seconds after I woke; there seemed nothing irrational about it to my mind, but it lay like scales on my eyes and prevented them from realizing the candle was no longer burning. Then it would gradually become unintelligible, as the memories of a former life must be after a reincarnation; the subject of the book and myself parted company and I felt free to go on being it or not. Then all at once I would get back my sight and realize in amazement that I was in darkness, which my eyes found pleasant and restful enough but which my mind enjoyed even more, seeing it as a phenomenon devoid of any cause and quite incomprehensible - what one might call being 'in the dark', in fact. I would wonder what time it was. Trains whistled, some nearby, some far away, plotting the empty distance like bird-calls in a forest and conjuring up deserted stretches of countryside, with a traveller hurrying towards the nearest railway-station along a lane that will be fixed for ever in his memory by the stimulation of new places, unwonted acts, the recent conversation under an unfamiliar lamp, the words of farewell he can still hear echoing in the silent darkness, and the happy homecoming he knows

I would press my face lovingly to the pillows' pleasant cheeks, as plump and cool as the cheeks of one's childhood. Then I would strike a match and look at my watch: almost midnight. The hour at which an invalid on a journey might wake feeling unwell in some unfamiliar hotel room. He takes heart when he sees a strip of light under the door. What a relief, it's the morning! In no time the staff will be up and about, he'll be able to ring for someone to come and help. Now that relief is at hand, he feels he can put up with the pain. He even thinks he can hear footsteps; they come closer, then go away again. And the strip of light under the door has gone too. It is midnight, the gaslight has just been turned off, the last servant has gone up to bed and now there is nothing for it but to lie there alone all night and suffer.

I would doze off again and sometimes for the rest of the night I would only surface for a split second at a time, barely long enough to register organic creakings in the woodwork, catch a glimpse of the kaleidoscopic darkness or savour in a flicker of awareness the sound sleeping of the furniture and the bedroom, the unconscious whole of which I was a small part; and then I would join them again in their state of oblivion. Or there were other nights when I found I had stepped right back into the long-lost days of my earliest infancy, to experience one of the terrors that haunted me at that time, such as the fear that my great-uncle would tweak my long curls. This fear I had not lost until the day when the curls were at last cut off. And although this event had marked the opening of a new era for me, I had lost all memory of it as I slept, and it was only when I managed to wake myself up so as to escape my great-uncle's clutches that I remembered it. None the less I took the precaution of wrapping the pillow right round my head before venturing back into the world of dreams.

On other occasions, like Eve growing out of Adam's rib, my misleading thigh would bring a woman to me as I slept. She was only a figment of the spasm of pleasure I was on the point of enjoying, but to my sleeping imagination it was she who had aroused me. The warmth of my own body became the warmth of hers lying against me and the attempt that I made to go into it woke me. No other member of the human race was of any interest to me compared to the woman I had just left; I could feel the warmth of her mouth still kissing my cheek and the weight of her body pressing on mine. If, as sometimes happened, she had the features of a woman I had known in real life, I would resolve to do everything in my power to find her, the way people go on a journey so as to set eyes on a city they have long yearned to see, in the fond belief that one can recapture in reality the charm of a dream. Gradually, though, the memory of her would fade and eventually I would forget the girl in my dream.

A sleeping man holds close about him the thread of time, the sequence of his hours and years, and the worlds where he has lived. He checks with them instinctively on waking and they tell him at once the spot where he is and how much time has elapsed since he went to sleep. But their order can be jumbled, the thread can tangle. If he has fallen asleep while reading in the early hours after a restless night, lying in a position which is very different

from his usual one, the fact that his arm is awkwardly raised can be enough to halt the sun and turn it backwards, so that on waking he will have no idea of what time it is and may believe he has only just gone to bed. Or again if he has nodded off in a posture that is even more untoward, in an armchair after dinner for instance, then the chaos of his worlds will be complete, his magic armchair will transport him at fantastic speed through time and space and on opening his eyes he will be convinced he is lying in bed some months before, in another country. As for myself, even when in bed, if I slept soundly enough to relax my mind completely, it would lose touch with the surroundings in which I had fallen asleep; and when I woke in the middle of the night, being unaware of where I was, I did not even know for a moment who I was. All I could experience was the sheer primeval feeling of existence itself, as it may flicker in the dim consciousness of an animal; I was as devoid of resources as any caveman. Then, like a godsend, lifting me out of the void where I should have had to stay if left to my own devices, there came a memory - not quite the memory of the actual place where I was, but the memory of some of the places where I had been at some time and where I might now be. In the span of a second I stepped out of the dark ages and over centuries of civilisation, until muddled glimpses of oil-lamps and shirts with turned-down collars gradually filled in for me the basic features of my personality and its present world.

It may well be that the apparent inertia of things around us is only an effect of our conviction that they are themselves and not other things, an effect of the inertia of our minds towards them, in fact. Certainly, whenever I woke up in that way, with my thoughts vainly struggling to find out where I was, the darkness round about me was full of swirling objects, different places and years. My body, too drowsy to move, would try to work out from the shape of its fatigue the pattern of my limbs, with the aim of deducing from them where the furniture and the walls were and thus of reconstructing and putting a name to the house where it now was. My body's memory, the memory in its ribs, knees and shoulders, would bring forward for inspection one after the other some of the different bedrooms in which it had slept, and all the while, as though being moved about by frantic scene-shifters shuffling in the dark, the invisible walls changed position to fit each of the rooms as I imagined it. And even before my reluctant intelligence, pausing on the threshold of these different shapes and phases of my life, had put two and two together and recognized the various places, the job had been done by my body itself which remembered not only each particular type of bed, the position of the doors, the way the light came in at the windows, and the corridor outside, but also the thoughts that had been in my mind as I fell asleep and which had still been there when I woke up the following morning. My side, for example, trying to deduce from its stiffness how I was lying, might jump to the conclusion that I was actually in a large four-poster facing the wall and I would immediately think, 'Goodness, I must have

dropped off even though Mama didn't come up to kiss me good-night!' I was back at my grandfather's† house in the country (although he had been dead for many years), because my body, the side I was lying on, had been trustier keepers of the past than my mind, which ought never to have forgotten my bedroom at Combray in my grandparents'† house, with the flickering of the urn-shaped night-light of Bohemian glass hanging on its fine chains from the ceiling, the mantelpiece of Siena marble and that whole part of my life that had gone for ever, that I was now vaguely convinced had come again and that I would be able to focus on properly in a moment when I was wide awake.

Or else I would find the memory of another posture and the wall would suddenly shift to a different place, my room at Tansonville, Mme de Saint-Loup's country house — oh Lord, it must be at least ten o'clock, dinner must be over! I mustn't have woken up from the nap I take each evening in between walking with Mme de Saint-Loup and dressing for dinner! For many years have passed since those Combray days, when even our longest walks would bring me back home in time to see the red glow of the setting sun reflected from my bedroom window. Nowadays at Tansonville, we lead a different sort of life and I take a different sort of pleasure in going out for walks only after dark, on moonlit paths where I used to play long ago in the sunshine; and as we turn back towards the house I catch a glimpse of a lamp, shining out like a distant lighthouse from this bedroom where I must have overslept instead of getting into my dinner-jacket.

These fragmentary, spinning figments never lasted for more than a few seconds; and often, in my brief uncertainty about my whereabouts, I was no more capable of focussing clearly on any one of the various hypotheses that composed it than the unaided eye is able to see any of the successive positions shown by a kinetoscope to be adopted by a cantering horse. But what I had glimpsed in those few seconds was one or other of the bedrooms in which I had slept at some time in my life, and I would lie there musing on them for a long time after waking, eventually remembering each one of them - bedrooms in winter, when you huddle your head into a nest woven out of the most incongruous objects (a corner of the pillow, the edge of the blankets, the fringe of a shawl, the side of the bed and today's copy of the Débats roses) which you mould together by the bird's trick of lying against them for a long time; when it is icy outside and the pleasure you feel most keenly is the simple one of being inside out of the cold (as snug as the tern which nests in a tunnel and is kept warm by the earth) and when the fire is kept going all night in the grate so that you sleep inside a cosy smoky blanket of air which is lit up by the intermittent flicker of rekindling embers, or inside a sort of intangible alcove, a cave of warmth dug out of the space of the room, a heated zone with shifting frontiers and currents which blow colder air on to your face from the remoter corners of the room, away from the † Thus Proust, though he later refers to this house as 'my great-aunt's house' (see p.5) and 'my aunt's house' on p.37 (JG).

fireplace, or from near the window; - or bedrooms in summer, when one enjoys being part of the warm night, when the moonlight pushes through the half-open shutters to lay its enchanted ladder right across the floor and you sleep almost in the open, like a blue-tit on a twig, rocking among breezy moonbeams. Sometimes it would be that Louis XVI bedroom, which was so pretty and bright that even on the first night I was not too miserable in it, with its slim columns effortlessly holding up the ceiling and gracefully standing aside to show the space they had reserved for the bed; but on some occasions it would be that other little room in the shape of a pyramid, with the excessively distant ceiling, fully two storeys high, and the partial wainscotting in mahogany, where, the moment I set foot inside it, I was emotionally paralysed by the unfamiliar smell of cuscus-grass and convinced of the hostility of the violet curtains and the indifference of an insolent clock that went on chattering to itself for all the world as though I was not there; where this outlandish rectangular mirror stood on its two feet, cruelly cutting off one corner of the room, brazenly and unexpectedly usurping part of my usual undisturbing field of vision; and where my mind was to spend many a long night stretching and contorting itself in the effort to fit accurately into the shape of the place and occupy that enormous inverted funnel right up to the top, while I myself lay there with restless eyes, an uneasily cocked ear, nostrils reluctantly open and my heart beating too fast, until habit changed the colour of the curtains, made the clock shut up, tamed the unkind oblique mirror, disguised if not abolished the smell of cuscus and markedly lowered the apparent height of that ceiling. Habit is the slow but sure homemaker - she lets your mind suffer for weeks in temporary quarters, but it is glad of her all the same since without her it would be quite unable to make one feel at home anywhere.

By this time I would be wide awake. My wayward body had come to rest at last in the right bed in the right room and the genie of familiarity had stopped all the movements round me in the dark and put back in their approximate positions my chest-of-drawers and my desk, the mantelpiece, the window on to the street and the two doors. But, although I now realized I was not in any of the rooms that in the disorientation of waking I had not quite glimpsed but had at least believed I might be in, the workings of my memory had been set in motion; I did not usually try to go back to sleep at once, but would spend much of the night recalling the life we used to lead at my great-aunt's† house in Combray, or in Balbec, Paris, Doncières, Venice and elsewhere, remembering not only the places but the people I had known there, what I had seen of them for myself and what others had told me.

Every day while we were staying at Combray, towards the end of the afternoon, hours before the time when I would have to go up to bed and lie there unable to sleep, separated from my mother and grandmother, my † See footnote, p.4 (JG).

bedroom became the painful focus of all my thoughts. In an attempt to keep me amused while waiting for dinner on evenings when I looked too miserable, somebody had had the bright idea of giving me a magic lantern, which fitted over the top of the lamp in my room. After the manner of the first Gothic architects and master glass-artists, it turned my opaque walls into intangible rainbows and preternatural images in all sorts of colours, depicting old legends in a sort of tremulous and transitory stained-glass window. However, this only made me unhappier than before, because the difference in the lighting of the room was enough to make it look unfamiliar to me, and it was only my familiarity with it that had made it bearable, apart from the torture of actually going to bed. Now the room was quite unrecognizable and I was uneasy in it, as though it was a strange room in some hotel or boarding-house where I had just arrived after a train journey.

Golo, mounted on his shaky steed and full of his dastardly designs, would come jerking out of the little triangular forest of dark velvety green on the hillside and go lurching across towards the castle of poor Geneviève de Brabant. One side of this castle was curved, being actually the edge of one of the oval glass slides that fitted into the slot in the lantern. So it was only a part of a castle, and in front of it stretched a heath, and on this heath was Geneviève, pining and wearing a blue girdle. The castle and the heath were both yellow, which came as no surprise to me since the ring of the name 'Brabant', an unmistakably old-gold sound, had given me a clear picture of the colour before I had even set eyes on the slide. Golo would pause for a moment to listen mournfully to the accompanying patter which my greataunt read out and which he seemed to understand perfectly, for he obediently but not unmajestically matched his behaviour to the words of the commentary; then he would set off again at the same jerky trot. No obstacle could unseat him — if the lamp was moved, I could still see Golo's slow horse clambering about the curtains by the window, stretching over the folds and slipping down in between them. Golo's own body was of the same supernatural essence as his horse's; whatever material encumbrances he came across he simply incorporated into himself as a sort of skeleton, including the door-knob on which could be seen, perfectly at home and utterly indomitable, his red cloak or his pale countenance, still as noble and woeful as before but quite unperturbed by this instantaneous osteology.

These shimmering projections were not without charm, of course, seeming as they did to come right out of Merovingian history and surrounding me with reflections from a remote past. But at the same time I felt indefinably uneasy at this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a place to which I was by now so acclimatized that it seemed an unremarkable extension of my own personality. Being thus deprived of the anaesthetic of habit, I would begin to have thoughts and feelings, and they are always fraught with unhappiness. That handle on my bedroom door, which was unique of its kind in the whole world (in that, to me, turning it was by now

such a reflex action that it seemed to turn all by itself), had now become an astral body for Golo. So as soon as the dinner-bell rang I would dash down to the dining-room and there, under the large lamp which in its blissful ignorance of Golo and Bluebeard and its intimacy with my family and the beef stew was beaming down on us as on every evening, I would rush into the arms of my Mama. The tribulations of Geneviève de Brabant made her even dearer to me than usual; and the villainy of Golo made me examine my own conscience with greater care.

Unfortunately, soon after dinner I had to leave Mama again, as she stayed downstairs with the others, sitting out in the garden chatting if the weather was fine, or in the little drawing-room where they all spent the evening if it was raining. All of them, that is, except my grandmother, who maintained it was 'a pity to stay shut up indoors like that in the country' and who carried on a running argument with my father because when it was too wet he used to send me to my bedroom to read rather than let me stay outside. She would say sadly, 'That's not the way to make a child strong and healthy. Especially one who really wants building up and a bit of backbone!' My father would just shrug his shoulders and inspect the barometer, indulging his interest in meteorology, while my mother, trying to be as quiet as possible, so as not to disturb his concentration, gazed up at him with loving awe but not too intently, so as not to risk solving the mystery of his superior mind. As for my grandmother, she went out in all weathers, even when it was pouring with rain and Françoise had had to dash out to rescue the precious wicker chairs; there she would be, out in the rain-drenched garden all by herself, parting her dishevelled grey hair so as to give her forehead the full benefit of the wind and water. She would gasp, 'A breath of air at last!' as she braved the storm, pacing up and down the sodden walks, which she found far too symmetrical for her taste, the new gardener (whom my father had asked first thing that morning if the weather was likely to clear up) being obviously devoid of any feeling for nature. Her excited jerky gait was dictated by the various feelings inspired in her by the exhilaration of the storm, the virtue of healthy exercise, the unintelligent upbringing I was being subjected to and the symmetrical laying out of gardens, rather than the desire (which would never have occured to her) to keep her plum-coloured skirt free of the mud which soon stained it to a height that was the constant despair of her maid.

If my grandmother happened to be walking like this after dinner, only one thing could make her come inside. That was when she heard my great-aunt calling to her at one of the times when her tour of the garden brought her back, like an insect, into the light from the little sitting-room where the liqueurs were served on the card-table, 'Bathilde, come in here and stop that husband of yours having a glass of brandy!' Actually, had it not been for my great-aunt herself, he would never have touched a drop, being under doctor's orders; but she egged him on to take a sip, so as to torment my grandmother, who had brought into my father's family a mentality that was

so different from the others' that they all teased her unmercifully. My poor grandmother would come inside and beg her husband not to touch the brandy, which just irritated him and made him drink it despite her. She would go back out to her walk saddened and discouraged but still smiling, for she was so mild-natured and gentle that her love for others and her lack of concern for her own troubles and person came out in a smile which (unlike that of many people) was ironic only towards herself, while for the rest of us it was like a visual kiss, as though she was incapable of seeing her loved ones without wanting to caress them with her eyes. The torment that my great-aunt inflicted on her, the sight of her vainly trying to take the glass away from my grandfather and the knowledge that she was so ineffectual she was bound to fail, all this was the sort of thing one gets so used to in later life that one laughs at it, cheerfully taking the side of the persecutors and convincing oneself that it is not really a form of persecution at all. At that time, however, I was so upset by it that I felt like assaulting my great-aunt. And yet, as soon as I heard her calling, 'Bathilde, come in here and stop your husband having this glass of brandy!' I did what people always do once they are grown-up and witness suffering and injustice — I preferred not to see them. Already man enough to be a coward, I would go upstairs to the very top floor, right under the roof, to have a cry to myself in a little room next to the schoolroom, smelling of orris-powder and fragrant with the added perfume of a wild black currant which had taken root among the stones in the wall just outside and had grown one of its flowering twigs in through the open window. This little room, from which, in daylight, one could see as far as the old keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, was meant for the performing of a more particular and down-to-earth function and was my refuge for a long time (no doubt because it was the only room I was allowed to lock from the inside) whenever I was engaged in one of the four occupations for which I required strict privacy: reading and daydreaming, tears and orgasm. I was not to know that the minor misdemeanours of her husband affected my grandmother far less than my own weak will, my delicate health and the uncertain future they seemed to predict for me, and that these were the subjects of her anxiety as she pursued her incessant perambulations each afternoon and evening, with her lovely face tilted upwards showing furrowed brown cheeks that advancing age had turned almost mauve, like ploughed fields in autumn, over which if she was going out somewhere she would wear a half-lowered veil and on which was always to be seen an unintentional teardrop, drawn from her eye by the cold weather or a sad thought.

When bedtime came and I went upstairs, my one consolation was that Mama would come up and kiss me good-night in bed. But this good-night kiss was so brief and she went back down so soon that I began to feel miserable the moment I heard her coming up the stairs and rustling along the corridor, through the double doors, in her garden-frock of blue muslin with its little

tassels of plaited straw. For that moment was almost the one when she would have already left me and gone back downstairs. Thus I found myself hoping at times that the good-night kiss I loved so much would come as late as possible, so that the peace I enjoyed while she had not yet been to me and gone away should last longer. Sometimes, as she was opening the bedroom door to go downstairs after kissing me, I would feel the urge to call her back and say, 'Give me another kiss.' But I knew this would instantly produce her expression of annoyance, as the concession she made to my unhappiness and anxiety by coming up to kiss me and reassure me in this way was a constant irritation to my father, who thought the whole ritual absurd, and she would have preferred to break me of the habit altogether rather than encourage me to contract the extra need of another kiss when she was already on her way out again. And to see her annoyed destroyed the very relief that she had just brought me, bending over my bed with her loving face, which she offered me like the host at communion, so that my lips could draw from it her real presence, peace of mind and the ability to go to sleep. However, those evenings when Mama stayed such a short time in my room were bliss compared with the nights when, because there were people to dinner, she did not come up at all. 'People' usually meant M. Swann, who, apart from the odd person who happened to be passing through Combray, was almost our only visitor. As our neighbour he was sometimes invited to dinner (although this happened less frequently after his unfortunate marriage, as my family had no wish to be on visiting terms with his wife); at other times, after dinner, he would just drop in. On evenings when, as we sat round the metal table under the big chestnut-tree in front of the house, we heard from the other end of the garden not the profuse and strident little bell that sprinkled its icy and intensely metallic noise on to any member of our household who set it off by coming in 'without ringing' (as we put it), but the two shy oval golden tones of the other bell, the one for visitors, we would all begin to exclaim, 'A visitor! Who on earth can this be?', although we knew perfectly well that it was bound to be M. Swann. My great-aunt, trying hard to sound natural, would set an example by speaking up and telling us not to whisper like that, it's the height of bad manners to give somebody arriving like that the impression you're saying things you don't want them to hear; and my grandmother, always glad of the excuse to make another trip round the garden, would be sent off on a reconnaissance, which she turned to good advantage by inconspicuously plucking out as she passed a few stakes from the rosebushes, so as to make the blooms look more natural, for all the world like a mother running her fingers through her son's hair to make it sit properly after the barber has slicked it down too much.

We all sat there in suspense, awaiting my grandmother's news of the enemy (as if there was a whole range of possible invaders to choose from), until my grandfather would say, 'I can recognize young Swann's voice.' And in fact his voice was all one *could* recognize him by; so as not to attract

mosquitoes we had as little light as possible out in the garden which was why it was difficult to make out Swann's face with its Roman nose, green eyes and high forehead fringed by fairish almost ginger hair, which he wore in the style popularized by the actor Bressant. I would slip off to report that it was time for cordials to be served, as my grandmother was firmly convinced it was nicer if they did not appear to be some special treat only served up for the benefit of visitors. Despite the disparity in their ages, M. Swann was very attached to my grandfather, who had been one of the closest friends of Swann's father. The latter had been by all accounts an excellent if slightly eccentric person whose deepest feelings and most consecutive thoughts could be interrupted by the most trifling stimuli. Several times a year I would listen to my grandfather at the dinner table telling the same stories about old M. Swann's reaction to the death of his wife, by whose bed he had sat up night after night until the end. My grandfather, who had not seen him for a long time, had rushed down for the funeral to the Swann's country house near Combray. When the time came for Mme Swann's body to be put in its coffin, my grandfather managed to get his weeping friend out of the room on some pretext and they took a short walk together in the garden. All at once, in the pale sunlight, M. Swann had grasped my grandfather by the arm and exclaimed, 'I say, old chap, isn't it nice to be out walking like this in such fine weather! Don't you think this little spot is really rather pretty with all these trees and the hawthorns there and my pond that you've never once admired? Look at you, you're as sad as a wet week! Just feel that breeze! Say what you like, Amédée old fellow, it's good to be alive!' Then suddenly he remembered his dead wife and this must have confused him so much that rather than try to understand how he could possibly have felt happy at such a time, he just rubbed his forehead, dried his eyes and wiped his glasses, something he often did when faced with a difficult mental problem. All the same, he was inconsolable at the loss of his wife for the two years he outlived her, saying to my grandfather, 'You know, it's odd, I think of my dear wife often - but I can't think of her a lot at any one time.' 'Little and often, like poor old Swann,' had become one of my grandfather's catchphrases; he would say it on every possible occasion, about all sorts of different things. I would have been inclined to think that M. Swann's father must have been a monster, had it not been for the fact that my grandfather (whom I looked on as a better judge of people than myself and whose authoritative pronouncements impressed me so much that in later life they often helped me forgive faults I might otherwise have condemned) vehemently disagreed with me: 'What! The man had a heart of gold, I tell you!'

For many years my great-aunt and my grandparents had no inkling that this same M. Swann the younger who often visited them at Combray (especially before his marriage) had moved completely away from the milieu his parents had lived in and that under the sort of incognito provided by the familiar name 'Swann', they were harbouring (with all the innocence of law-

abiding hoteliers unwittingly having on the premises a notorious bandit) one of the most fashionable members of the Jockey Club, a favourite friend of the Comte de Paris and the Prince of Wales, in fact one of the men most sought after by that highest of high society known as the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Our ignorance of Swann's exalted social life was obviously to be explained, at least in part, by the reserve and discretion that were natural to the man, but also by the fact that the middle classes in those days had a somewhat Hindu conception of society, in that they saw it as being made up of a set of closed castes; by virtue of being born into one of these, one occupied the same level as one's parents before one, and the only way of leaving a caste and being promoted to another was to be lucky enough to have an exceptional career or to marry above one. Old M. Swann having been a stockbroker, 'young Swann' was fated to belong for ever to a caste defined as clearly as a certain tax-bracket by the upper and lower figures of its members' incomes. His father having had such-and-such connections, his own were bound to be similar, that is the sort of people he was 'in a position' to know. If he happened to know other sorts of people they could only be acquaintances from his bachelor days to whom old friends of his family such as my relatives could easily turn a blind eye, given that Swann kept coming faithfully to visit us even after the death of his parents, although of course there was a strong chance that any of his acquaintances who might be unknown to us would be the sort of people he would have preferred to ignore if he met them while in our company. If one had been obliged to allot Swann to a social grade that defined him accurately and marked him off in some individual way from all the other sons-ofstockbrokers-on-the-same-level-as-his-father, it would actually have been lowish in the scale, because of where he lived — being unpretentious in his ways and having always had a soft spot for antiques and paintings, he lived in an old house that was full of his collections and that my grandmother longed to visit, but which was, of all places, on the Quai d'Orléans, a district that my great-aunt would have been ashamed to live in. She would ask him, 'But, really, have you got what it takes to be a connoisseur? I mean, I'm only asking in your own interest, because I'm sure you must let those dealers palm off all sorts of duds on you.' She was convinced he was devoid of all competence and, even in intellectual matters, had no high opinion of a man who avoided serious subjects of conversation and was downright precise and prosaic not only when passing on (in excessively minute detail) a recipe for a dish but even when my grandmother's sisters broached cultural topics. When they invited him to pass an opinion on a picture or to express admiration of it he would sit there and have so little to say for himself that he was almost rude; but he would make up for this taciturnity if he was able to offer some factual information about the art-gallery in which the picture was to be seen or the date when it was painted. His usual practice, however, was

to try to be amusing, by recounting his latest experiences with people whom we knew, such as the village chemist, our cook or our coachman. My greataunt used to laugh at these stories, all right, although she could never really tell whether it was because Swann always cast himself in the role of a fool or because he was a witty raconteur: 'You're what's called a real card, M. Swann!' She was the only member of our family who was at all 'common' and never failed to let outsiders know, if the subject of Swann was raised, that he could easily have lived in the Boulevard Haussmann or the Avenue de l'Opéra if he had felt like it (being the son of M. Swann who must have left four or five million francs), but that it was his eccentricity not to. This eccentricity she assumed would be bound to amuse other people and so, when M. Swann came to wish her a Happy New Year in Paris, with his little bag of marrons glaces for her, she always made a point of simpering over her lorgnette at the other guests and saying, 'Ah, it's M. Swann, who lives over near the wine warehouse, so as to be sure of catching his train when he's got to go to Lyon.'

However, if my great-aunt had learned that her M. Swann—who in his capacity as 'young Swann' had the necessary qualifications for being accepted by all the 'best' upper-middle-class families, the most highly regarded men in Parisian legal circles (a privilege of which he seemed somewhat unappreciative)—led a very different and almost secret life, that her M. Swann could leave our Paris house, saying he was off home to bed, and go straight to the sort of salon that no stockbroker or his partner had ever set foot in, she would have been as amazed as a better-read lady would have been to think that she might have a personal acquaintance with Aristeus who, after a chat with her, could plunge into the realm of Thetis on which no mortal eye has ever looked and in which Vergil shows him being welcomed with open arms; or, to use an illustration that was more likely to occur to her (since she had seen it painted on her side-plates at Combray), she would have felt as though she had just had dinner with Ali Baba who, as soon as he was alone, would go off to his glittering cave full of secret treasure.

He dropped in on us once in Paris after dinner, apologizing for being in evening dress. After he had gone, Françoise said his coachman had told her M. Swann had dined 'with a princess', at which my aunt, not even bothering to look up from her knitting, shrugged her shoulders and said with placid irony, 'Hm, princess indeed! We all know what that means!'

My great-aunt was briskly unceremonious with him. Believing that Swann must feel flattered by our invitations, she thought it was the least he could do to bring us a basket of peaches or raspberries from his garden whenever he came to visit us in summer and to bring me back photographs of works of art every time he went to Italy. He was quite unashamedly sent for if a recipe was needed for *gribiche* sauce or pineapple salad, although he himself would not be invited to the dinner-party at which it was to be

served, being deemed insufficiently impressive to be shown off to new friends on their first visit. If the conversation turned, say, to the princes of the French royal house, my great-aunt would say to Swann (who probably had a letter from Twickenham in his pocket), 'People you and I will never know and never want to know, what?'; and on evenings when one of my grandmother's sisters sang for us, my great-aunt made Swann push the piano about and stand there turning the pages of the music, generally treating this person (whom others valued so highly) with all the unthinking roughness of a child playing with a rare collector's item as though it was a cheap toy.

So the Swann who was often to be seen in fashionable clubs at that period was very different from the Swann conjured up by my great-aunt on fine evenings in the garden at Combray when, at the two timid rings from the little bell, she took the dim, indeterminate character, barely visible against the darkness, recognizable only by the voice talking to my grandmother, and filled him out with everything she knew about the Swann family. But then, even down to the most inconsequential things, none of us is an unchanging constitutive entity, identical to all observers and waiting to be looked up like a list of specifications or somebody's will; our social personality is, in fact, a creation of the minds of other people. Even the simple act of 'seeing a man we know' is partly an intellectual activity. We take the physical appearance of such a person and fill it up with all our ideas about him; and these ideas constitute by far the greater part of our total impression of him. They eventually model his cheeks so exactly, trace the curve of his nose so faithfully and are so expert at giving his voice its especial intonation that each time we see his face and hear his voice, it is as though he is wearing a transparent disguise and what we really see and hear are the ideas we ourselves have formed. No doubt my family left out of the Swann of their creation a whole host of details that they knew nothing of and which, by belonging to his social life, were the very reason why other people saw elegance written all over his face and epitomized in his aquiline nose; but by the same token my relatives had taken his unremarkable eyes and the empty spaces of his unprestigious face and put into them the vague homely semimemory of the pleasant hours they had idled away in his company, sitting about the card-table or out in the garden after the weekly dinner-party in the old days when we were neighbours in the country. These half-forgotten figments, along with a few more precise memories of his family, had so totally taken over the physical appearance of our friend that this version of Swann had become a fully rounded character with a life of its own; and nowadays I have the impression that I am dealing with two utterly different individuals if I remember first the Swann I came to know intimately in later life and then the family version of him I knew in my childhood, with all its charming inaccuracies, its air of eternal leisure and its peculiar fragrance that came from the big chestnut-tree, the baskets of raspberries and a sprig of tarragon. For this early Swann actually resembled not so much the later one as other people whom I knew at the same time, as though one could detect among real people the sort of family likeness one sees in the portraits from one particular period in an art-gallery which all look as though painted in the same key.

And yet there was a day when my grandmother went to ask a favour of a lady she had known at the Sacré-Coeur convent-school (the Marquise de Villeparisis, one of the famous Bouillon family) and with whom, because of our family's belief in the caste system, she had all but lost touch, despite their liking for each other. The Marquise had said to her, 'I believe you know M. Swann very well? He's a great friend of my nephew and niece the Prince and Princesse des Laumes.' My grandmother had come home from this call full of enthusiasm about the Marquise's house (in which Mme de Villeparisis had urged her to rent a flat) with its gardens behind, and also about a waistcoat-maker who with his daughter kept a shop opening on to the courtyard and who had mended her skirt after she tore it coming downstairs. She could not speak too highly of these people: the girl was a perfect gem and the man himself was the nearest thing to a real gentleman that she had ever seen, since to her mind distinction had nothing whatever to do with social class. She repeated to my mother something he had said to her, adding, 'Mme de Sévigné couldn't have put it better!'; whereas her reaction to a nephew of Mme de Villeparisis to whom she had been introduced was, 'My dear, he's the most vulgar person!'

As for the remark about Swann, its effect was not to raise him in the opinion of my great-aunt but to lower Mme de Villeparisis. It was as though this lady, by learning of the existence of Swann and permitting her relatives to have anything to do with him, had failed in a duty imposed on her by the esteem in which, on my grandmother's authority, we held her. 'What! She knows our Swann! I thought you told us she was related to Marshall MacMahon?' My family were to be confirmed in their low opinion of Swann's connections when he got married to a woman of the worst sort, a woman who was little better than a common prostitute — not that he ever tried to introduce her to them (he went on coming over to see us by himself, although his visits became more and more infrequent) but because, believing in their ignorance of his private life that he had met her in his usual social set, they judged that set by what they knew of her.

There was another occasion on which my grandfather read in a newspaper that M. Swann was one of the most regular guests at the Sunday luncheons of the Duc de X—, whose father and uncle had been the most prominent statesmen during the reign of Louis-Philippe. My grandfather was interested in any snippets of information that could help him visualize the private life of men like Molé, the Duc Pasquier or the Duc de Broglie, and so was delighted to learn that Swann was on familiar terms with people who had known them. However, my great-aunt interpreted this piece of news to

Swann's detriment: anyone who chose to mix with people born into a different social caste went irretrievably down in her estimation. She felt that to allow oneself to become declasse like that was to throw away at one fell swoop all the good connections with solid citizens who knew their place, which had been painstakingly cultivated and handed down by honourable families. She had even fallen out with a friend of the family, a solicitor's son, because by marrying a lady of noble birth he had demoted himself from the respectable class of lawyer's son and put himself on the same level as those adventurers one reads about, former footmen or stable-lads, who enjoyed the favours of queens. She pooh-poohed my grandfather's idea of asking Swann about these friends he appeared to have the next time he came to dinner. My grandmother's two sisters (old maids, both of them, who shared her noble nature but not her fine mind) chimed in to declare that it was beyond them how their brother-in-law could be bothered to indulge in such tomfoolery. These two old spinsters had such elevated standards that they were quite incapable of paying any attention to what is known as tittle-tattle, even if it had a certain historical value, and in general could only take an interest in subjects which had a direct link with the aesthetic or the uplifting. Their minds were so devoid of interest in anything remotely connected with social life that their sense of hearing — realizing its temporary uselessness as soon as the tone of the conversation at dinner-time, despite their best efforts to raise it to their favourite exalted subjects, descended to the frivolous or even just to the commonplace — would switch off its receiving apparatus and let it suffer what amounted to incipient atrophy. At such times, if my grandfather wanted to attract their attention, he had to rely on the minatory methods used by psychiatrists with some of their patients whose minds wander too compulsively - tapping a knife repeatedly on a glass, while simultaneously calling their name and staring hard at them (the sort of violent tactics that psychiatrists often use even when having everyday dealings with people who are quite sane, either because it is a professional habit they cannot break or because they think everybody is slightly mad).

The two old sisters did prick up their ears on one occasion. It was the day before Swann was due to come to dinner, and he had sent over a case of Asti as a personal gift to them. My great-aunt, perusing that morning's Figaro, came upon a mention of a painting loaned to a Corot exhibition 'from the collection of M. Charles Swann', and said, 'Well, well! Have you seen that Swann is making the headlines in the Figaro now?'

To which my grandmother said, 'Well, I for one have always maintained he has excellent taste.'

'Well, of course, you would! Anything to be different from the rest of us!'
(This from my great-aunt — knowing full well that my grandmother and herself never saw eye to eye on anything, but not quite sure that the rest of us always shared her own view, she was attempting to manoeuvre us into a wholesale condemnation of my grandmother's opinions by thrusting this

supposed unanimity on us. But none of us supported her.) My grandmother's sisters then expressed their intention of mentioning the item in the Figaro to Swann, but my great-aunt would have none of it. Whenever she discovered that somebody enjoyed a benefit, however slight, that she did not share, she persuaded herself it was not a benefit at all but a disadvantage, and pitied them so as not to have to envy them: 'I think he would probably be displeased if you did. I mean, I know if it was my name put in the paper like that for all the world to see I should be greatly put out. And I shouldn't be at all flattered if people mentioned it to me.'

Not that she needed to press the point, for my grandmother's sisters had such an aversion to vulgarity that they had made a fine art of concealing any personal allusion behind the most subtle circumlocutions, so that it often passed unnoticed by the very person it was meant for. My mother, for her part, was solely concerned to have my father speak to Swann not about his wife but about his little girl whom he adored and who rumour had it was the real reason why he had married at all: 'All you would have to do would be mention her. Just ask him how she is. It must be unbearable for him.'

This only irritated my father: 'No, I tell you! What ludicrous suggestions you make! It would be quite out of the question!'

The only one of us who looked forward to Swann's visits with anxiety was myself. This was because on evenings when we had visitors, or just M. Swann, Mama did not come up to my room. I had to eat before the others and was then allowed to sit at the table with them until eight o'clock, when I was to go up to bed. This meant that instead of Mama bringing her kiss up to me in bed and giving it to me just before I went to sleep, I now had to carry her precious fragile gift all the way from the dining-room up to my bedroom and keep it intact while I undressed, so that the sweetness of it should not seep out and evaporate. Not only that, but on those very evenings when I needed to receive it with even greater care than usual, I had to snatch it unceremoniously in public without having the time or the presence of mind to concentrate on what I was doing as carefully as do those obsessive characters who, while closing a door, strive their utmost to exclude all other thoughts from their minds so that when their nagging doubt comes back they can defeat it with the memory of the moment when they did close that door.

We were all sitting out in the garden when we heard the little bell give its two tentative rings. We knew it would be Swann; even so, we all looked at one another in wonderment and my grandmother was sent out on a patrol. My grandfather urged his two sisters-in-law to 'Try to thank him intelligibly for his wine. It's very good stuff. And the case is enormous.'

'Don't start that whispering!' said my great-aunt. 'How nice to come into a place where everybody is muttering away!'

'Ah, here's M. Swann! He'll know if we're to have a fine day tomorrow,' said my father.

My mother was sure that a kind word from her would compensate Swann

for all the pain that our family might have caused him since his marriage and she found an opportunity to take him aside. But I followed her, unable to let her out of reach and knowing that in all too short a time I would have to leave her in the dining-room and go up to bed without the usual consolation of her coming up to kiss me good-night. She said to him, 'M. Swann, do tell me about your daughter. I expect she already has a taste for beautiful things, like her father.'

My grandfather came over just then and said, 'I say, come and sit with the rest of us on the verandah.'

This prevented my mother from continuing, but just as the tyranny of a rhyme-scheme can force a good poet to write his best lines, she turned this constraint to good effect and managed to get in another considerate remark: 'We can talk about her when we are by ourselves,' she murmured to Swann. 'A mother can understand these things better than anyone else. I'm sure her mother would agree.'

We all sat down round the iron table. I would have preferred not to think about the painful hours I was going to have to spend up in my room unable to sleep. I kept telling myself that this pain was insignificant, since by the following morning I would have forgotten all about it; and I tried to think of the future, as though this would bridge the intervening gulf of anxiety for me. But my mind was tense with foreboding and so impervious to all other influences that, like the anxious eyes with which I stared at my mother, it too seemed somehow to have become convex. Impressions could still enter my mind, but only after they had left outside all trace of beauty or enjoyment that might have moved me or made me laugh. In the same way as a patient can be completely aware of the surgery he is undergoing but feel nothing of it due to a local anaesthetic, I could remember favourite lines of poetry without being affected by them and witness my grandfather's attempts to engage Swann in a conversation about the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier without being amused by them.

My grandfather's efforts were quite fruitless. He had barely had time to ask Swann about the orator when one of his sisters-in-law, Céline, taking his question to be a form of total and untimely silence that should be politely broken, addressed her sister: 'Just think, Flora, I've met a young Swedish governess who told me the most fascinating things about co-operatives in the Scandinavian countries. We really must have her to dinner one evening.'

'By all means,' replied Great-Aunt Flora. 'But, you know, I haven't been wasting my time either. At M. Vinteuil's house the other day I met an old scholar who knows Maubant the actor very well and, do you know, Maubant's been telling him all about how he thinks himself into a part in a new play! It was most fascinating. Apparently he's a neighbour of M. Vinteuil, which was news to me. Anyway, he's very nice.'

'But M. Vinteuil's not the only one who has nice neighbours,' exclaimed Great-Aunt Céline in a voice that was too loud (because she was shy) and rang false (because she had rehearsed her little speech too much), while casting at

Swann what she thought was a 'meaning' look. Meanwhile, Great-Aunt Flora (realizing that this was her sister's way of thanking Swann for his gift of Asti) was also gazing at him with an expression that was half congratulatory and half ironic, perhaps just to underline her sister's wit, or because she envied Swann for having been the cause of it, or possibly because she enjoyed teasing him in what she took to be an embarrassing situation for him. She said, 'I'm pretty sure we can get him to come to dinner. I tell you, once he gets started on Maubant or Mme Materna, he'll go on for hours on end!'

'That sounds fascinating,' sighed my grandfather, who was unfortunately as unable to be passionately interested in Swedish co-operatives or Maubant's ways of preparing his roles as were his sisters-in-law to add for themselves the necessary touch of piquancy to a story about the private life of Mole or the Comte de Paris, without which it would not be so enjoyable.

'Listen to this,' said Swann to my grandfather. 'It's more relevant than you might think to what you asked me, because in some ways things haven't changed all that much. I was re-reading Saint-Simon this morning and I came across something you would have enjoyed. It's in the part dealing with his mission to Spain. Mind you, it's not one of the best volumes, it's little more than a diary, really, a daily bulletin of news. But at least it's extremely well written, which is more than one can say for those dreadful news-sheets we make a point of reading each morning and evening...'

'Oh, I disagree with you there! Some days one can find nice things in the papers!' — this being Great-Aunt Flora's way of showing Swann that she had seen the reference to his Corot in the Figaro.

'Yes, sometimes they mention things and people that one is interested in!'
— this being Great-Aunt Céline making doubly sure that Swann would take
the point.

'Well, I'm sure you're right,' replied Swann in amazement. 'But what I think is wrong with the newspapers is that every single day they make you take an interest in trivia. Whereas in a whole lifetime you may only read three or four books which have really essential things to say. The way people eagerly open their paper every morning makes you want to change things a bit and put in something like, say, the ... Pensées of Pascal!' This title he pronounced with a special ironic stress, so as to avoid appearing pedantic. He went on, expressing the disdain for fashionable society that fashionable society men sometimes affect, 'And then, in the leather-bound tome that you read once in ten years you could put that Her Majesty the Queen of the Hellenes is visiting Cannes and that the Princess of León has given a fancy-dress ball. That way, people could keep a sense of proportion.'

Then, feeling that he should not be expressing himself, however light-heartedly, on serious questions, he added ironically, 'Well, we are having a grand conversation! I can't think how we got into such exalted spheres. Anyway, as I was saying' (and he turned back towards my grandfather), 'Saint-Simon tells how Maulévrier had the audacity to offer his hand to his

sons. You remember, it's the Maulévrier of whom he says: "Never did I see in that coarse bottle anything but bad temper, uncouthness and stupidity..."

'Coarse or not,' chipped in Great-Aunt Flora, anxious to thank Swann personally, since the wine was for both sisters, 'there are other sorts of bottles in which one can see something very different!'

Great-Aunt Céline burst out laughing and Swann, in some bewilderment, went on, 'Saint-Simon puts it like this: "He tried, I know not whether through ignorance or as a snare, to shake hands with my sons. I noticed this soon enough to forestall him."

My grandfather was just beginning to appreciate the expression 'through ignorance or as a snare', when his sister-in-law Céline (the total atrophy of whose hearing had been averted by the name of Saint-Simon, a man of letters) burst out indignantly, 'What! You think that's admirable, do you? Well, I never! That is the limit! Just think what it really means — isn't a man a man for a' that? What does it matter whether he's a duke or a coachman? Kind hearts and coronets, after all! A fine way to bring up children, not letting them shake the hand of any good person. I tell you it's disgraceful. How can you quote the man?'

By which stage my grandfather, realizing the frustrating futility of his attempt to have Swann pass on the anecdotes he had been looking forward to hearing, was muttering to my mother, 'What's that line of Corneille's that you console me with at times like this? Ah, yes, I've got it: "Lord, how many are the virtues you make us detest!" True, very true.'

I could not take my eyes off my mother, knowing that once we went into the dining-room I would not be allowed to stay until the end of the meal and that Mama, so as not to upset my father, would not let me kiss her several times in front of everybody as she would have done up in my bedroom. I was making up my mind that once dinner had begun and bedtime was near I would make the most I could of my kiss, however perfunctory and furtive it was; I was going to select the best spot on her cheek to kiss and prepare my thoughts for it, so that having planned the kiss in this way I could then spend the whole moment with Mama actually noticing the feel of her cheek on my lips, as a painter who can only have brief sessions with his model prepares his palette and does as much as he can in advance from memory and from notes. Then, all of a sudden, before the dinner-bell had even been rung, my grandfather had the unwitting cruelty to say, 'That boy looks tired. He should go up to bed. I mean, we're having dinner late as it is.' At which my father, who was less punctilious about adhering to treaties than my mother or grandmother, said, 'Yes, off you go. Up to bed.' I went to give Mama a kiss but at that very moment the bell was rung for dinner and my father said, 'Come on now, leave your mother in peace. The pair of you have had plenty of time to say goodnight. It's a preposterous performance! Off you go, up those stairs!' And so, like an unshriven soul, I had to leave without my viaticum; I had to drag my unwilling heart with me up each single stair,

instead of letting it do what it wanted to do - go back down to Mama who, by failing to kiss me, had not given it permission to go with me. I was always heartbroken as I started to climb those stairs: I hated them and their smell of varnish which, by somehow absorbing and focussing the specific sorrow I felt each evening, had made it even more unbearable to me because, now that it was perceptible to me as a smell, my intelligence could not cope with it. If one suffers from a toothache while asleep, the pain may be perceptible as the image of a drowning girl whom one is trying to save hundreds of times over or as a line from Molière that one cannot get out of one's head, and it actually comes as a great relief to wake up so that one's intelligence can divest the toothache of its disguise of heroism or meter. It was the opposite of this relief that I experienced when, in a way that was as insidious as it was sharp and much more damaging than the solely emotional experience would have been, my unhappiness at having to go upstairs pierced me suddenly by being breathed in as the smell of varnish on that staircase. Once up in the bedroom I had to seal myself in, close the shutters, dig my own grave, draw back the blankets and put on the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself alive (in the little metal-framed bed that had been put into the room specially for me because I was too hot on summer nights behind the rep hangings of the four-poster) I felt a surge of rebellion and decided to try one desperate life-or-death ruse: I wrote to my mother, begging her to come up to see me about a serious matter that I could not put on paper. I dreaded that Françoise, my aunt's cook, who had the extra job of looking after me while we were at Combray, would refuse to deliver my note. I suspected she might feel that to take a message to my mother while we had a guest to dinner was as out of the question as for the doorman of a theatre to pass a letter to one of the cast who is actually on stage. For, when it came to things that may or may not be done, Françoise followed a moral code that was demanding, ingenious, multifarious in its application and totally inflexible on pointless or imperceptible quibbles (which gave it something of the character of those legal codes in ancient times which prescribed such bloodthirsty duties as slaughtering babes-in-arms, while having the improbable squeamishness to forbid 'seething a kid in his mother's milk' or 'eating of the sinew which is upon the hollow of the thigh'). If one judged this code of hers by her unpredictable unwillingness to carry out certain instructions we gave her, it would appear to have been devised for complex and sophisticated social situations the like of which could never have been put into Françoise's head by anything in her background, which was that of a servant born and bred in a village; and one could only conclude that Françoise had inherited something from the past of France that was very ancient, noble and misunderstood, like one of those industrialized towns where elegant old houses are all that remain to show that a royal court once lived there and where the employees of a chemical factory work amid delicate sculptures depicting the miracle of Saint Theophilus or the legend

of the four sons of Aymon. In my case, the article of Françoise's code which made it likely that the house would at least have to catch fire before an insignificant personage like myself could prevail on her to go and disturb Mama while M. Swann was there, was the one which enshrined the respect she professed not only for Family — in the same class as the Dear Departed, the Clergy and Royalty - but also for the Stranger Within One's Gates. This respect of hers might well have impressed me if I had come upon it in a book, but coming from Françoise it invariably irritated me because of the solemn maudlin tone which she used when speaking of it; and on this particular night it exasperated me even more than usual because she saw dinner-parties as sacred ceremonies that could not be disrupted. However, so as to increase my chances of success, I had no hesitation in telling her a lie, to the effect that the idea of writing to my mother was not my own, but that as I was coming upstairs Mama herself had specially told me to be sure and send down a note about an object that she wanted me to find for her; I added that, if my note was not delivered to Mama, she was bound to be very angry. I suspect Françoise did not believe a word of all this; she was like primitive man in that her senses were more acute than ours, so that by reading signs which were imperceptible to us she was able to detect any truth we might try to keep from her. She took a long hard look at the envelope, as though by scrutinizing the paper and my handwriting she could find out what was inside or perhaps ascertain which article of her code was the appropriate one for this situation. Then she left my room, her long-suffering expression seeming to say, 'Break your bleedin' heart, so it would, to have a kid like that!' She was back a moment later to say they had only got as far as the icecream and the butler couldn't possibly deliver the letter yet, in front of everybody like that, but when the bowls of mouth-water went round it should be easy to slip Mama the note. My anxiety instantly abated. A few minutes before, I had been cut off from my mother until the following day; now everything was changed, thanks to my message which (although it would no doubt annoy her, especially since my little trick was bound to make me look ridiculous to Swann) was going to take me invisible and happy into the room where she was and whisper about me in her ear; now that Mama was about to read my note, the hostile forbidden dining-room (where a moment before, the very ice-cream — a coarse-grained one known as granité - and the mouth-water had seemed to be full of delights that hurt and saddened me because Mama was enjoying them without me) was no longer forbidden but like a ripe fruit was about to open and nourish my happy heart with all the sweetness of Mama's attention. Now I was no longer separated from her; the barriers were down and we were joined

[†] The French is rince-bouches — Victorian England's disgust at the Continental habit of rinsing out the mouth (and spitting) after a meal or between courses seems to result in English having no nouns for these utensils, an illustration of which can still be seen in Larousse, or for their contents (JG).

together by a joyful bond. But the best of it all was that Mama was bound to come to me now.

I had the feeling that if Swann could have read my letter and deduced its purport he would have had a good laugh at the pangs of anguish that motivated it. But, as I was to find out years later, a similar torment had in fact blighted years of his own life; and he might have been better able to sympathize with me than anyone else. In his case it was through love that he first experienced the torture of knowing that the person one craves to be with is enjoying herself in some other place from which one is excluded. In fact that particular torture is somehow predestined to be annexed and refined in adult life by love; but when one has already experienced it before the advent of adult love in one's life, as was my case, it is free to drift and be indeterminate in its object, attaching itself to different feelings on different days, at times to one's love for a parent, at others to one's liking for a friend. And the special mode of happiness with which I made my first acquaintance that night when Françoise came up to tell me my letter would be delivered was also familiar to Swann — it was that deceptive sort of joy you get from a friend or relation of your beloved who sees you mooning about outside the hotel or theatre where she is attending a ball or party or first night, waiting in desperation for the chance to speak to her. He recognizes you, gives you a friendly greeting and asks you what you are doing in those parts. And when you trump up some urgent message that you must pass on to the woman in question, he assures you that nothing could be simpler, ushers you into the foyer and promises you she will be down in a few minutes. You feel a great surge of love (the sort I now felt for Françoise) for this well-meaning gobetween who with one word has transformed the whole ghastly party, turning it from some unmentionable affair full of dangerous delights all trying to whisk her away, seduce her and make her laugh at you, into something not only bearable and sane but almost promising. And if this chap is typical of the other beings admitted to these cruel mysteries, then there can't be anything very diabolical about any of them. The same goes for the heartless succession of unsharable hours she had been all set to spend indulging in unimaginable pleasures, for here is a sample moment of that period that you are suddenly enabled to inspect — the moment when she is just about to be told you are waiting downstairs — and it is as genuine as all the other moments and possibly even more significant than them (because it has more to do with her); you can imagine it clearly, dominate it completely, actually take part in it, because you have almost created it. Presumably none of the other moments that evening would be very different in essence to this one, neither more or less delightful nor more or less hurtful, because the well-intentioned friend has just said, 'But of course! She'll be glad to come down. I'm sure she'd much rather be down here chatting with you than bored to death upstairs.' But as Swann had also learned to his cost, the best intentions of a friend are of no avail with a woman who is put out at being

pursued and having her fun spoiled by someone she does not love. And often the friend comes back down without her.

My mother did not come to me. Not only that but she rode rough-shod over my self-esteem (which was anxious that the fiction I had concocted for Françoise should be maintained) by sending me via Françoise this message: 'There is no answer', words which I have often heard since then being said by the doormen of luxury hotels or gambling-clubs to some poor girl who cannot believe her ears: 'But are you sure there's no answer? It's not possible! Are you sure you gave him my note? All right, then, I'll just wait here for a bit.' And so (just as the girl invariably assures the doorman she has no need of the extra gas-lamp he offers to light for her, and goes on sitting there in the silence which is only broken now and again by the doorman remarking on the weather to a page or suddenly noticing what time it is and sending him to put a bottle on ice for a customer) I declined Françoise's offer to sit with me or make me a cup of tea, let her go down the stairs to her pantry, got into bed and shut my eyes as though I could not hear the voices from the garden where they were all having coffee. But after a few seconds I had the feeling that by writing my note to Mama, risking her anger and coming so close to her that she had almost seemed within reach, I had in fact ruled out the possibility of getting to sleep without seeing her again. The beating of my heart was now becoming more painful with each passing minute, since the more I told myself to calm down, the more I realized I only did it because I had accepted my fate, and that only upset me further. Then all at once my agitation disappeared and I was swept with a joyous relief like the feeling one has when a powerful drug begins to take effect and releases one from pain: I had just resolved to stop trying to go to sleep without seeing Mama again, to stay up until she came to bed and kiss her then, even though I knew I would pay dearly for it and might be in her bad books for a long time. The peace of mind that came with the ending of my mental agony combined with the feeling of suspense, thirst and the thrill of danger to put me in a state of extraordinary exhilaration. I opened the bedroom window without a sound and sat on the end of my bed, as still as possible so as not to be heard from down below. Outside, too, all things seemed to be standing stock still, as though struck dumb and trying not to disturb the moonlight which duplicated and diminished them all by projecting a pattern of shadows denser and bulkier than they were, thus simultaneously shrinking and enlarging the landscape, like a map, depending on whether it is folded or spread out. Whatever needed to move, like the leaves on the chestnut-trees, moved. But even such a definite and detailed rustling, played with all its fine shades of expression and its most delicate touches, kept its own separate outline of sound and did not blend into any other. Against the clear silence that did not encroach on any of them, even the farthest sounds from gardens right at the other end of the village could be heard in such accurate detail that they seemed to be not distant at all but a pianissimo effect played close at hand, like those muted passages the Conservatoire orchestra performed with such finesse that one could make out every single note of them, although one had the impression they were being played somewhere outside the hall, and all the regular concert-goers (including my grandmother's two sisters when Swann gave them his seats) sat there straining their ears as though trying to catch the distant fanfare of a military detachment that had not yet reached the Rue de Trévise.

I was well aware that by not going to bed I was guilty of the sort of misdeed that would have the gravest consequences for me, and that my parents would mete out such punishment as an outsider might well have thought should be reserved for the most infamous misconduct. The fact was that in my upbringing the order of seriousness of misbehaviour was not the same as in the upbringing of other children. I had been taught that the most heinous crimes (no doubt because they were the ones against which I needed most careful protection) were those which one commits by acting on what I can see now to be a nervous impulse. But in those days nobody ever said any such thing, nobody ever admitted there might be such a thing, because that might have made me think it was perfectly excusable to act on those impulses, or even that I was actually unable to resist them. However, nameless as they were, I could recognize them by the emotional agony that preceded them and the severity of the punishment that followed; and I knew that the crime I was now committing, though it belonged to the same category as others for which I had been severely punished, was infinitely more serious. I knew for sure that when the time came for me to go and waylay my mother as she went to bed, and she saw that I had stayed up to say good-night again in the corridor, I should be banished from the family and packed off to boarding-school the very next day. But my mind was made up—even if it meant I had to throw myself out of the window immediately afterwards, I was going through with it. What I wanted now was my Mama to say good-night to properly and I had gone too far towards the satisfaction of that desire to turn back.

I heard the footsteps of the family seeing Swann to the gate; and when the bell announced that he had gone, I went closer to the window. Mama was asking my father if he had enjoyed the lobster and if Swann had had a second helping of the coffee-and-pistachio ice-cream. She said, 'I thought it was quite nondescript, actually. I think we'd better try a different flavour next time.'

'I must say,' said my great-aunt, 'I thought Swann was greatly changed. Doesn't he look old!'

She was so used to seeing Swann as an eternal adolescent that she was for ever being surprised that he was older than she thought. In fact, the whole family were beginning to notice in him the early onset of that well deserved old age of the unmarried — abnormal, long drawn out and blameworthy — or of any man whose bright-midday-without-a-morrow seems much.

brighter than other people's, since his life is unoccupied and time means nothing to him each morning but a daily accumulation of moments, never to be divided up by the demands of children.

'I think that wretched wife of his leads him a dog's life. It's common knowledge she's living with some fellow called Charlus. The whole of Combray's full of it.'

My mother remarked that he hadn't been looking so bad of late, though: 'Also, he doesn't make that gesture nearly so much now, the one like his father where he wipes his eyes and rubs his forehead. I don't believe he really loves the woman any more, anyway.'

'Good Lord,' replied my grandfather, 'of course he doesn't love her! I had a letter from him ages ago which had to do with her, asking me to do something for him, which I took good care not to do, mind you. But it left no room for doubt about any feelings of love for his wife.'

He added, turning towards his two sisters-in-law, 'Well, what did I tell you — you didn't thank him for the wine!'

'What on earth do you mean, "didn't thank him"?' replied Great-Aunt Flora. 'I think one could fairly say that I put it pretty neatly.'

'Yes,' agreed Great-Aunt Céline, 'you did put it very well. I was proud of you.'

'But you said your piece very well, too.'

'Yes, I must admit I was pleased with the bit about having nice neighbours.'

'What!' exclaimed my grandfather. 'Is that what you mean by thanking someone? I mean, I heard you say it all right, but I never for the life of me imagined it was meant for Swann. You may be sure he did'nt understand one word of it.'

'Oh, for goodness sake, the man's not a fool! I'm quite sure he would have appreciated the allusion. After all, I couldn't very well detail the number of bottles and the price, now, could I?'

My mother and father were the last to go in. They sat by themselves for a moment, until my father said, 'Well, shall we go up to bed?'

'If you like, dear, but I must say I'm not a bit sleepy. Surely it couldn't be that insipid coffee ice-cream that's making me feel so wide awake? I see from the light in the pantry that Françoise is still waiting up for me, so I'll just go and ask her to unhook me while you're undressing.'

I heard her open the latticed door leading from the hall to the stairs. Soon I heard her coming up to close her bedroom window. I slipped out into the passage. My heart was beating so hard I could barely walk, but now it was from trepidation and joy, not anxiety. I saw the glow from her candle coming up the stairs. Then I saw her and ran to her. For a moment she looked at me in amazement, not understanding what was happening. Then she looked angry, but still said nothing to me, which was not surprising as they used to send me to Coventry for days for much less serious crimes than

this. If Mama had spoken to me, it would have been an implicit admission that I was worth speaking to now, which might actually have seemed more ominous to me, meaning that in comparison with the terrible punishment that must now be visited upon me, sulks and silence were just too childish. Had she spoken, it would have suggested the quiet way one speaks to a servant whom one has that moment decided to dismiss; it would have been like kissing one's errant son when packing him off in disgrace to the army, whereas one would make a point of not kissing him if one had merely decided not to be on speaking terms with him for a day or two. But she heard my father coming up from the dressing-room where he had been getting ready for bed. To avoid the scene that was bound to ensue if he found me, she said in a voice choking with anger, 'Get back to bed and don't let your father see you standing about here like a little fool!' I kept on saying, 'Come and kiss me good-night,' terror-struck though I was by the sight of the shadows rising on the wall from my father's candle. I was hoping to use the fact that my father was coming closer and the danger that he would find me still up as a way of blackmailing my mother into saying, 'Go back into your bedroom, I'm coming.' But it was too late, he was there in front of us. I murmured unintentionally, 'I'm done for,' which nobody heard.

And yet I was not done for. My father was for ever refusing me things that had already been accorded under the more flexible covenants agreed to by my mother and grandmother, because he was unconcerned about 'the principle of the thing' and had no respect for any supposed 'law of nations'. For some totally irrelevant reason, or even without any reason at all, he was capable of depriving me at the last minute of the most time-honoured outing, the sort of sacrosanct ritual that could only be broken by breaking faith too; or else, as he had done tonight, long before the appointed hour, he could say, 'Off you go, up to bed, no nonsense, now!' But by the same token, because he had no principles (at least in my grandmother's sense) he had no intransigence either. He stood there now and looked at me in anger and amazement; then, when Mama had explained in a few embarrassed words what it was all about, he said to her, 'Well, off you go with him to his room. You say you don't feel like sleeping and I certainly don't need anything.'

'But, my dear,' replied my mother timidly, 'whether I feel like sleeping or not is surely not the point. We cannot let the child get accustomed to...'

'That's got nothing to do with it,' said my father, shrugging his shoulders. 'As you can see, the child is upset. He looks quite beside himself. I mean, we're not monsters, are we? If he makes himself ill, a fat lot of good that'll be! There are the two beds in his room, so just tell Françoise to make up the four-poster and sleep in his room tonight. Well, I'm not as nervy as you two, I'm off to bed. Good night.'

It was impossible to thank my father; he would have seen it as sentimentality and it would have irritated him. I just stood, not daring to move an inch; he was still there in front of us, a tall figure in a white

nightshirt and the mauve and pink turban of cashmere that he had taken to wearing for his neuralgia, looking like Abraham in the engraving after Benozzo Gozzoli (that M. Swann had given me), pointing and telling Sarah that she must abandon Isaac. All that happened many years ago. The wall on which I watched the glow from his candle coming upstairs has been demolished long since. In me, too, many things that I thought would last for ever have been destroyed and new ones have taken their place, giving rise to unforeseeable joys and sorrows, just as those I felt then have become wellnigh incomprehensible to me. It is many years since my father was able to say to Mama, 'Go with the boy,' Such hours will never come again for me. But of late, if I try, I have been able to hear coming to me very clear across the years the sobs I was strong enough to contain in front of my father and which did not burst out until I was alone with Mama. To tell the truth, they have never stopped; but it is only now, when the noises of life are dving out round about me, that I can hear them again, the way convent bells are drowned by city noises during the day and one thinks they have stopped ringing until one hears them pealing out again in the evening silence.

Mama spent that night in my room. After what I had done, I felt I ought to be banished from home, yet here were my parents granting me more than I could have expected as the reward for a considerate action. My father's behaviour towards me, even at this moment of leniency, still showed its customary quality of undeserved arbitrariness, which was to be explained by the fact that he usually acted in response to chance circumstances and not according to a premeditated plan. As for what I saw as his severity, it may well be that in sending me to bed early he was actually being less severe than my mother and grandmother would have been, because in certain things his nature was less close to mine than theirs were, which meant that he had probably not realized before this how unhappy I was each evening; whereas my mother and grandmother, though realizing it perfectly well, loved me enough to acquaint me with pain, so as to teach me how to defeat it, to counteract my hypersensitive disposition and strengthen my feeble will. This required courage in them, and I am not sure that my father, whose fondness for me was of a different sort, would have had that courage: once having realized I was unhappy, he had immediately told my mother, 'Go and console the boy.' So Mama spent that whole night in my room; and when Françoise, seeing her sitting at my bedside holding my hand and letting me weep to my heart's content, realised that something untoward had happened and asked, 'But, Ma'am, what's up with young Master, crying like that?', Mama answered, as though to make sure this undeservedly sweet moment would not be spoiled for me by any remorse, 'He doesn't even know himself, Françoise. It's just his nerves. Make up the big bed for me straight away and then go up to bed.' This meant that for the first time my tearfulness was considered not as a punishable transgression but as an unintentional affliction which had only now been officially recognized, a

nervous condition for which I could not be held answerable; and I felt a great surge of relief at no longer having to dilute the bitterness of my grief with moral qualms, at being able to weep without sinning. I was also more than a little proud that Françoise, one hour after Mama had refused to come up to me and had sent her disdainful message that I was to go to sleep. should witness this turn of the tide in the affairs of men which had raised me to the exalted status of a grown-up and brought about in me an instant puberty of sorrow, as it were, an emancipation through tears. This should have made me happy; but it did not. I had the feeling that my mother had just had the painful experience of giving in to me for the first time, that this was in fact her first step away from the ideal she had set for me and that, for all her courage, this was her first admission of defeat. I had the feeling that any victory I might have won was a victory over her, that like sickness, sorrows or old age, all I had achieved was a weakening of her resolve, a setback for her belief in herself, that this was a sad day for all of us and that this evening's events marked the beginning of a new era. Had I dared, I would have said to her, 'No, please, Mama, don't sleep in my room tonight.' But I was too well aware of how her practical wisdom ('realism' is what it would be called nowadays) tempered the ardent idealism she had inherited from my grandmother; and so I knew that, now the damage was done, she would prefer not to disturb my father and let me enjoy what consolation was to be had. My mother's beautiful face was still bright with youth that night as she held my hands so tenderly and tried to make me stop crying; but I had the impression that there was something wrong in all this, that if she had been angry with me she would not have hurt me as much as she did by this gentleness, unwonted in my childhood; it seemed to me that in a faithless underhand way I had just caused her first wrinkle to appear and turned her first hair white. This thought made me sob harder than before. At which I noticed that Mama (who never allowed herself to be emotional with me) was being affected by my tears and was trying to hold back her own. Sensing that I was aware of this, she said with a laugh, 'Just look at my silly little fellow! He's going to make his Mama as soppy as he is if this goes on much longer! Listen, if you're not sleepy and Mama's not sleepy either, why don't we do something instead of just sitting here getting upset — why don't we read one of your books?' But there were none of my books in the room. 'Well, do you think it would spoil your birthday for you if we got out the books that your grandma has bought for your present? Think carefully, though: are you sure you won't be too disappointed the day after tomorrow when there's no surprise?' Actually, I was delighted and so Mama went and fetched a parcel of books. Through the paper in which they were wrapped all I could distinguish was their broad squat shape; but, although this was only a brief veiled glimpse, I was already better pleased with them than with the paintbox I had been given at Christmas and the silkworms the previous year. There were four books, all by George Sand: La mare au diable, François

le Champi, La petite fadette and Les maîtres sonneurs. My grandmother's original choice (I have since learned) had been the poems of Alfred de Musset, a volume of Rousseau and George Sand's Indiana; for although she deemed the reading of trivia as baneful as the consumption of sweets and cakes, she believed that even the mind of a child could be as safely exposed to the invigorating breath of wholesome genius as his body to the open air and the strongest sea breezes. But when my father, on learning of the titles she proposed to give me, reacted as though she was almost crazy, she had gone all the way back to the bookshop in Jouy-le-Vicomte so as to make sure I would not go without a present (it was a scorching day; when she got home she felt so unwell that the doctor warned my mother never to let her tire herself out like that again) and had chosen as her second preference the four rural novels of George Sand. 'My dear,' she said to Mama, 'I just couldn't bring myself to give that boy something that's not well written.'

In fact, she could never bring herself to buy anything that could not be turned to some intellectual advantage; and the intellectual advantage she preferred was the one to be found in things of beauty which teach one that there are pleasures to be had from life other than the mere gratifications of material well-being and vanity. Even when she had occasion to give presents that were utilitarian (such as an armchair, a service of cutlery or a walkingstick), she made a point of getting antiques, as though they were so out-ofdate that their usefulness had worn off them and they were better able to suggest the lives led by people long ago than to serve the needs of people now alive. She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of the finest buildings and most beautiful landscapes. But when it came to the actual business of buying a photograph, even though she recognized that the subject of it retained its aesthetic value, she would think of the mechanical process by which the picture had been produced and was instantly put off by the vulgarity and usefulness of photography. In an attempt to reduce this element of commercial triteness, if not abolish it, she tried the stratagem of replacing it as far as possible by art-forms of a different sort, thus achieving several levels of art in the one picture — instead of having photographs of Vesuvius, the cathedral at Chartres or the great fountains at Saint-Cloud, she would find out from Swann if these subjects had not been painted by some good artist and then buy me photos of Chartres Cathedral by Corot, The Fountains at Saint-Cloud by Hubert Robert and Turner's Vesuvius, and in this way managed to build three stages of art into one picture. But, of course, this still meant that the photographer, although forbidden to have anything to do with the original depiction of these beautiful subjects and replaced by great artists, had to have a part in the reproduction of their versions. So, having reduced vulgarity to this absolute minimum, my grandmother would try to reduce it even further. She would ask Swann if a certain work had not been engraved, preferring where possible engravings which were not only old but which contained features of added interest, for

example those in which one can inspect a masterpiece in better condition that it is in nowadays (like Morghen's print of Leonardo's Last Supper as it was before it deteriorated). It is fair to say that my grandmother's version of the art of giving presents did not always have resoundingly successful results. The notion I got of Venice from a drawing by Titian which is supposed to have the lagoon as a background was undoubtedly a much more inaccurate one than I would have got from plain photographs. And according to my great-aunt (whenever she felt like airing a grievance against her sister-in-law) we had all lost count of the number of armchairs given by my grandmother as wedding or anniversary presents which, at the first attempt by the recipients to actually sit down in them, had instantly fallen apart. However, my grandmother would have thought it too petty to concern herself with the solidity of a piece of furniture if one could make out on it a carved blossom or smile, or some fine fancy from the past. Even if these features of the furniture had once upon a time been functional, the fact that they were in a long-outdated style enchanted her, as did old-fashioned turns of phrase in which one can discern former figures of speech worn away by habit in modern usage. And the four pastoral novels by George Sand which she was giving me for my birthday were like old furniture, in that they were full of expressions that, by dropping out of city speech, had once again become pithy idioms of the sort one can only hear nowadays in regional dialects. My grandmother had preferred these books to others in the same way as she would have preferred to rent a house where there was a Gothic dove-cote or one of those antique articles which are beneficial to the mind by making one imagine impossible journeys back through time.

Mama sat down by my bed with François le Champi. To me, the book's red cover and its incomprehensible title gave it a quite separate personality and a mysterious attraction. Never having read any real novels but having heard that George Sand was the perfect novelist, I had already begun imagining that François le Champi was something indefinably delightful. To my mind, a new book was not just an object among many similar ones, but as unique as a person, with no reason for existing except in itself; and so I took it that certain narrative devices used for moving the reader or arousing his curiosity, certain mannerisms of style which make for anxiety or melancholy and which any semi-educated reader knows are common to many novels, were in fact the potent properties only to be found in the essence of François le Champi. What struck me, under the everyday events of the story and the ordinary things and common words it contained, was a strange sort of intonation or accentuation that I could sense. The plot got under way, striking me as highly obscure, especially since at that age I often spent whole pages daydreaming about something completely unconnected with the book I was reading. And, as if the gaps left in the story by my absentmindedness were not enough, Mama, when reading to me, always skipped

love-scenes. This meant that the odd changes in the attitudes of the miller's wife and the boy towards each other (which can only be understood as the gradual growth of love between them) seemed to me to be full of a profound mysteriousness that I imagined must originate in the weird and gentle name of 'Champi' which, for some reason that I could not grasp, cast on the boy who bore it a beautiful bright reddish glow. As a reader, my mother was no doubt unfaithful to the text; but with a book in which she caught the ring of emotional truth, she was also an admirable reader because of the respectful simplicity of her performance and the soft beauty in her voice. In life too, when it was people and not works of art that moved her to pity and admiration, it was touching to see the tact with which she rid her tone of voice, her gestures or her speech of any suggestion of mirth which might hurt a woman who had lost a child, any mention of birthdays which might remind an old man of his advanced age, or any household chitchat that might bore a young academic. In the same way, when she read the prose of George Sand, with its constant tone of generous high-mindedness (which she had been taught by my grandmother to see as superior to all else in life, and which I was to teach her much later not to see as thereby superior to all else in books), she took care to keep out of her voice any suggestion of pettiness or affectation that might have unfitted it for the potent spirit it was to convey, and supplied all the natural tenderness and unstinting warmth required by cadences which seemed to have been written specially for her voice and fitted perfectly within her own range of sensitivity. To deliver them in the proper tone, she hit on the exact accent of generosity which is implicit in them and originally inspired them, but is absent from the printed words themselves; in this way she smoothed out any clumsiness in the tenses of the verbs, giving to the imperfect and the preterite all the gentleness implicit in charity and all the melancholy in tenderness, pointing the ends of sentences towards the beginning of the following ones, sometimes hurrying the syllables along, sometimes slowing them down, so as to fit their varying quantities into a regular rhythm, and always managing to charge this plain prose with a sort of living and uninterrupted current of emotion.

My feelings of remorse had abated; I let myself enjoy the sweet relief of this one night with my mother. I knew there would be no more of them and that my heart's desire — to have Mama by my side through the saddest and darkest hours — was too much at variance with the scheme of things and the needs of others for its fulfilment tonight to have been anything but an unnatural exception. Tomorrow evening my pangs would come back and Mama would not stay with me. But the trouble was that when my anguish was allayed, as now, I could not make sense of it any more; and in any case, tomorrow night was a long way off. I told myself that in the mean time I might think of something; although, of course, I could not think up any extra power for myself, since I was dealing with something that my own will

had no effect on and which only seemed avoidable now because I was separated from it by a period of time.

That was how I remembered Combray for a long time, on the nights when I lay awake. All I could ever see of it was one illuminated panel, standing out against an indeterminate dark background and looking like the slices of buildings picked out on the surrounding darkness by the glow from a flare or the beam of a floodlight. The base of this panel was rather wide and contained the little sitting-room, the dining-room, the end of the shadowy path taken by M. Swann, the unwitting harbinger of my grief, and the hall through which I walked to the foot of those ruthless stairs; the stairs made up the extremely narrow body of an irregular pyramid, topped by my bedroom with the little corridor and its glass door for Mama to make her entrance. What it amounted to was the barest minimum of scenery (like the short-list of props on a playscript for performances in the provinces) needed for the staging of my bedtime drama, always to be seen at the same hour of the day, unconnected with anything round about and standing by itself in the dark. It was as if all of Combray was a mere two storeys linked by a brief staircase, where it was never any other time but seven p.m. Obviously, if I had been asked about it I would have been able to say that Combray contained other things and was to be found at other hours of the day or night. But what I would have been remembering would have been supplied by my conscious memory, the memory of the intelligence; and since the information this mode of memory supplies about the past contains nothing of the past, I would never have wanted to think about any of it. It was all quite dead for me.

Was it dead for ever? Quite possibly.

Chance plays a large part in all of this, and the further chance that we may die too soon often makes the lucky strike impossible.

I find nothing unreasonable in the Celtic belief that the souls of our dead loved ones are held imprisoned in some lower form of life, an animal, a plant or even an inanimate object, and are lost to us until the day (which for many people never comes) when we happen to walk by the tree or acquire the thing that holds them prisoner. At which, they quiver and call to us; and as soon as we recognize them, the spell is broken, they are set free, death is defeated and they come back to share our lives.

One's past life is like that too. If we try to remember it, all our conscious efforts are futile. It is hidden somewhere out of range of our intelligence, in a region where the intelligence cannot trespass, in some unsuspected material object (or rather, in the sensation that object would give us). And it is a question of pure chance whether or not we shall ever stumble on the right object before we die.

One winter's day, years after Combray had shrunk to the mere stage-set for my bedtime performance, I came home cold and my mother suggested I

have a cup of tea, a thing I did not usually do. My first impulse was to decline; then for some reason I changed my mind. My mother sent for one of those dumpy little sponge-cakes called madeleines, which look as though they have been moulded inside a corrugated scallop-shell. Soon, depressed by the gloomy day and the promise of more like it to come, I took a mechanical sip at a spoonful of tea with a piece of the cake soaked in it. But at the very moment when the sip of tea and cake-crumbs touched my palate, a thrill ran through me and I immediately focussed my attention on something strange happening inside me. I had been suddenly singled out and filled with a sweet feeling of joy, although I had no inkling of where it came from. This joy had instantly made me indifferent to the vicissitudes of life, inoculated me against any setback it might have in store and shown me that its brevity was an irrelevant illusion; it had acted on me as love acts, filling me with a precious essence - or rather, the essence was not put into me, it was me, I was it. I no longer felt mediocre, contingent or mortal. I wondered where such a potent happiness could have come from. I sensed that it had to do with the taste of tea and cake but that it was infinitely more significant than they were and must be of a different nature. Where could it have come from? What did it mean? How could I grasp it? I took a second sip which was no more enlightening than the first, then a third which was a little less informative than the second. Time to stop, the potion seemed to be losing its effect. It was now obvious that the truth I was after was not in the drink but in me - the taste had found the truth inside me but, not knowing what it was, could only go on repeating its single weakening signal that I could not decode. So, in the hope of receiving it again soon loud and clear for a definitive deciphering, I put down my teacup and resorted to my mind. It was up to it now to find the truth. But how was it to set about it, grapple with the formidable quandary of not being able to make head or tail of itself? How could it be simultaneously the seeker and the dark place where it must seek and where all its intellectual paraphernalia would be of no avail? And not only seek — but actually create. For my mind was faced with something that did not yet exist, that only it could bring into being and ultimately shed its light on.

I asked myself once more what that unknown feeling could possibly be, devoid as it was of any logical proof of happiness, but full of its undeniable bliss and a sense of reality so strong that it eclipsed all other feelings. I decided to try to reproduce it. I back-tracked mentally to the moment when I took my first sip of tea. This brought back the same feeling, but did not clarify it at all. I demanded a further effort of my mind, to make it bring the fading impression back to me once again. So that nothing could hamper the movement it must make to catch the impression, I emptied my mind of all obstacles and extraneous notions, stopping up my ears and my attention to keep out noises from the next room. But then, as my mind began to tire without having achieved anything, I decided to give it the rest I had denied

it before; and I made it think of something else, so that it could gather its forces for a supreme effort. Then, for the second time, I cleared everything else out to focus on the first sip and its taste which was still perceptible—and this time I felt a faint tremor deep inside me; something was moving, trying to rise, as though an anchor had been dislodged at some tremendous depth. I could not tell what it was, but it was slowly coming up towards me; I could feel the resistance of it and catch vague clamours from the regions it passed through on the way up.

By now I sensed well enough that this faint movement inside me must be a visual memory which, because it was linked to the taste, was now trying to reach me. But it was so blurred and flickering and so far away that all I could make out was a vague spinning reflection of many colours in one. I could distinguish no shape in it that could serve as the only possible interpreter able to translate the message of the taste and tell me in which particular setting and period of the past the two impressions, taste and sight, had been contemporaneous and inseparable.

I could not tell now whether this memory, this old moment that had been sought out inside me and set in motion at such long distance by an identical moment, would ever surface into the daylight of my consciousness. I could feel nothing. It was stationary, or might have sunk back to the bottom, never to climb up out of the dark again. I had to go back to the beginning and try to concentrate on it many more times. And each time I tried, the pusillanimity that distracts one from any difficult task or work of importance kept whispering to me to forget it, just drink my tea and think of my present problems and my wishes for the future, which I could mull over without any trouble.

And then suddenly the memory came to me: it was the taste of a morsel of madeleine that my Aunt Léonie used to dip in her tea or in her infusion of lime and give to me to sip when I went into her bedroom to say good morning on Sundays (because on Sundays at Combray I never went out before it was time to go to mass). Before I tasted the little cake that my mother had given me, the sight of it had not reminded me of anything; I had often seen them since the Combray days, displayed in cake-shops, but had never eaten any, which may be why their appearance had become divorced from those days and associated with more recent times; or it may be that the memory of those days had been so long out of mind that it had crumbled away to nothing; the visible shapes of the past (like the fluted shape of the little cake itself, so plump and voluptuous in its prim and proper creases) had either disappeared for ever or had lain dormant for so long that they had lost the energy needed to bring them back up to consciousness. But when nothing else is left of one's remote past, when the people one knew are dead and buried and the things they used have disintegrated, two survivors will live on among the ruins, more delicate but more indestructible, more immaterial but more persistent and faithful than all the rest; the smell and

the taste of things, prevailing like disembodied spirits, remembering, waiting, hoping and holding up on their frail but unfaltering foundation the immense edifice of Memory.

No sooner had I recognized the taste of the crumb of sponge-cake dipped in lime-tea that my aunt used to give me (although why the memory should make me so happy I still had no idea; and I would have to postpone finding this out until much later) than the old grey house with her bedroom in it and the street outside appeared and was joined like scenery to the little wing built for my parents overlooking the back garden (which was the isolated segment I had always remembered); and not only the house, but the village at all hours of the day and in all weathers, the Square where I was sent to play before lunch, the streets where I ran errands and the lanes round about where we walked if it was fine. And, just as in that Japanese game where you have a bowl of water into which you dip tiny pieces of nondescript paper which instantly begin to stretch and open, taking on colour, dimension and bulk, turning into flowers or houses or recognizable characters, so there and then all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's grounds, the waterlilies on the Vivonne, the local people in their little houses, the church and all of Combray town with its gardens and countryside took shape and body and rose up out of my cup of tea.

Combray II



OMBRAY AT A distance, seen from a radius of twenty-five miles or from the train that last week before Easter, was only a church summing up the village, standing for it, speaking of it and for it to the surrounding country; and then, as one came nearer, it looked like a shepherdess braving the wind on the open plain and holding close to her long dark mantle a huddled flock of shaggy dun-coloured houses, which here and there were still encircled by the remnants of a mediaeval rampart, drawn in the perfect arc that one sees embracing little towns in primitive paintings. To live in, Combray was somewhat forlorn, since its streets of houses built in the local grey-stone, with their outside steps and protruding gables, were so dim with shadows that by late afternoon 'parlour' curtains had to be drawn right back. These streets, called after sober saints, some of whom went back to the days of the first counts of Combray (like the Rue Saint-Hilaire, or the Rue Saint-Jacques where my aunt's† house stood, the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde along her railings and also the Rue du Saint-Esprit that you could get to via the little side gate of her garden), exist in a region of my memory which is now so remote and tinted with colours which are so different from the hues of my present world that I actually see them, not only the streets but the church in its square looming over them, as more unreal than the pictures from my magic lantern; and sometimes I feel that to be able to walk across the Rue Saint-Hilaire or rent a room in the Rue de l'Oiseau - at the old Bird and Arrow inn, which used now and then to exhale from its basement gratings an aroma of cooking that still comes back to me in its intermittent warmth - would be a more miraculous communication with the supernatural than to be introduced to Golo or have a chat with Geneviève de Brabant herself.

My grandfather's cousin — my great-aunt — in whose house we would stay, was the mother of that same Aunt Léonie who since the death of her husband, my Uncle Octave, had confined herself first to Combray, then to † See footnote to p.4.

her house, then to her bedroom, then to her bed, and who now never got up, spending her life supine, suffering in some undefined way from bereavement, exhaustion, ill-health, obsession and piety. The part of the house reserved for her looked out on the Rue Saint-Jacques which led eventually to the Great Common (as distinct from the Little Common, a bright triangle in the heart of the village, bounded by three streets) and which, in its monotonous grey and with three steep free-stone steps at nearly every front door, looked as though a Gothic stonemason had cut out a deep groove in a block he was using to sculpt a Crib or a Calvary. My aunt now restricted herself to two adjoining rooms, using one of them in the afternoons while the other was being aired. They were the sort of room, still to be found in houses in the country, that is rich with the smells of all the virtues, wisdom and habits of long standing, the whole suspension of secret, invisible, abundant, wholesome life-forms that its atmosphere supports (like those parts of the world where whole zones of the air or sea are lit or scented by myriads of protozoa which we cannot see), smells which, though still redolent of nature and coloured as much by the time of year as by the scents of the nearby countryside, have already become indoor smells, human and musty; smells which make a limpid, ingenious, mouth-watering jelly of all this year's orchard crop, stocked in the store-room; smells which are seasonal, but domesticated and house-bound, lacing the mellow tones of fresh bread with the sharpness of hoar frost; smells which are as lazy and punctual as a village clock, idling but tidy, carefree and thrifty, pious linen and morning smells, all at peace in a contentment that can only lead to an increase in care, all selfsatisfied with their own prosaic triteness that is such heady poetry to the stranger who does not spend his days among them. The air of those rooms was steeped in a superfine silence, so nourishing and delicious that I could not enter them without a sort of greed, especially on those first chilly mornings in Easter week when, because I had only just arrived in Combray, I savoured it at its strongest. Before I went in to kiss my aunt good-morning, I had to wait for a while in the outer room where a wintry sun had come in out of the cold to warm itself by the fire, which was already burning between its two bricks and tingeing the air with the smell of soot, turning the whole room into one of those vast open hearths that one finds in the country, or one of those fireplace canopies in castles, under which you sit wishing for rain and snow outside, or even some cataclysmic deluge, so as to enjoy not just your snug nook but the added romance of being stranded for the duration of the winter; I would take a few steps, from the hassock to the armchairs of embossed velvet with their eternal crocheted antimacassars, while the fire baked the crusty aromas which thickened the air of the room (and which the sunny damp morning chill had already leavened), folding, browning, fluting, swelling them into an unseen but palpable country bun, an outsize flaky pastry in which, having briefly tasted the crunchier, finer, more highly esteemed but drier flavours of the cupboard, the chest-of-drawers and the

foliage on the wallpaper, I always came back, lured by an unadmitted lust, to the irresistibly viscous, neutral, stodgy, insipid odour of the floral bedspread.

In the next room, I could hear my aunt talking quietly to herself. She would never raise her voice much above a murmur, believing that something inside her head had broken adrift and that she might shake it about if she spoke in a loud voice; but even when she was alone, she could not remain quiet for very long, believing also that speech was good for the throat and that by preventing her blood from settling in it she would reduce the frequency of the breathlessness and bouts of anguish to which she was subject; besides, in the state of total inertia in which she lived, she gave extraordinary importance to her slightest feelings, endowing them with a kinetic energy which made it difficult for her to keep them to herself and, since she had no confidant with whom to share them, she informed herself about them in an endless running commentary that was her sole activity. Unfortunately, having fallen into the habit of thinking aloud, she did not always make sure there was nobody in the next room and I would often hear her tell herself: 'I must remember that I didn't get a wink of sleep last night' - her greatest contention being that she could never sleep, a claim that had a respectful place in the habits of the whole household: in the mornings, for instance, Françoise did not 'go up to wake' her, but simply 'went in'; or when my aunt felt like having an afternoon nap, we would say she was 'having a think' or 'a rest'; and whenever she forgot herself so much as to say 'what woke me up' or 'I dreamt that ...', she would blush and correct her slip instantly.

After a moment I would go in to kiss her. Francoise would be busy brewing her tea; or if my aunt happened to be feeling out of sorts, she would ask Françoise for some tisane instead, and it was my job to take the chemist's little bag and tip out on to a plate the right amount of lime-blossom for infusion in the boiling water. The process of drying the lime-stems had twisted them into an outlandish lattice-work with pallid blossoms set among twigs, like a subject arranged by a painter for the most graceful effect. The leaves had been transformed into the most incongruous objects — a fly's transparent wing, the blank underside of a label, a rose-petal - and seemed to have been heaped together, crushed or interwoven as though in the making of a nest. The charming extravagance of the chemist showed in all sorts of touching, unnecessary little details which would have been omitted from an artificial concoction, but which, like the amazing experience of finding the name of some acquaintance in a book, gave me the joy of realising that these lime-stems were the stems of real limes, like the ones I passed on the Avenue de la Gare, only different, not because they were imitations, but for the simple reason that they were the real thing which had grown much older. And since each new feature among them was merely the metamorphosis of an old feature, I could recognise the green buds, as yet unopened, in these tiny grey balls; but it was especially the tender pink moonlight of the blooms hanging like little golden roses among the brittle thickets of the stems (and, like the light patch left on a wall by a vanished fresco, marking the difference between the parts of the tree where the blossom had been already 'out' and those where it had not) that told me these petals glowing in the chemist's paper bag were the very ones which had scented spring evenings. That faint flamy pink inside the bag was the same colour as they had had, except that now it was faded and muted as they lived out the half-life that one could call the twilight of flowers. Before long my aunt would take a madeleine, dip it into the boiling brew, relishing its flavour of dead leaves and withered blossom, and then, when it was soft enough, give me a taste.

By her bed stood a large yellow chest-of-drawers made of lemon-wood, and a table which served as a dispensary-cum-high-altar, and on which belonged a statuette of the Virgin Mary and a bottle of Vichy water, missals and doctors' prescriptions, everything she needed for the bedridden observance of religion and regimen, for her daily appointments with pepsin and vespers. At the other side of the bed was the window, looking directly on to the street, and from morning to night, reading it like a book, she would loll there and conjure her boredom, like a Persian prince, by following the daily immemorial chronicles of Combray, which she would eventually discuss with Françoise.

I would have spent no more than five minutes with my aunt when she sent me downstairs, in case I should tire her out. She would present to my kiss the stale sad pallor of her forehead, on which, because she had not yet had time to cover it with her hair-piece, the bones stood out like a crown of thorns or the beads of a rosary, saying, 'Well now, off you go, my dear, and get yourself ready for mass. And if you should see Françoise, be sure to tell her she's not to be spending the time of day with you all down there, but she's to come up soon to make sure I don't need anything.'

The fact was that Françoise, who had been in service with my aunt for years and at that time had no idea that she would one day become our servant, did tend to neglect my aunt during the months we spent in Combray. Earlier in my childhood, before we took to going there, at a time when my Aunt Léonie still spent the winter in Paris with her mother, I was so unfamiliar with Françoise that when we went to visit my great-aunt on New Year's Day, outside the front door my mother would put a five-franc piece into my hand and say: 'Now be sure you don't give it to the wrong person! Just wait till you hear me say "Good morning, Françoise". And at that moment I'll give you a pat on the arm.' Hardly had we entered my aunt's dim hall when we saw a dazzling white bonnet, its fluting as stiff and fragile as though modelled out of spun sugar, and underneath it the concentric creases of a smile of anticipatory gratitude. This was Françoise, standing motionless in the little doorway of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. As one's eyes became accustomed to the church-like

gloom, one saw on her face all the selfless love of her fellow-man, all the fond respect for the upper classes, that were inspired in her better nature by the imminence of her New Year's present. Then Mama would pinch my arm fiercely and say in a loud voice, 'Good morning, Françoise!' At which signal, my fingers opened to drop the coin into a bashful but ready hand. Now, however, that we were regular visitors to Combray, I knew Françoise better than anyone else. And she for her part preferred us to all others, at least in the early years, when she treated us with all the consideration she usually reserved for my aunt, and at the same time took a franker pleasure in our company, since not only did we enjoy the prestige of being Family (and the awe in which Françoise held the unseen bonds that a shared bloodstream forms among members of a family was worthy of a Greek tragedian) but also we had the charm of not being her usual employers. So when we arrived on Easter Eve (which was often cold and windy still) and Mama asked after her daughter and her nephews, and whether her grandson was a good boy, and what trade he would follow, and whether he was the image of his Granny, Françoise would welcome us with a great show of joy and commiserate with us over the bad weather.

And if there was no one else there, Mama, knowing that Françoise was still in mourning for her parents, who had been dead for years, spoke to her kindly about them, asking her all sorts of little things about the lives they had led.

Mama had sensed that Françoise did not get on with her son-in-law and that she could not enjoy her daughter's company, or even chat with her as openly, when he was there. They lived a few miles from Combray and whenever Françoise was setting off on a visit to them, Mama would say with a smile: 'Well, Françoise, I'm sure if Julien isn't at home today and you have Marguerite all to yourself for the whole day, you'll be heartbroken but you'll grin and bear it, won't you?' And Françoise would laugh and say, 'Oh, Madam knows everything! Madam's worse than those X-rays they brought for Madame Octave what see what's in your heart' (she pronounced the 'X' with an affectation of difficulty and a self-deprecatory smile for daring, despite her lack of education, to use such a learned term). Then she would disappear, embarrassed that anyone should pay attention to her, or perhaps so as not to be seen in tears, for Mama was the only person with whom she had ever had the soothing experience of realising that, peasant as she was, her own life, with its humble pleasures and sorrows, could actually be of interest, a source of joy or sadness, to somebody else. During our stay at Combray, my aunt would resign herself to seeing less of Françoise, as she knew how much my mother appreciated this busy, intelligent maid, who at five in the morning was as smart in her kitchen cap, with its frills all stiff and white as though crimped out of china, as she was when she went to mass; who was good at everything and worked like a horse, in good health and bad, but unobtrusively and without a word, being the only maid my aunt ever had who, when Mama needed hot water or black coffee, could be relied on to bring it piping hot; she was the sort of maid whom, on the one hand, strangers find most unpleasant at first (perhaps because she cannot be bothered ingratiating herself with them and treats them without ceremony, knowing perfectly well that they are not essential to her well-being and that such guests run more risk of not being invited again than she does of being dismissed) and whom her employers, on the other hand, prefer to any other, because they have abundant experience of her real virtues and are glad enough to do without the specious charm of fawning chit-chat which may impress visitors but often conceals a brainless and obtuse incompetence.

When Françoise, having made sure that my parents had everything they required, went back upstairs for the first time to give my aunt her dose of pepsin and inquire of her what she would like for lunch, she could rarely escape again without having to give an opinion on, or even a definitive interpretation of, some event of great moment: 'Just imagine, Françoise — Mme Goupil went by just now on her way to fetch her sister a good fifteen minutes late! If she dawdles a bit on the way, I'd be surprised if she gets there in time for the Elevation!'

'I daresay you'd be right,' said Françoise.

'Françoise, if you'd been in here five minutes ago, you'd have seen Mme Imbert going past with a bunch of asparagus twice as big as what old Mme Calet sells. Try to find out from her maid where she got it. You could have got some like that for our Parisian travellers, you know, for all those asparagus sauces you keep making this year.'

'I shouldn't be surprised if she got it from the priest's garden,' said Françoise.

'A likely story, my dear Françoise!' replied my aunt, with a shrug. 'From the priest's? You know as well as I do the asparagus he grows is undersized and not worth twopence. It was as thick as your arm, I tell you! Well, not your arm, actually, but my poor arm. Look at it — it's thinner than ever this year . . . Françoise, didn't you hear that bell a moment ago? It was nerveracking.'

'No, can't say as I did, Madame Octave.'

'In that case, my dear girl, you must have nerves of steel and you should thank the Lord for them. It was Maguelone ringing for Dr Piperaud. He came straight out again with her and they went off up the Rue de l'Oiseau. One of the children must be ill.'

'Oh, good 'eavens! Dear me!' sighed Françoise, who could never hear of a calamity happening to a total stranger, even in some remote region of the globe, without moaning in sympathy.

'Tell me, Françoise, who on earth were they ringing that passing-bell for? Oh dear, of course, it must be for Mme Rousseau! Fancy me forgetting that she passed away the other night. It just shows you, it's time the Lord sent for me too. I've had a head like a sieve since I lost poor dear Octave. But

you'd better be off about your business, I mustn't keep you.'

'Not at all, Madame Octave. My time's not as precious as all that. God gives it to us free, gratis and for nothing, you know. But I'll just go and see my fire hasn't gone out.'

In this way, Françoise and my aunt held their morning session to review the first events of each day. Sometimes, however, these events portended such mystery and gravity that my aunt felt it was beyond her to wait until it was time for Françoise to come up again, and then four tremendous peals of her handbell rang through the house.

'But it's not time for the pepsin yet, Madame Octave!' puffed Françoise. 'Or did you feel faint?'

'Not at all,' replied my aunt, 'I mean yes, of course! As you well know, there's hardly a moment when I don't feel faint these days. One fine day, I'll just pass away like poor old Mme Rousseau before you can say "Jack Robinson". But that wasn't why I rang. Would you believe it, Françoise, I've just seen, as large as life, Mme Goupil with a strange little girl? Run down to Camus' and get some salt. Théodore always knows who anyone is.'

'It's probably just the Pupin girl,' said Françoise, who, having already been down to Camus' shop twice that morning, preferred to have the matter settled there and then.

'The Pupin girl! Oh, a likely tale, Françoise! Do you think I don't know the Pupin girl when I set eyes on her?'

'I don't mean the big one, you know, Madame Octave. I mean the little one what's away at school at Jouy. Now you mention it, I think I seen her earlier this morning.'

'Ah, well, that may be it, then!' said my aunt. 'She'd be back home for the holidays. Yes, that's who it is! We can stop wondering, Françoise, she must have come home for the holidays. But in that case we might see Mme Sazerat coming to her sister's for lunch soon. Yes, that's what it is! I saw Galopin's delivery-boy go by with a tart! You mark my words, it must have been for Mme Goupil!'

'Yes, well, if Mme Goupil's got company, Madame Octave, you'll see all her folk arriving there before very long for lunch, because it's getting on a bit, you know,' said Françoise, who was impatient to get back downstairs to her lunch preparations and relieved that my aunt now had some entertainment to look forward to.

'Yes, but they won't turn up until twelve o'clock,' my aunt replied in a tone of resignation, glancing at the clock anxiously but stealthily, so as to disguise the fact that she, who had renounced all earthly joys, could still find such keen pleasure in the mystery of Mme Goupil and whom she was having to lunch, and such disappointment at having to postpone that pleasure for at least another hour. 'Not only that,' she muttered to herself, 'but it'll happen right in the middle of my lunch!' Lunch was sufficient entertainment in itself for her to wish for no other at the same time. 'Well, can you at least

make sure to give me my creamed eggs on one of the flat plates?' These flat plates were the only ones which had pictures on them, and at meal times my aunt used to enjoy reading the caption on whichever one she was given. She would put on her glasses and make out: 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves' or 'Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp', then say with a smile, 'Good, very good.'

'I don't mind going down to Camus'...', Françoise said, now that it was clear my aunt was not going to send her.

'No, no, it's not worth it now. It's bound to be the Pupin girl. Françoise, my dear, I am sorry to have got you up here for nothing.'

But, as my aunt knew perfectly well, it was not for nothing that her bell had summoned Françoise. In Combray, to see 'a person whom nobody knew' was as improbable as to meet a character from Greek mythology, and within living memory, each time one of these stupendous apparitions had been reported in the Rue du Saint-Esprit or in the Square, it had invariably turned out, after judicious and apposite research, that the fabulous monster was reduced to the dimensions of 'a person whom somebody knew', either personally or by proxy, and who enjoyed official status as a relative of a Combray family. It would be the son of Mme Sauton, back from the Army; Father Perdreau's niece, down from her convent school; or the priest's brother, a tax-official at Châteaudun, who had just retired or come for the holidays. The excitement of believing that there were people abroad in Combray whom nobody knew had been caused quite simply by the fact that they had not been immediately recognised or identified. And yet Mme Sauton or the priest would have mentioned well in advance that they were expecting their 'travellers'. In the evening, when we came back from our walk and I went up to entertain Aunt Léonie with an account of it, I only had to let slip the reckless news that near the Old Bridge we had passed a man whom Grandpa did not know, and she would burst out: 'A man that Grandpa didn't know! A likely story!' Nevertheless, this news having upset her a little, she had to have the mystery solved and my grandfather was sent for. 'Who on earth was it you passed near the Old Bridge, Uncle? Was it a man you didn't know?'

'Not at all!' said my grandfather. 'It was just Prosper, Mme Bouilleboeuf's gardener's brother.'

'Oh, well, in that case!' said my aunt, calming down but still somewhat flushed. Then, with a shrug and an ironic smile, 'He was trying to tell me you'd passed a man you didn't know!' And it was impressed upon me that the next time I should think twice before upsetting my aunt with rash statements. In Combray, everything and everybody, both animals and people, were so well known to everybody else that if my aunt happened to notice down in the street a dog 'that she didn't know', she could not take her mind off it and would devote to this incomprehensible event all her powers of induction and her empty hours. Without any great conviction but with

the aim of pacifying my aunt and preventing her 'worrying herself sick', Françoise would suggest, 'I daresay it's Mme Sazerat's dog.'

'Oh, Françoise, as if I don't know Mme Sazerat's dog when I see it!' replied my aunt, her critical mind unable to accept such a straightforward solution.

'I know! It must be that new dog M. Galopin brought back from Lisieux!'

'Ah, yes! That could be it!'

'I hear it's quite a courteous sort of creature,' added Françoise, who had the story from Théodore, 'as smart as you like, never bad-tempered, always friendly, always very proper in its ways. It's not often you come across civility like that in one so young. But, look 'ere, Mme Octave, I must be off downstairs again. I can't be up 'ere passing the time of day with you, it's almost ten o'clock, my oven's not on yet and I haven't even done my asparagrass.'

'Oh, Françoise, you're not giving us asparagus again, are you? You've got asparagus on the brain this spring! You'll turn our Parisians right off it, you know'

'Not at all, Mme Octave, they love it, they do. You'll see, they'll bring a good appetite back from church and they'll tuck into it without having to be told twice.'

'Church! Of course, they must be there by now! You've no time to lose, my girl. Off you go and get on with that lunch.'

While my aunt was gossiping with Françoise, I went to mass with my parents. How I loved that church, how vividly it comes back to me! The old stone of the porch, blackened and pock-marked, was misshapen and deeply worn away at the corners (as was the font just inside) as though over the centuries the faint touch of the peasant-women's cloaks, as they stepped through the porch, and of their timid fingertips dipping into the holy water, could acquire the power of destruction, warp the stones and carve furrows in them like the ruts cut by cart-wheels rubbing against a gate-post every day. The chancel was paved with the souls, so to speak, of the Abbots of Combray, who had long since turned to dust under their memorial-stones, which were themselves no longer made out of hard inert matter, as time had softened the square-cut blocks and melted them, so that like honey one of them had palely overflowed its margin, making a florid Gothic capital run on to the white marble violets on the floor; while others had shrunk, cramping even more their elliptical Latin inscriptions, adding another whimsical touch to the arrangement of the abbreviated characters, closing together two letters in a word and stretching the others out of all proportion. The stained-glass windows were never so brilliant as on days when there was no sun; if it was dull outside, one could be sure of fine weather in church. One of these windows was completely filled by a single personage who looked like a King on a playing-card and who lived up there, between heaven and earth, under his stone canopy; sometimes, at about twelve on

weekdays, when there was no service (at one of those rare moments when the deserted, airy church, with sunlight on its rich furnishings, seemed a more human and luxurious place, almost as habitable as the hall in a mediaeval mansion, all sculpted stone and stained glass) the blue gleam from this King slanted down to tint Mme Sazerat, as she knelt for an instant, laying on the next prayer-stool a neatly tied-up box of little cakes which she had just bought at the baker's opposite the church and was taking home for lunch. In another of these windows a battle was being fought at the foot of a mountain of pink snow which seemed to have frosted into the glass itself, pocking it with opaque hail and making it look at though snowflakes had stuck to the outside of it and then been turned pink by the glow of daybreak (the same glow which tinged the altar-piece with hues so bright that they seemed to be only a fleeting glimmer shed by daylight that might fade at any moment, instead of being the colours imprinted for ever in the stone). And all these windows were so ancient that here and there one could see their silvery old age sparkling through the dust of centuries and in the bright threadbare web of their smooth glass tapestry. One of them was a tall panel divided into a hundred small rectangular windows, which were mainly of blue and looked like the cards in some great pack that might have amused King Charles VI; but then, a moment later, either because a sunbeam had shone through them or because a movement of my eye had extinguished and rekindled a precious restless fire in the coloured panes, they were shot through with the iridescence of a peacock's tail, or else they trembled and showered a fantastic rippling blaze down from the gloom of the stone vault, to wash the damp walls with colour, as though I was walking through some lofty rainbowcoloured grotto full of whorled stalactites, behind my parents with their missals; the next moment the little glass oblongs would take on the profound transparency and unbreakable hardness of a pattern of sapphires on a vast breast-plate, behind which one sensed a momentary smile of sunshine, worth more than all these riches and just as recognisable in this soft blue ripple over the stones as it was on the cobbles in the Square or the straw in the market-place; and even on those first Sundays when we had arrived before Easter, this sunshine compensated me for the black barren winter landscape by bringing into bloom, in a sort of historical springtime, as old as the successors of Saint Louis, this rich dazzling carpet of glass forget-menots.

Two high-warp tapestries depicted the coronation of Esther — according to a local tradition Ahasuerus had been given the face of a King of France, and Esther the face of a Lady of Guermantes with whom he had fallen in love. The colours had run, giving expression, relief, even a sort of lighting to the tapestries: the pink of Esther's lips wavered slightly beyond their outline; the yellow of her dress had such a creamy, melting richness to it that it had acquired a certain texture which stood out boldly on the muted surroundings; and the green of the silken and woollen trees, still bright near

the bottom of the panel, had faded nearer the top, and set off against the dark trunks the yellowing of the topmost branches, which appeared gilded and almost obliterated by the dazzling slanting rays of an invisible sun.

Because of all these things, and even more because of heirlooms which had belonged to personages who were to my mind almost mythological characters (like the golden cross fashioned, according to legend, by Saint Eloi, and handed down by the good King Dagobert, or the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic, made of porphyry and enamelled copper), I walked through the church on the way to our row of chairs as though I was in some fairy-tale dell, where a wondering peasant might see in the merest tree or pond or boulder the tangible trace of the Little People's magical presence; and in this way for me the building became a place of a totally different order from the rest of the village: it existed in four-dimensional space — its fourth dimension being Time — occupying centuries with its nave which, from bay to bay and chapel to chapel, seemed to straddle not only a few yards but whole eras of history which had left it unvanquished; hiding in the massiveness of its walls the uncouth eleventh century, which, with its ponderous rounded arches long since filled in and erased by rough-hewn stones, only showed now near the porch in the narrow slit cut into the wall by the stairway leading up to the belfry, and which even there was disguised by a line of graceful Gothic arches standing coyly in front of it, for all the world like smiling grown-up sisters who try to prevent strangers from seeing their peevish, unpresentable bumpkin of a younger brother; raising into the sky above the Square its tower which had beheld Saint Louis and might still be gazing at him; and thrusting its roots into the Merovingian gloom of its crypt, where we groped along under the dark, strongly ribbed vault (looking like the wing of an immense stone bat) so that Théodore and his sister could show us by candle-light the tomb of Sigebert's little daughter, on which a deep indentation, like the bed of a fossil, had been made, so it was told, 'by a crystal lamp which, on the very night when the Frankish princess was done to death, had fallen from the golden chains on which it hung, on the site where the apse is nowadays; and without its glass breaking, without its flame even going out, had stamped its shape into the stone, which gave under it.'

As for that apse in the Combray church, what can one possibly say about it? It was such a clumsy thing, devoid not only of beauty but even of any religious feeling. From the outside, because that end of the building stood well above the level of the streets that met there, its coarse wall was supported by an unecclesiastical mass of rough-cut, unfinished rock, studded with stones, its stained-glass windows seemed to be set at an inordinate height, and the whole thing looked more like the wall of a prison than the wall of a church. Later in life, thinking back to all the superb church apses I had ever seen, it would never have occurred to me to compare the apse at Combray with any of them. Then one day, turning a corner in some village street, I found myself confronted with the intersection of three alleys

and a crude high church wall, with windows set near the top and the same lopsided look as the apse at Combray. I did not marvel at how forcefully the religious feeling was conveyed by the stone, as I would have at Chartres or Rheims; I just exclaimed spontaneously: 'The Church!'

The church! It was just as familiar a sight in the Rue Saint-Hilaire, where it had its north door, as were its two neighbours, M. Rapin the chemist's and the house of Mme Loiseau, both of which adjoined its walls without the slightest gap; and one felt it was so much the private citizen of Combray that it could have had a street number (if the houses in Combray had had numbers) and that the postman should have stopped there on his morning round after coming out of M. Rapin's and before going into Mme Loiseau's. Even so, between the church and everything that was not the church there was a borderline that my mind was never able to ignore - although Mme Loiseau had a window-box full of fuchsia plants which had the bad habit of letting their careless stems run wild with their heads down, and whose blooms, as soon as they were old enough, could find nothing better to do than cool their flushed cheeks against the dark front of the church, this did not make the fuchsias any more holy; although to my eye there was no gap between the flowers and the grimy stone on which they rested, to my mind they were different worlds.

The steeple of Saint-Hilaire, with its unforgettable lines, was recognisable at a great distance, as it stood by itself on the horizon that still hid the rest of Combray; when my father caught sight of it from the train bringing us down from Paris in Easter week, he would say as it veered this way and that against the sky and ran its little metal weathercock along the furrows of clouds, 'Righto! Fold up the rugs. We're there.' And on one of the longest walks that we took into the surrounding countryside, there was a spot where the narrow lane suddenly opened out on to a vast plateau that swept away to a distant uneven horizon of forests on which all that could be seen of Combray was the delicate outline of the steeple, so frail and pink that it looked as though a finger-nail had drawn it in, so as to put this merest touch of art, this single trace of humanity, into a landscape that otherwise would have been painted entirely from nature. When one came close enough to the church to see the remains of the square half-ruined tower still standing beside but below the steeple, what struck one was the sombre reddish tint in the stones; on misty autumn mornings, seen above the sultry violet of the vineyards, it was like a ruin of purple, dyed almost to the colour of Virginia creeper.

My grandmother, as we came back from a walk, would often make me stop in the Square and look up at the steeple. From the belfry windows, set side by side in pairs, one above the other, spaced with that apt and original proportion which imparts beauty and dignity not only to human faces, it would drop at regular intervals flights of jackdaws which wheeled about cawing for a moment, as though the old stones, which seemed usually to turn a blind eye to their antics, had suddenly become inhospitable and

been charged with some elemental principle of disturbance that had made it strike them and shake them off. Then, after they had streaked their patterns on the purple velvet of the dusk, they calmed down all at once and flew back to become part of the tower, which had got over its dangerous fit and was once more well disposed, several of them perching here and there on top of pinnacles (seeming motionless but perhaps pecking at a passing insect) as seagulls poise on the crest of a wave with the immobility of an angler. My grandmother somehow thought the steeple of Saint-Hilaire showed that same lack of vulgarity and pretty pretentiousness that she adored and believed richly rewarding in works of artistic genius and in Nature itself when the hand of man had not diminished it (as did the hand of my great-aunt's gardener). And certainly, any part of the church that one could see was marked off from all other buildings by being imbued with a quality of mind; but it was especially in its steeple that it seemed to display full consciousness of itself, to affirm itself as a responsible individual being. It was the steeple which spoke for the church. I think, really, the elusive thing my grandmother tried to express about the steeple was its possession of something she prized above all else: distinction, and a natural air. Ignoramus that she was in architecture, she would say: 'Laugh at me if you like, my dears. It may not be conventionally beautiful, but there's something in its quaint old face that I like. If it could play the piano, I'm sure it would play with real feeling.' As she gazed up at its slopes of slates, studying the gentle tension of them, the fervent inclination with which they tapered up like hands joined in prayer, she shared so deeply in the exaltation of the spire that her gaze seemed to yearn upwards with it; and as the setting sun touched the highest points of the church, she would have a friendly smile for the worn old stones which, as the sunlight softened them, seemed suddenly to have climbed even higher, like remote falsettos singing an octave above the rest of the choir.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire which gave to all occupations, all times of the day and all perspectives of the village their special shape, climactic point and consecration. From my bedroom, I could only see the base of the steeple, which had also been covered with slates; but on warm Sunday mornings in summer, when I saw them gleaming like a black sun, I thought, 'Good heavens, it's nine o'clock! I'll need to get ready for mass right now if I want to go in and kiss Aunt Léonie first,' and I could tell the exact colour of the sunlight in the Square, the heat and dust there would be at the market and the shadow of the awning in front of the shop where Mama, breathing the smell of brown holland, might stop before mass to buy a handkerchief, which would be shown to her at the behest of the shopkeeper who stood by, swelling his chest, having just been into the back-shop (as it was almost closing-time) to slip on his Sunday jacket and soap his hands which he was for ever rubbing together, even in the saddest circumstances, with a businesslike, voluptuous and successful air.

After mass, when we looked in to tell Théodore we would need a larger brioche than usual because our cousins from Thiberzy had taken advantage of the fine day to come over and lunch with us, there again was the steeple, itself all glazed and baked like some great brioche, flaky and sticky with sunlight, pointing its sharp tip at the blue sky. In the evening too, as I came home from a walk, thinking of how soon I would have to kiss Mama good-night and be without her, there was something restful about the steeple in the dying light; it gave the impression of being a brown velvet cushion set into the pale sky, which gave ever so slightly under it and encroached round its edges; and the cries of the birds that flew about it seemed to intensify its silence, add a purity of line to its spire and give it a meaning that no words could ever express.

Even when I had to run an errand in the district behind the church, from which the building itself was not visible, everything in Combray seemed laid out in relation to the steeple, which appeared here and there among the houses and was possibly even more touching when one caught sight of it minus the church. Of course, there are many steeples which are improved by being seen like that, and my memory contains vignettes of housetops with steeples which are much more artistic than the ones composed by the dreary streets of Combray. In a quaint Norman town near Balbec, there are two charming and unforgettable eighteenth-century mansions, which are dear to me for a variety of reasons, and between which, if one stands in the fine garden that descends from their front steps to the river, one sees soaring upwards from an invisible church a Gothic spire which seems to crown and complete the two house-fronts, but in a style that is so distinctive, so preciously detailed, so pink and polished, that it is as easy to see that it does not belong to them as it is, when walking on the beach, to see that the dark red crinkled pinnacle of a seashell, tapered like a turret and glazed with enamel, is not part of the pretty pair of smooth pebbles between which the tide has lodged it. And in one of the ugliest districts of Paris, there is a window from which one can look out over the serried roofs of several streets, which fill the foreground and the middle ground, at a great violet-coloured bell (which at times turns reddish and at others, in the finest prints that the atmosphere etches of it, black diluted with ash) which is none other than the dome of Saint-Augustin and gives to this picture of Paris the quality of certain views of Rome by Piranesi. However, no matter how delicate the craftsmanship of memory in painting these little works, it was incapable of putting into them what I had long ago lost — the feeling which makes us not see a thing as a spectacle, but actually believe in it as a unique being - and so, unlike the memory glimpses of the Combray steeple from the streets behind the church, none of them is a repository of a whole submerged area of my life. Whether one saw it at five o'clock, on the way to the post-office to pick up a letter, when it was to one's left and only a few houses away, abruptly punctuating the line of rooftops with its single peak; whether one

was going to call on Mme Sazerat, when one's eyes would follow the same roof-line (which had flattened out again after the climb down from the steeple) in the knowledge that one would have to take the second on the left past the point where the steeple protruded; whether one had to go as far as the railway station, when one caught an oblique glimpse of it in profile, showing unfamiliar quoins and surfaces, like a solid body glimpsed at an unusual stage in its revolution; or whether one was down by the banks of the Vivonne, from where it seemed that the apse, foreshortened into a muscular crouch by the perspective, was hoisting the steeple as it attempted to heave its spire heavenwards; wherever one went, it was the steeple which always drew the eye, always dominated everything else, admonishing the houses with its unexpected pinnacle, standing before me like the raised finger of God, as though His body was concealed among the host of human bodies but still distinguishable from them. Even today, if I have to ask my way in some provincial city or in an unfamiliar part of Paris, and a passer-by points out the landmark of some hospital belfry or monastery spire showing the top of its biretta at the street-corner where I must turn, my memory has only to find in it a faint resemblance to the dear shape unseen since childhood and, if the passer-by turns round to make sure I am on the right road, he may be amazed to see me standing there, gazing motionless at the steeple, forgetting the purpose of my excursion, trying to remember and sensing deep within me lands just reclaimed from oblivion beginning to dry out and buildings rising on them again. For no doubt I am at that moment also asking my way, but with greater anxiety than before, and trying to turn down one of the byways of the heart.

After mass we would often meet M. Legrandin who, at times other than the summer holidays, could only come down to his Combray estate from Saturday evening to Monday morning, being kept in Paris by his professional duties as an engineer. He was one of those men who have not only been brilliantly successful in their scientific career but have also acquired a totally different sort of culture, literary or artistic, which can find no outlet in the specialised work of their profession and so enriches their conversation. Such men may well be more literate than the literary man (at that time my family were unaware that M. Legrandin enjoyed a certain renown as an author and we were later amazed to discover that a composer had actually set some of his poetry to music) and more gifted than many a painter, and, fancying that the sort of life they lead is not the one for which they were cut out, either they go through the motions of their regular occupations with a flighty nonchalance or they conduct themselves with an unfailing, supercilious diligence, conscientious, embittered and full of contempt. Our M. Legrandin, a tall man who carried himself well, had a delicate, thoughtful face with a long fair moustache and eyes of disillusioned blue; in manner he was exquisitely polite and a talker the like of which my family had never heard; for them he was the epitome of the superior man, and they admired him and held him up as an example of how to cope with life on the noblest and most sensitive terms. My grandmother's only criticism of him was that as a talker he was a shade too good, too bookish for her taste, that in the things he said there was none of the naturalness of his flowing Lavallière cravats nor the simplicity of his single-breasted jackets that were as straight-cut as any schoolboy's blazer. She was also surprised by his frequent blood-and-thunder denunciations of the aristocracy, fashionable society and snobbery (which for him was 'indubitably the sin that Saint Paul had in mind when referring to the sin for which there is no forgiveness'). The ambition of the social climber was an emotion that my grandmother was so incapable of sharing and even of comprehending that she could not see the point of attacking it so vehemently. Besides, she found a certain lack of taste in the fact that M. Legrandin (whose sister had married a titled gentleman from Lower Normandy and lived at Balbec) should indulge in such virulent invective against the nobility — why, he even regretted that they had not all been guillotined in the Revolution!

'Greetings, friends!' he would say as we met. 'How fortunate you are to spend so much time hereabouts! Tomorrow I shall have to be off to Paris again, back to take up my post. I know, I know,' (he went on, with his vague smile of gentle irony and disillusion), 'I have all manner of useless things in my Paris house. All I lack is the necessary thing, a great tract of blue sky like this. Always be sure to keep a patch of blue sky above your life, my boy! For yours is a fine spirit, a spirit of rare quality. There's an artist's nature in you and you must never let it go without what it needs.'

When we got home from church my aunt would want to know whether Mme Goupil had been late for mass, and we were unable to tell her. Instead, we increased her agitation by telling her there was a painter at work in the church making a copy of the stained-glass window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise, despatched post haste to the grocer's, came back none the wiser owing to the absence of Théodore who, in his double capacity as chorister-cum-sexton and grocer's assistant, not only enjoyed connections in all walks of life but also derived from them his encyclopaedic knowledge.

'Oh, dear!' sighed my aunt, 'I do wish it was time for Eulalie! She's the only one who could tell me what's what.'

This Eulalie was a deaf and energetic spinster with a limp, who had 'retired' after the death of Mme de la Bretonnerie (with whom she had been in service ever since her childhood) and who had a room next to the church, from which she was for ever emerging to attend mass, to say a little prayer or to give Théodore a hand; the rest of her time was employed in visiting the sick, such as my Aunt Léonie, and in recounting to them everything that had taken place at mass or vespers. She did not mind adding a perquisite to the small pension paid to her by her former employers and would occasionally serve as seamstress to the priest or to some other notable clerical personage in Combray. Over her cloak of black cloth she wore, almost like a nun, a little

white hood; and a skin disease coloured her crooked nose and part of her cheeks with the bright pink of balsam. The visits of Eulalie were the one great entertainment left to my Aunt Léonie who, apart from the priest himself, hardly saw anyone now. My aunt had gradually got rid of her other visitors because they all made the mistake of falling into one or other of the two categories of people whom she detested. The first and worst, the ones she had struck off soonest, were those who advised her not to mollycoddle herself and who expounded (perhaps only negatively, through the occasional disapproving silence or sceptical smile) the subversive doctrine that a little walk in the fresh air and a good underdone steak would do her more good than her bed and medicine bottles - when it took her fourteen hours to digest two miserable sips of Vichy water! The other category was composed of the people who appeared to believe that she was more seriously ill than she thought, in fact that she was as seriously ill as she said. And so, each and every one of those whom she had allowed upstairs, after some hesitation and in response to the well-meant plea of Françoise, and who had shown during their stay in her room how unworthy they were of the honour accorded them by hazarding a diffident: 'Don't you think that if you were to get out and about a bit in the nice weather . . .?' or who, in answer to Aunt Léonie's 'Oh, my dear, I'm in a bad way, a very bad way, I feel at death's door', had said, 'You poor thing, how terrible to be in such a state! Though, mind you, you could linger on like that for a while', could be sure of never again being admitted to her presence. Françoise's mirth at my aunt's terrified expression when she looked down from her bedroom window and saw one of these people approaching along the Rue du Saint-Esprit with the apparent intention of paying her a visit, or when she heard the door-bell ring, was nothing to her hilarity at the successful devices employed by my aunt to have these people sent packing and at their discomfited expressions as they walked away, all of which seemed to Françoise a good trick played on them by her mistress, whom she admired for being superior to such persons and refusing to see them. In short, my aunt's requirements were that she should be approved of for her way of life, sympathised with for her sufferings and reassured about her future.

At all of these things Eulalie excelled. No matter how often my aunt might say to her, 'Oh, dear, Eulalie, I feel I haven't long to go now,' Eulalie would invariably reply, 'With all the experience you've got of your illness, Mme Octave, you'll live to be a hundred, as Mme Sazerin was saying to me only yesterday.' (One of Eulalie's deepest-rooted convictions, unshaken by many corrections over the years, was that Mme Sazerat was called Mme Sazerin.)

'Well, I certainly don't ask to live to be a hundred,' my aunt would say, preferring not to fix too precise a limit to her life.

As well as this, Eulalie was better than anyone else at entertaining my aunt without tiring her out, and so her visit (which took place regularly every Sunday, unless something unforeseen happened to prevent it) was such a

pleasure to my aunt that each Sunday morning she looked forward to it eagerly - at least to begin with, for if Eulalie was a moment late her expectation immediately turned to an aching hunger of anxiety. If her rapture of expectancy went on too long, it became a form of torture and my aunt would take to yawning, looking at the time and complaining of feeling faint. And if Eulalie's ring at the bell was not heard until late in the day. when my aunt had given her up, it could give her quite an unpleasant turn. The fact was that on Sundays she thought of nothing other than Eulalie's visit, and as soon as lunch was over Françoise became anxious for us to vacate the dining-room so that she could go upstairs and 'see to' my aunt. But especially after the first warmer weather had come to Combray, the haughty hour of noon, graciously descending from the belfry of Saint-Hilaire which it emblazoned with the twelve brief fleurons of its resonant crown, would have long since sounded in our ears as we sat on at the table, with its Arabian Nights plates and the homely holy bread which had come in with us from church, all of us torpid from the heat and particularly from over-eating. For, to our staple diet of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, preserves and cakes, which she no longer bothered even to announce as part of her menu, Françoise would add any windfall that came her way from the fish-market or through the seasonal offerings of the fields and orchards, chance shopping-day bargains, the kindness of a neighbour or her own genius, so that our bill of fare, like the quatrefoils carved on cathedral porches in the thirteenth century, was a reflection of the changing seasons and the phases of life: a brill, because the fishmonger had guaranteed it to be fresh; a turkey, because she had seen a fine specimen at the market in Roussainville-le-Pin; cardoons in beef-marrow sauce, because she had never done them like that for us before; a roast leg of mutton, because the open air gives you an appetite and anyway it would have plenty of time to go down before dinner at seven; spinach, just for a change; apricots, because they were still hard to get; red currants, because in a fortnight there would be none left; raspberries, because M. Swann had brought some over specially; cherries, because the tree in the garden had just fruited for the first time for two years; cream cheese, because I used to like it; an almond cake, because she had ordered one the previous day; a brioche, because it was our turn to bake them for Easter mass. And when we had disposed of all this, there was an encore, a minor opus by Françoise, a brief, light-weight, inspired improvisation full of her inimitable genius, specially composed for the family but with a personal dedication to my father who had a soft spot for it: a chocolate cream custard. Anyone who declined it, saving, 'No, really, I couldn't eat another thing,' would instantly have shown himself to be the sort of boor who cannot receive a painting as a gift from an artist without quibbling about its size and subject-matter, instead of appreciating the thought behind it and the signature. To be so ill-bred as to leave a drop of it in the dish would have

been tantamount to walking out during a performance in the presence of the composer himself.

Eventually my mother would say to me, 'Come on now, don't sit about here all day. Go up to your room if it's too hot outside. But be sure to have a breath of fresh air first, so as not to start reading immediately after your food.' Outside, shaded by a lilac, I would sit beside the pump and its trough (which was often decorated, like a Gothic font, by a salamander whose tapered allegorical body sculpted a mobile relief on the worn stone), on the backless bench in the small untended part of the garden which communicated via a tradesmen's entrance with the Rue du Saint-Esprit and from where one could see up two steps into the back kitchen, jutting out almost like a separate structure. This room, with its red tiles gleaming like porphyry, looked more like a little temple of Venus than the lair of Françoise: it overflowed with offerings from the dairy-man, the fruiterer and the greengrocer, who might have come in from quite remote hamlets to consecrate these first-fruits. And up on the roof, a dove for ever soothed the garden with its smooth muted cooing.

In earlier years, I never lingered in the sacred grove that surrounded this temple; before going up to read in my bedroom, I used to go into the little ground-floor sitting-room of my Uncle Adolphe (a brother of my grandfather who had retired from the Army with the rank of major) where, even on days when the open windows let in the heat, if not actually the sun which rarely reached that far, one always breathed the dim, cool, unfading, woodlandy, eighteenth-century redolence that tricks the enraptured nostril in a disused hunting-lodge. However, for many years now I had not been into this little room, my Uncle Adolphe having stopped coming to Combray because of a quarrel I had caused between him and my parents, and which had happened as follows.

When we were in Paris, I would be sent round to visit him once or twice a month; he would usually be in a plain tunic, finishing lunch, which was served by his man wearing a work-jacket of mauve-and-white striped twill. He would grumble that I had not come to see him for a long time, that he was being neglected, would give me a piece of marzipan or a tangerine, walk me through a sitting-room (where we never sat, where no fire was ever lit and which had gilded mouldings on its walls, a ceiling painted blue to look like the sky and furniture upholstered like my grandparents' in quilted satin, only yellow) and into what he called his study, a room hung with those prints of plump pink goddesses against a black background, driving a chariot, bestriding a globe or bearing a star on their brow, which were much loved during the years of the Second Empire because they seemed reminiscent of Pompeii, which were later generally despised and which are now coming back into favour, for one simple reason (that underlies all the different ones given) namely that they are reminiscent of the Second Empire. I would stay there with my uncle until his manservant came up to say that the coachman wished to know at what time he would like the carriage brought round. At this, my uncle would meditate profoundly, while the wondering manservant took care not to disturb him by the slightest movement, waiting on tenterhooks for the answer, which never varied. At last, after a crisis of supreme indecision, my uncle unfailingly uttered the same words, 'A quarter past two,' which his servant would repeat in astonishment but, without comment, 'A quarter past two? Very good, sir. I shall tell him.'

At that age, I was in love with the theatre — of necessity a Platonic affair, as my parents had never allowed me to set foot inside a theatre — and my idea of the pleasures to be enjoyed at a play was so imprecise that I almost believed every member of the audience looked at a private performance as though through a stereoscope, seeing something that was similar to, while separate from, the hundreds of other performances being enjoyed by everybody else.

Every morning I used to run along to the Morris column to see what plays were being advertised. Nothing was ever happier or more disinterested than the dreams inspired in my imagination by these theatre posters, under the influence not only of the images conjured up by the words of the titles but even of the colours of the damp, paste-blistered notices on which the titles stood out. Apart from weird works such as The Testament of César Girodot or Oedipus Rex (printed not on the green posters of the Opéra-Comique but the claret-coloured posters of the Comédie-Française), nothing could have struck me as more different from the sparkling white plume of The Crown Jewels than the mysterious smooth satin of The Black Domino; and since my parents had told me that for my first visit to a theatre I would have to choose between these two plays, both of which I knew by title only, I strove so hard to solve the mystery of each title in turn, to grasp the especial pleasure that each held in store for me and to compare it to the promise of the other, that I vividly imagined the one to be a dazzling swashbuckling affair and the other a gentle, velvety play — all of which left me just as incapable of plumping for one or the other as I would have been of opting between rice pudding à l'Impératrice or Françoise's chocolate cream custard.

Actors were the sole subject of my conversation with friends; and, of all the possible art-forms, acting, although I knew not the slightest thing about it, was the one through which I caught my earliest inklings of the world of Art. The minutest differences between the ways in which various actors put expression into their delivery were of the utmost importance to me. Going on what I had picked up about them, I ranked them in order of talent and spent my days reciting lists of their names, which became a nuisance by setting hard in my brain and turning into fixtures. Later, after I had been sent to school, as soon as a master looked away from the class and I took the chance to communicate with a new friend, my very first question was invariably whether he had ever been to the theatre and whether in his opinion Got really was the greatest actor, and Delaunay the second greatest,

and so on. And if this friend opined that Febvre's proper place was lower than Thiron, or Delaunay's below Coquelin, the sudden mobility that affected Coquelin's petrified rigidity in my mind, enabling him to move up to second place, and the miraculous agility and vitality that made it possible for Delaunay to drop down to fourth, gave back to my brain the invigorating impression of being flexible and fertile.

Now, although I was obsessed by the thought of actors, and the spectacle of Maubant coming out of the Comédie-Française one afternoon left me smitten with all the sufferings of love, I was infinitely more affected by the name of a leading lady glittering above a theatre entrance or by glimpsing the face of a woman who I thought might be an actress at the window of a passing brougham drawn by horses with roses on their headbands, such sights stirring in me a long drawn out pang of yearning, which I would try to vent in a futile and forlorn effort to imagine the life she must lead. The most illustrious I graded in order of their talent: Sarah Bernhardt, La Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary; but I was fascinated by all of them. It happened that my Uncle Adolphe knew not only a great many actresses but some high-class courtesans as well, and the difference between the two was not very clear to me. He used to entertain them at his house. In fact, the reason why we restricted our visits to him to certain days was that on the other days he was at home to women with whom his family could not possibly have been on familiar terms, at least in the family's own opinion. As for my uncle, he had already got himself into my grandfather's bad books on more than one occasion by his habit of extending politeness to the lengths of introducing to my grandmother pretty widows (who might never have been married) and countesses with impressive titles (which were most likely assumed), or even of making them a present of a family heirloom. If the name of an actress cropped up in conversation, I would often hear my father say with a smile to Mama, 'One of your uncle's friends'; and it occurred to me that, young as I was, my Uncle Adolphe could probably spare me the business (to which grown men might devote fruitless years of their lives) of waiting and dancing attendance on some woman who did not even bother to acknowledge one's letters and had one turned away by her doorman, by introducing me in his own house to the actress who, though inaccessible to so many men, was his close friend.

And so, one day, which was not one of our days for visiting him, on the pretext that a lesson which had been shifted to another day was now so inconvenient that it had already prevented me several times, and would continue to prevent me, from seeing my uncle, I took advantage of the fact that we had lunched early, slipped out of the house and, instead of going along to look at the advertising column, which I was allowed to do on my own, ran all the way to his house. Outside his front door I saw a carriage and pair, with red carnations on the horses' blinkers to match the one in the coachman's buttonhole. As I went up the stairs, I could hear laughter and a

woman talking; and then as soon as I rang there was silence followed by the sound of doors closing. The door was opened by the manservant who, as soon as he set eyes on me, looked embarrassed and told me my uncle was so busy he would most likely be unable to see me. Nevertheless he went to inform my uncle of my presence and it was then that I heard the same woman's voice saying: 'Oh, do let him in, please! Just for a minute. It would be nice! In that snap-shot of him you've got on your desk, he's the image of his mother. That is your niece, isn't it, whose photo is standing beside his? I'd really love to see the kid, just for a couple of minutes!' I could hear my uncle complaining irritably; but eventually the manservant showed me in.

The usual dish of marzipan stood on the table and my uncle was wearing his customary plain jacket, but sitting opposite him, in a dress of pink silk and with a long pearl necklace about her throat, was a young woman, eating the last of a tangerine. Blushing, because I was unsure whether to address her as 'Ma'am' or 'Miss', and being careful not to glance too closely at her in case I should be obliged to speak to her, I went across to kiss my uncle. She was beaming at me; my uncle said, 'My nephew,' without telling her my name, or me hers, presumably because his problems with my grandfather had made him anxious to avoid as far as possible bringing members of the family together with acquaintances of her sort.

'Isn't he like his mother!' she said.

'But you've only ever seen my niece in that photo,' snapped my uncle, quite out of sorts.

'I beg your pardon, dearest, but I passed her on the stairs last year when you had that bad bout of illness. I know I only saw her for a moment and your staircase is awfully dark, but I was able to look at her long enough to see how lovely she was. This young gent has her beautiful eyes, and also this,' she said, drawing her finger across her brow. 'Tell me, my dear, does your niece have the same name as you?'

'It's his father he really takes after,' growled my uncle, just as reluctant to mention Mama's name and thus effect an introduction by proxy as he was to effect it in person. 'He's the very spit of his father and my late mother.'

'Well, I don't know his father,' said the lady in pink, holding her head slightly to one side, 'and I never met your mother, my dear. You remember, it was shortly after your bereavement that we got to know one another.'

I was aware of a feeling of slight disappointment, as this young lady was no different from the other pretty women I had come across in our own family circle, reminding me especially of a second cousin of mine whose parents we visited each New Year's Day. My uncle's lady-friend, although better dressed, had the same bright warmth to her eyes, the same candid, affectionate manner. She had none of the theatrical glamour that fascinated me in photographs of actresses nor of the demoniacal expression that would have been in keeping with the life I supposed she must lead. I had difficulty in believing that she really was a courtesan and should certainly never have

believed that she was one of the fashionable ones, if it had not been for her carriage and pair, the pink dress and pearl necklace, and if I had not been aware that my uncle only associated with the most superior sort. I kept wondering how on earth the millionaire who had given her the carriage, her town house and her iewellery could actually enjoy throwing his money away on a person of such apparent simplicity and respectability. And yet, as I tried to picture that life she must lead, the immorality of it was perhaps more thrilling and disturbing than if it had been objectified before my very eyes in some unmistakable concrete form, by virtue of the fact that it lay hidden in the dramatic secret of whatever scandalous or romantic escapade had originally caused this young woman's departure from a decent middle-class background, made her into public property, brought her beauty to its full flower and thrust her into the twilit notoriety of the world of wanton women — despite all of which I still could not help seeing in her (in the play of her facial expressions and tones of voice, which were similar to those of other young women I already knew) a girl from a good family who now belonged to no family at all.

We had gone through into the 'study', where my uncle, looking rather embarrassed by my presence, offered her a cigarette.

'No, thanks, dear,' she said, 'you know I'm so used to the ones the Grand Duke sends me. I told him they make you jealous.' And from a case she produced cigarettes covered in gold lettering in a foreign script. 'Of course!' she exclaimed, 'I have met this young man's father, in this very house! He was so nice to me, quite charming.' Her manner was demure and sincere but, as I imagined my father's 'charming' reception of her, which in view of his usual stand-offish manner might well have been ungracious, the disparity between her extravagant show of appreciation and his inadequate civility embarrassed me for him, as though he had been guilty of tactlessness. Later in life it occurred to me that it is one of the touching aspects of the role of these idle but industrious women that they take their generosity, their talents, one's unrestricted fantasy of romantic perfection - since, like artists, they never embody that dream in the material world or let it become fixed in the static framework of day-to-day existence - and a priceless gold which costs them nothing, all of which they devote to fashioning precious and delicate settings for the rough-cut, unpolished lives of men. Just as this woman sat with her host in his casual jac. et, filling his smoking-room with her delightful person, her pink silk dress, her pearls and the glamour of her friendship with a Grand Duke, so she had picked up some banal remark of my father's, worked at it carefully, bezelled it, given it a proper finish and a distinctive name, and having set in it one of her glances of the purest water, glowing with a lustre of humility and gratitude, handed it back transformed into a gem, into something 'quite charming'.

'Look here, my boy, it's time for you to be off,' said my uncle. I stood up, terribly tempted to kiss the hand of the lady in pink but feeling that to do so would be as daring as to attempt an elopement with her. To the beating of

my heart, I wondered: Should I or shouldn't I? Then I stopped wondering what I should do so as to actually do it. With an absurd recklessness, and without any of the reasons for doing it which had seemed so pressing a moment before, I raised to my lips the hand she offered me.

'Oh, isn't he sweet! Isn't he the little ladies' man! Just like his uncle!' she said. Through half-closed teeth, which gave a slight English accent to the words, she went on, 'I can see he's going to be a proper gentleman. Perhaps he could come up some time and 'have a cup of tea', as our neighbours across the Channel say. He would just have to be sure to send me a wire that morning.'

What a wire might be I had no idea. I could not understand half of what the lady was saying, but the fear that her words might conceal some question which it would have been rude of me not to answer prevented my attention from straying, and this effort proved exhausting.

'No, no, that's out of the question,' said my uncle with a shrug, 'he's terribly busy, he's a very hard worker.' Then, dropping his voice so as to prevent me from hearing and contradicting the untruth, he added, 'He wins all the school prizes. You never know, one day he may turn out to be a lesser Victor Hugo, someone like Vaulabelle, if you see what I mean.'

'Oh, I just adore artistic people!' replied the lady in pink. 'There's nobody like them when it comes to understanding women. Well, them and superior men like yourself, of course. Pardon my ignorance, dearest, but who is Vaulabelle? Is he that row of gilt-edged volumes in the little glass bookcase in your den? You haven't forgotten you promised to lend me them? I'll take ever such good care of them.'

My uncle, who hated lending any of his books, said nothing and saw me out to the hall. Madly in love with the lady in pink, I covered my old uncle's tobacco-scented cheeks with kisses; and while he, in some embarrassment, was hinting that he would prefer me not to mention my visit to my mother and father, I told him, my eyes brimming with tears, that I would never forget his kindness to me and that he could be sure I would find a way to show him my gratitude one day. A way which I found a mere two hours later - after a few enigmatic statements to my parents, which did not appear to have given them a keen enough sense of my new-found importance, I felt plain speaking was called for and told them in the greatest detail of the visit I had just paid to my uncle. I had no thought of creating trouble for him. How could any such thought have occurred to me, since I did not wish it? Nor could I imagine that my parents would see anything bad in my visit, since I myself could see nothing bad in it. After all, one frequently has the experience of being asked by a friend to be sure to convey to a certain woman his excuses for not having written to her, and one neglects to do so, because one feels the woman could not possibly be more exercised than oneself about the lack of communication, about which one is not exercised at all. Like everybody else, I was under the impression that the minds of other people

were mere neutral, passive receptacles, devoid of any power of specific reaction on whatever was inserted into them; and I was in no doubt that by putting into my parents' minds the information about my new acquaintance I was simultaneously passing on to them, as was my intention, my own favourable view of Uncle Adolphe's lady-friend. Unfortunately, the family judged his introduction of me to her by a set of principles which were utterly different from those my enthusiasm implied were appropriate. My father and my grandfather each had a virulent altercation with him; and I heard indirectly about these scenes. In the street, some days after these events, I saw my uncle passing by in his open carriage and felt all the mortification, remorse and gratitude that I would have liked to express to him. But compared to the enormity of these emotions, I felt that just to raise my cap would be too contemptible and might give my uncle the idea that I believed I owed him only the minimum of civility. I could not bring myself to give him such a petty greeting and looked away. My Uncle Adolphe, believing that I was complying with a parental direction, never forgave my father and mother; he died many years later, without any of us ever having spoken to

And that was why I no longer went into my Uncle Adolphe's little sittingroom, which was now kept closed. I would linger near the back-kitchen until Françoise emerged from her sanctum to say, 'I've got to run up and see to Mme Octave, so I'll 'ave to let that scullery-maid serve the coffee and take up the 'ot water,' at which I decided to go back indoors, going straight up to read in my bedroom. 'That scullery-maid' was what the lawyers call an artificial person, a permanent institution with unvarying functions which gave a sort of continuity and identity to the succession of changing forms in which she became manifest, for she was never the same person two years running. The year when we ate so much asparagus, the scullery-maid whose job it was to 'pluck' it (Françoise's word) was a poor sickly soul who, at Easter, when we arrived, was already very pregnant; in fact, there was some surprise among the household at the errands and chores that Françoise delegated to her, as she was already having difficulty in bearing the mysterious burden which filled out more each day and which in all its superb bulk could be weighed by the eye through her ample smocks. These garments were reminiscent of the cloaks in which Giotto draped some of the allegorical figures in his frescoes, of which M. Swann had given me photographs. He it was who had pointed out this similarity to us, and whenever he asked after the scullery-maid he would say, 'Well, how's Giotto's Charity today?' And in fact, the poor girl's face was so bloated by pregnancy that her cheeks had a straight square-cut set to them, giving her the appearance of those virile, able-bodied virgins, or rather matrons, in whom the seven Virtues are personified on the walls of the Arena Chapel. I realise now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua resembled her in another way, too. Just as the figure of that girl was enlarged by the additional symbol

which she carried in front of her as though it was nothing but a cumbersome load, looking as though she did not understand the meaning of it and showing in her expression no glimmer of the beauty or spirituality of the experience, similarly the strapping housewife who figures in the Arena Chapel under the caption Karitas and who hung in reproduction on the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, portrays her stated Virtue without appearing to realise what she is supposed to be doing, without the slightest hint that a charitable expression could ever flit across her vulgar energetic features. By an ingenious device, the painter has her trampling earthly riches underfoot, but she looks for all the world as though she is treading grapes or even as though she is simply standing on top of a few sacks so as to be able to reach higher; and she is holding up to God her ardent heart, or to be more precise she is just handing it to Him, the way a cook might hand up a corkscrew through the skylight of her basement kitchen to somebody leaning down from one of the ground-floor windows. Envy, too, might have had more of an expression of envy. But in this fresco the symbol is once again so prominent and so lifelike, the hissing snake coiling out from Envy's lips is so thick, filling the wide-open mouth, that in order to accommodate it the facial muscles are distended like those of a child blowing up a balloon. and because Envy's attention (to say nothing of one's own) is totally focussed on the action of her lips, she has hardly any time to spare for an envious thought.

Despite the great admiration that M. Swann professed for these frescoes by Giotto, for a long time I derived no pleasure from the reproductions which he had brought me from Padua and which hung on my schoolroom wall — of that uncharitable Charity; that Envy who looked more like a plate in a medical tome illustrating constriction of the glottis or the uvula by a tumour on the tongue or by the insertion of a surgical instrument; or that Justice who had the same greyish, frugal regularity of feature as certain pretty ladies of Combray, whose joyless, devout faces I would see at mass and some of whom had long since enlisted in the reserve forces of Injustice. It was only later in life that I was to realise that the startling oddity and especial beauty of these frescoes came from the very prominence of the symbol in each one of them; and that since these symbols were shown not in any mannered symbolic way (the ideas symbolised being left unexpressed) but as real things actually experienced or wielded, the works thus acquired a more literal and apt point, a meaning that was more concrete and striking. And similarly, in the case of our poor scullery-maid, her attention was for ever being drawn to her belly by the weight it was carrying; just as, in another vein, more often than not the thoughts of a person who is dying focus on the actual, the painful, the obscure, the visceral, on the reverse face of death, because of course that is the face it turns to them, trying them sorely and resembling much more closely the feeling of being crushed, the struggle to draw a breath or the craving for a drink of water than what we conceive of as the abstract idea of Death.

These Virtues and Vices of Padua must have had a convincing element of the real in them, since they seemed fully as alive as the pregnant servant, while she seemed almost as much an allegory as they. And it may be that this apparent lack of participation by a person's soul in the workings of a virtue which acts through him, is not only of aesthetic value but also represents a reality which if not strictly psychological may at least be called physiognomical. Later in life, when I happened to meet people, in convents for instance, who were truly holy embodiments of pragmatic charity, they usually had the busy surgeon's brisk, forthright, indifferent, abrupt manner and the expression that conveys neither sympathetic tenderness in the face of human suffering nor any aversion to increasing it, the obdurate, unbenign and sublime expression of true goodness.

While the scullery-maid was engaged in unwittingly demonstrating the superiority of Françoise (as Error, by contrast, highlights the triumph of Truth) by serving coffee which, according to Mama, was just hot water, and then carrying up to our rooms hot water that was barely tepid, I had lain down with a book in my room which trembled with the effort of protecting its frail transparent coolness from the afternoon sun behind almost closed shutters, through which a gleam of reflected light had somehow managed to slip its yellow wings and settled motionless in a corner of the window-frame, between the woodwork and the glass, like a poised butterfly. There was hardly enough light to read by and the impression I had of brilliant sunlight was created by Camus (to whom Françoise had said that, since my aunt was not 'resting', noise could now be made) as he hammered at dusty packingcases down in the Rue de la Cure, scattering reverberations like scarlet stars into the resonant hot-weather atmosphere; and also by the flies which kept performing for me their little repertoire of summer chamber-music, so to speak — which never merely suggests high summer in the way that a real musical phrase which you may have heard once at that time of year can bring summertime back to you; it is linked to summer in a more intrinsic way: by originating in the summer days and by coming back only when they come back, by containing in fact a drop of their essence, it not only rouses the image of them in one's memory, it is a pledge of their actual advent, a guarantee that they are here, all about one, ready to be enjoyed.

This dim coolness in my bedroom was to the broad sunlight outside what a shadow is to a sunbeam, that is to say equally clear; it gave me in imagination a single impression of the whole of summer which, if I had been out walking, my separate senses could only have enjoyed in a fragmentary way; so the cool gloom suited my siesta which, because of the torrent of stirring adventures in the books I read, was as restful and active a time as the experience of holding one's hand motionless in running water.

But even if the day had become too hot and the weather had then broken,

if a thunderstorm or even just a squall had blown up, my grandmother would come upstairs and beg me to go out of doors. Since I did not wish to interrupt my reading, I compromised by taking my book down into the garden, where I ensconced myself inside a little cradle-like cabin of wickerwork and canvas, under the chestnut-tree, feeling secure from the eyes of anyone who might arrive to pay us a visit.

And my mind itself was a sort of crib, in which it seemed to me I remained ensconced even as I observed what happened in the outside world. Whenever I saw any external object, the knowledge that I was seeing it stayed between it and myself, outlining it with a faint nimbus of spirituality which for ever prevented my mind from touching the immediate substance of it; this material form of the thing would somehow fade away before my mind could come into contact with it, as a red-hot body put against something damp never actually encounters the moisture because it is always preceded by its own zone of evaporation. As I read, my consciousness projected on to a sort of screen a simultaneous display of different impressions and states of mind, ranging from my deepest-seated inner yearnings to the wholly outer glimpse my eyes had of the horizon at the far end of the garden; and of these perceptions the one which was most immediate and heartfelt, the master-switch whose incessant workings controlled all the others, was my belief in the beauty and philosophic richness of the book I was reading, and my desire, with whatever book it was, to absorb these into myself. For even if I had bought the book at Combray, having seen it outside Borange's the grocer's (too far from home for Françoise to be as regular a customer there as at Camus's, but better for stationery and reading-matter) held in place by string among the mosaic of pamphlets and periodicals bedecking its double doors, which were more mysterious and thought-provoking than those of any cathedral, it would have been because I had recognised it as one of the remarkable books recommended to me by whichever teacher or classmate seemed at the time to be privy to secrets of Truth and Beauty that I could only guess at and never clearly grasp, and which were the imprecise but perennial object of all my mental activity.

Next in importance to this central conviction, which as I read was for ever impelling itself into the outside world in the search for truth, there were the emotions aroused by the action in which I took part, for those afternoons were crammed with more drama than many a lifetime. This drama consisted of the events that happened in the book I was reading. It is true, of course, that the characters involved in these events were not 'real people', as Françoise put it. But the fact is that any emotion we may experience as a result of the joys or sorrows of real people can only affect us through a mental image of those joys or sorrows; the genius of the first novelist lay in his realisation that, since that mental image is the sole essential element in our emotional mechanism, the simplification of things that would follow

from the abolition of 'real people' was bound to be a decided step forward. Any real person, however closely we sympathise with him, is perceived by us in large measure via the senses, which is to say he remains opaque for us, he constitutes a dead weight that our sensibility cannot lift. If he is stricken by some misfortune, we can only be affected by it in one small part of our total idea of him; what is more, he himself can only be affected by it in one part of his own total idea of himself. The real stroke of genius occurred when the novelist conceived of removing these opaque components, impenetrable by the heart and soul of a reader, and replacing them by an equal quantity of immaterial components, that is to say of the sort that the heart and soul can absorb. Thenceforth, what matters is not that the actions and feelings of this new type of creature should be a mere illusion of truth, but that we have identified with them to the point of experiencing them in ourselves and that, as we feverishly turn each page of the novel, they control our rate of breathing and the intensity of our eyes' concentration. No sooner has the novelist brought us to this state, in which as in all purely subjective states of mind every emotion is increased tenfold and his book can work on us like a dream (but a dream that will be clearer than the ones we have while asleep and which will leave a more lasting memory) than he sets off in us a ferment of emotions and in the space of an hour we live through a range of joys and sorrows the like of which we might only experience in real life over a period of years; and even then the most intense of these emotional perceptions would be for ever beyond our ken, since the gradualness with which they happen prevents us from experiencing them as such — and that is the way the heart itself changes, in real life, which is the saddest thing of all; but we only ever find out about it while reading or through the imagination, for in reality, just like certain other phenomena of the natural world, it changes so slowly that, though we can observe the succession of its different dispositions, we are spared the actual experience of feeling it change.

Next in the order of my sensations as I read, though not quite as internalized a part of my experience as my sharing of the characters' lives, was my feeling for the landscape in which the action took place, which was almost visibly projected in front of me and affected my thoughts much more vividly than the real place that met my eyes whenever I glanced up from the book. This was why, for two consecutive summers, sitting out in the heat in that garden at Combray, the books I was reading made me homesick, as it were, for a land of mountains and streams, where I could see many sawmills and deep limpid water with pieces of wood rotting under beds of cress, and not very far away there would be reddish and violet clusters of flowers rambling over low walls. And because I was for ever bemused by an imaginary woman who was in love with me, those two summers my daydreams of her were soothed by the coolness of running water; and whichever actual woman I called to mind, bunches of reddish and violet

flowers instantly sprang up on either side of her like pigments juxtaposed for effect by a painter.

The cause of this was not simply that any mental picture is always enhanced by the beauty and suggestiveness it derives from the chance colours of the random things that form the background to one's idle mood; for these landscapes in the books I read were not mere substitute landscapes like places I could see in and around Combray, only more vividly brought to life for the imagination. By virtue of being singled out by the author, by virtue of the faith my mind had in the author's word, which it welcomed like a revelation, these landscapes gave me an impression that I hardly ever received from the real countryside where I was and certainly never from our back garden (that unglamorous product of the orderly imagination of a gardener despised by my grandmother), an impression of actually being a genuine part of Nature, and hence worthy of being studied and understood.

When I was reading a book, if my parents had allowed me to go and visit the part of the country described in it, I would have believed I was taking an immeasurable step towards the attainment of truth. For although one may have the constant impression of being enveloped by one's self, it never feels as though one is imprisoned in a state of immobility — the experience one has is of being carried away in the self's perpetually reiterated attempts to go beyond self, to reach something outside one, and of a certain feeling of discouragement at hearing reverberate all about one the same unvarying sound which is not an echo from outside but the incessant resonance of one's own inner vibrations. One tries to discover in things the colouring that one's self has shed on them and which has added to their worth; it is disenchanting to realise that, in the real state, they are devoid of the charm which in the mind they derived from their proximity to certain other notions; at times one transforms all one's inner resources into brilliance and attractiveness so as to impress other people, although one senses quite clearly that these people, by virtue of their separate existence, are beyond the range of one's influence. And so my constant imagining of the woman I loved in the setting I most longed to see, my wish that she could be the one to take me there, these were not the chance result of a mere association of ideas — the fact was that my fancies of setting off on a journey and of being in love were just moments in the single indivisible flow of my vital impulses, which I am now artificially breaking down as though cutting cross-sections at various heights in an iridescent and apparently motionless water-jet.

The final outer layer of my simultaneous states of consciousness, apart from the real horizon which bounded all of them, was composed of pleasures of a different sort — the comfortable nook where I sat, the clean-scented air I could breathe, the whole afternoon to enjoy without being interrupted by visitors, and, on hearing the bell of Saint-Hilaire ring out the time, the thought that each peal was striking off a used piece of the afternoon, until at the final one I could add them together and see, in the long sky-blue silence

that followed, the beginning of the large piece of reading-time I had left before going in to the good dinner that Françoise was preparing and which would help me recuperate from the exhaustion that I had contracted by following in the footsteps of the hero of my book. As each of these hours rang out I had the impression that no more than a few seconds had elapsed since the previous one had sounded; the most recent of them took its place in the sky right beside the preceding one and I had difficulty in believing that sixty minutes could fit into the brief blue arc described between their two golden points. There were even times when an hour rang prematurely, tolling two strokes more than the one before; which meant there was one I had not heard, something which had happened had not happened for me; the absorption of reading, as magical in its effects as a sound sleep, had deluded my dreaming ears and erased the golden peals from the azure surface of silence. To this day when I think of those fine Sunday afternoons under the chestnut-tree in the garden at Combray, which I carefully emptied of the mediocre incidents of my personal life and filled up with a substitute career of outlandish aspirations and adventures set in a landscape of running waters, how vividly they bring back to me the events of that career because after all it is for ever contained in those afternoons which, as I advanced through my book and the heat of the day abated, slowly enfolded and encrusted it in the gradual unflawed crystal of their limpid, leafdappled hours, silent, sonorous and fragrant.

Sometimes, in the middle of the afternoon, my reading was interrupted by the gardener's daughter, rushing past like a mad thing, upsetting an orange-tree in its tub, cutting her finger, breaking a tooth, yelling at Françoise and myself to hurry up and not miss any of the show: 'Here they come! Here they come!' This was on the days when the locally garrisoned cavalry trooped through Combray on manoeuvres, usually coming along the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde. The servants had been sitting on a row of chairs outside the railings, looking at and being looked at by Combray's Sunday strollers, and the gardener's daughter had suddenly glimpsed through the narrow gap between two houses in the distant Avenue de la Gare the flashing of helmets. The servants would make haste to bring in the chairs, as the parade of the cuirassiers along the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde occupied the whole width of the street and the cantering horses all but scraped the walls of the houses, overflowing from the roadway and submerging even the pavements, which were like banks incapable of containing a river in flood.

"Those poor lads!' said Françoise, already in tears before she even reached the railings, 'those poor youngsters going off to be mown down like meadow grass!' And she added, 'The very thought of it's heart-rendering, so it is!' putting a hand to her 'rendered' heart.

'It's a stirring sight, isn't it, Madame Françoise, to see young fellows like that not caring about losing their lives?' said the gardener, hoping to set her off. And set her off he did —

'Not caring about losing their lives! What should you care about except losing your life? It's the only present the Lord never gives twice. 'eavens above, though, you're right! They don't care about losing it! I seen them in 1870 and I can tell you they don't know what fear of death is in their wretched wars. Madmen they are, I tell you! Anyway, they're not worth the price of a rope to 'ang them with! They're not men, they're more like lions.' (As far as Françoise was concerned, the comparison of a man to a lion, which she pronounced lie-on, was anything but a compliment.)

As we were too close to the sharp bend in the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde to be able to see very far along the street, we kept glancing through the gap between the two houses in the Avenue de la Gare at the constant flow of helmets, glittering in the sunlight. The gardener wanted to know if there were still many of them to come, because the sun was hot and he felt the need of a drink. At which his daughter sallied forth, as though from a beleaguered city, made a sortie as far as the bend in the street and, after countless brushes with death, brought him a flask of liquorice-water and the news that there must be another thousand of them at least, all trooping in from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, their earlier difference forgotten, would discuss how one should behave in time of war: 'Well, if you ask me, Françoise, I'd say a revolution's better nor a war any day, because, you see, when your revolution's declared the only ones what gets called up is them as wants to.'

'Hm, yes, I can see the sense in that. It's fairer.'

According to the gardener, whenever war was declared, 'they' stopped all the trains.

'To be sure!' answered Françoise. 'So you can't get away!'

'Ooh! Aren't they cunning!' said the gardener, for whom a war was a sort of dirty trick played by the State on the population, who, if they had been able to do so, would have absconded to a man.

After the soldiers had passed, Françoise hurried back upstairs to see to my aunt, I returned to my book and the servants took their chairs back outside the railings, while the dust and commotion subsided. Long after the return of peace and quiet, the streets of Combray were still busy with unwonted crowds of strollers. Outside every house, including those where such behaviour was unusual, the servants and even the owners sat and stared, festooning their thresholds with a dark uneven fringe like the lacy patterns of sea-weed and shells embroidered by a high tide on a beach.

On normal days, however, I could usually read to my heart's content, although there was one occasion when Swann arrived, interrupted my reading and passed remarks on my book (by a writer who was then completely new to me, Bergotte by name) which had as their consequence that for a long time afterwards the imaginary background against which I pictured one of the women about whom I romanced was not the usual purple flowers trained up a wall but the porch of a Gothic cathedral.

I had heard of this Bergotte for the first time from one of my friends, Bloch, who was older than I was and whom I greatly admired. On hearing me profess admiration for Musset's poem La nuit d'octobre, he had brayed with laughter and said to me, 'Beware thy fatal favouritism for Master de Musset! He is a most odious bounder, nay, a somewhat ineffable beggar. Mark you, though, good my Lord, I must needs make mention that he and that Racine chappie, once in their life, did each manage to pen one tolerably turned verse, both of which achieve the to my mind supreme merit, viz. they mean absolutely nothing. They read as follows: "The white Oloosson and the white Kameiros" and "The daughter of Minos and of Pasiphae". These two lines were drawn to my attention in the defence of the said blackguards by an article from the quill of that most masterful of masters, my Lord Leconte de Lisle, who is found pleasing in the sight of the Immortal Gods. Oh, and by the way, while on the subject of my Lord Leconte, I bring thee this book, which I have for the nonce no time to read and which is recommended, rumour hath it, by the aforementioned stout fellow. He deemeth, I am informed, the author, one Master Bergotte, to be the veriest smartest varlet. And although he doth at times exhibit unaccountable signs of meek-and-mildness in such judgments, his word to me is as the Delphic Oracle. Yea, take and read of this lyrical prose and, if there be truth in the word of the stupendous compeller of rhythms who did write Bhagavat and the Lévrier de Magnus, why then, by Apollo, thou, good my master, shalt taste of the ambrosial joys of Olympus.' It was with an ostensible tone of self-deprecation that Bloch had suggested I call him 'good my master' and that he used the same form of address to me. But in fact both of us joined in this word-play with genuine enjoyment, as we were still close to the age when one believes that to put a name to a thing is to make it exist.

Unfortunately, I was unable to have another conversation with Bloch and hence to draw from him some clarification and a remedy for the confusion into which I had been thrown by his assertion that beauty in poetry (to which I looked for nothing less than the revelation of Truth) was all the more beautiful if the poetry was devoid of meaning. For, as it happened, Bloch was never asked back to our house. To begin with, my family had been well enough disposed to him. Admittedly, my grandfather passed his usual remark to the effect that whenever I struck up an especial friendship with a school-mate and brought him home with me, he always turned out to be a Jew. Not that this in itself would have upset my grandfather - after all, his own friend Swann was of Jewish extraction — but he did feel that the Jews whom I chose as friends were not always of the best sort. Whenever I arrived home with a new friend, he nearly always started humming the aria 'Oh God of our Fathers' from Halévy's La juive, or 'Israel, break thy chain'; and though he would only tra-la-la the tunes I was always afraid my friend might recognise them and supply the missing words.

Before even setting eyes on them, knowing nothing about them but their

names, which were often not particularly Jewish, he could detect not only the Jewish origin of any friends of mine who did happen to be Jewish, but even any skeletons their families might have in a cupboard.

'And what's the name of this friend of yours who's coming this evening?' 'He's called Dumont, grandpa.'

'Dumont! Aha, I smell a rat!'

And he would start singing:

'Archers, be on your guard!

Watch without a rest, without a word.'

Then after a few more pointed questions he would exclaim: 'Sound the alarm, sound the alarm!' Or if the poor fellow himself was already there, my grandfather by a devious and veiled cross-examination would get him, all unawares, to divulge his antecedents, and then content himself with looking at the rest of us and humming a barely identifiable snatch of:

'What! Do you hither guide the feet

Of this timid Israelite?'

or else:

'Sweet vale of Hebron, dear paternal fields' or even:

'Yes, I belong to the Chosen People'.

Such minor eccentricities bespoke no ill will in my grandfather towards my friends. As it happened, Bloch had fallen from favour with my family for other reasons. He had started by annoying my father who, on seeing him arrive in wet clothes, had asked with keen interest: 'I say, Monsieur Bloch, what's the weather like? Has it been raining? According to the barometer it was set fair. I can't understand it.'

To which he had received the following reply:

'I am afraid I cannot possibly say whether or not it has been raining, sir. The life I lead is so utterly independent of physical contingencies that my senses do not bother to inform me of them.'

After Bloch's departure my father had said, 'I tell you, my dear fellow, that friend of yours is an imbecile. I mean, he can't even tell you what the weather's like! As if there were anything more interesting! The chap's a

Bloch had also managed to irk my grandmother, replying to her complaint after lunch that she felt a little out of sorts by stifling a sob and wiping away a tear.

'How could you possibly think he's genuine?' she asked. 'It's not as if he knows me. The fellow might be off his head, I suppose.'

And finally he had upset everybody by turning up an hour and a half late for lunch, in mud-spattered clothes, and then, instead of begging pardon for this behaviour, had pronounced: 'I never let myself be influenced by atmospheric disturbances or conventional ways of measuring time. I would be all in favour of reintroducing the opium pipe and the Malayan kris, but I

am totally ignorant of how to wield those other two implements, which are not only infinitely more pernicious but too, too inanely bourgeois, namely the watch and the umbrella.'

He could still have come to see me at Combray, despite all of this and despite his not being the sort of friend my people would have preferred me to have. They had eventually taken the view that the tears he shed over my grandmother's indisposition were quite genuine; but they knew, whether Instinctively or from experience, that the most sensitive and sympathetic impulses have little bearing on the sequence of our acts and the conduct of our lives, and that values such as a respect for moral obligations, faithfulness to one's friends, the ability to achieve something creative or to discipline oneself, are more securely built on a foundation of unreflecting habits than on Bloch's sort of short-winded elations which were passionate but fruitless. My parents would have preferred me to have the kind of friends who would not overstep the mark laid down by conventional standards of middle-class propriety, who might never send me an unexpected basket of fruit simply because they happened to have thought of me with affection on that particular day but who, precisely because they were incapable of tipping in my favour friendship's fine balance of duties and demands out of passing fancy or mere whim, were equally incapable of tipping it against me. People of such sterling natures will hardly be dissuaded, even by our faults towards them, from treating us as they feel duty bound to, my great-aunt being the exemplar in this regard — although she had fallen out with one of her nieces and had not even been on speaking terms with her for years, she made no alteration to the will by which she left the niece her entire fortune, because she was her next of kin and it was 'the done thing'.

However, I was fond of Bloch, my parents wished to please me and, although my mother was of the opinion that further conversation with him would do me more harm than good, it would not have left me as exhausted and unwell as I became through puzzling over the insoluble problems posed by the meaningless beauty of the daughter of Minos and of Pasiphae. He would still have been welcome at Combray had it not been for the fact that, after lunch that very day, having just informed me that every woman under the sun had her head full of thoughts of love and that there was no such thing as a woman who could not be seduced — a piece of information that was to greatly influence my life, first by making it happier, then by making it unhappier — he went on to assure me that he had it on the most reliable authority that my own great-aunt had led a life of scandalous immorality as a young woman and that she had been quite openly kept as somebody's mistress. I could not resist the temptation to retail this information to the family, he was shown the door the next time he called and when I greeted him one day in the street he treated me with extreme coldness.

But on the subject of Bergotte he had told the truth. Like a new melody that one will eventually come to adore but which one cannot yet clearly pick out, during the first days of my reading of Bergotte the things in his style which I was to love so much later on were invisible to me. I found I could not put down the novel I was reading, but I believed this fascination came solely from the subject of it, as one finds in the early days of being in love that one keeps going to gatherings or entertainments at which one will meet the same woman, believing it is the prospect of enjoying these functions themselves that attracts one to them. Then I noticed the rare turns of phrase, verging on the archaic, that he favoured at points where a hidden swell of harmony, the thrill of some elusive inner music began to ripple through his prose; and it was at these very points that he would write of 'life, this futile figment', or 'the headlong torrent of fair forms', or 'the fruitless torture of delight in understanding and loving', or 'those heart-warming effigies which eternally dignify the venerable and charming fronts of our cathedrals', opening up for me a whole new view of the world through imagery so striking that it seemed to be the source of the harp-like strains that played in my ears at such moments, an accompaniment to which it gave a touch of the sublime. One of these passages from Bergotte, the third or fourth that I detached from the rest of the text, filled me with an incomparably more intense joy than had the first one, a feeling that I experienced at a deeper level of my being, in a region of the self that was vastly enlarged, calmer and more complete than before, and which seemed to have been swept clear of all obstacles and divisions. What had happened was that, having recognised in this latest piece the very same liking for out-of-the-way expressions, the same ripple of musicality and the Idealist philosophy which had been the unrecognised source of the pleasure I had derived from the previous ones, I no longer had the impression of dealing with this simple extract from a particular Bergotte novel, sketching its purely linear character on the surface of my thoughts, but with 'The Ideal Passage' by Bergotte, which was common to all of his books and drew from all those other analogous passages which now merged into it a sort of density and bulk that seemed to endow my mind with a greater scope of comprehension.

I was not the one and only admirer of Bergotte — he was also the favourite author of a very well-read lady-friend of my mother's, while Dr du Boulbon would keep patients waiting so as to finish reading his latest book; in fact it was from his surgery and from a fine garden not far from Combray that the wind carried some of the very first seeds of that liking for Bergotte which in those days was such an exotic plant and nowadays is to be found everywhere, showing off in every last village throughout Europe and America the commonplace perfection of its blooms. The features that my mother's friend and, apparently, Dr du Boulbon as well, particularly appreciated in Bergotte's books were the ones I myself enjoyed so much: the melodic fluency, the old-fashioned turns of phrase and the impression one got, from his knack of highlighting other very simple everyday expressions, of a special tastefulness in words; and also the peculiar brusqueness and almost

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hoarse tone that he affected in the sadder parts. No doubt Bergotte himself must have sensed that these features constituted the most potent charms of his writing. For in his later works, if he had a truth of fundamental import to announce or used the name of some great cathedral, he took to interrupting the flow of his narrative with a paean of praise, a salutation, an extended prayer, in which he would give free expression to this lyricism that in his earlier works had remained latent within his prose, only showing through as ripples on the surface of it, and which was perhaps even more gentle and farmonious because it was veiled and because one could not tell with any precision where the murmur of it originated or faded away. These set pieces in which he delighted were our favourites. I knew them by heart. When he reached the end of one of them and took up his narrative again I was sorry. Each time he spoke of something in which I had never discovered anything beautiful - hailstones, forests of pines, Notre Dame cathedral, Racine's Athalie or Phèdre - with one of his sudden images he would prise it open and show me where the unsuspected beauty lay. Sensing how many aspects of things in the universe were bound to remain beyond my meagre ken unless he were to magnify them for me, I wished I could have an opinion from him, one of his metaphors, on every single thing in existence, especially on those which I might one day be able to see for myself, and in particular on some of the historic buildings of France and certain seascapes, because the emphasis with which he kept referring to such things in his different books proved how rich in meaning and beauty they were for him. But unfortunately, on almost every matter under the sun his opinion was unknown to me. What I was sure of was that his opinions would be utterly unlike my own, since they were handed down from some unknown sphere towards which I could only strive; and in my belief that any ideas of mine would have seemed arrant nonsense to such a consummate intellect, I had abjured them so thoroughly that if I chanced upon an idea in Bergotte that I myself had once entertained I would swell with pride and gratitude as though a benevolent deity had deigned to restore it to me, certifying its validity and beauty. Now and again I would come upon a page in which he said the kind of things that I would often write at night to my grandmother and my mother if I had difficulty in getting to sleep, so that the page by Bergotte read like a collection of epigraphs that could stand at the top of my letters. Later in life, too, when I was to try my hand at writing a book, though certain of my own sentences were very reminiscent of Bergotte their quality did not manage to make me go on with it. For it was only at the actual moment of reading sentences like that in Bergotte himself that I could find any pleasure in them; when they were being written by me, I was too preoccupied with making them into the exact replica of a mental image and too apprehensive of putting down something that was not 'true to life' to have time to wonder whether what I was writing might read well. Yet the truth was that these were the only kind of sentences and ideas I genuinely

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loved. Even my own fretful and frustrating efforts were really a mark of love, admittedly cheerless love, but heartfelt. And so when I came upon such turns of phrase in a book by someone else, that is when I could lay aside qualms and strictures and self-torment, I indulged my taste for them, as a chef can eat well for once when somebody else is doing the cooking. For instance, having once discovered in a Bergotte novel a joke about an old family servant which was exactly the same joke as I had often told my grandmother about Françoise but to which the writer, with his grand rolling manner, had added a further touch of ironic bathos; or having noticed that he was in no way averse to including in one of his works, those mirrors of Absolute Truth, a comment similar to one I had applied to our friend M. Legrandin (and these remarks about Françoise and Legrandin were the very sort that I would have renegued most willingly for the sake of Bergotte, on the assumption that he would think them beneath his interest) it seemed to me all at once that the gulf between my inglorious life and the Realms of Truth was not as unbridgable as I had believed, that they actually touched each other at certain points, at which thought I shed tears of trust and gladness on the pages of this writer, as though he was a long-lost father.

The picture I had formed of Bergotte from reading him was of an infirm, disenchanted old man who had been left inconsolably bereft by the deaths of his children. This was why, as I read him, I sang his prose into myself, but with more dolce and more lento perhaps than he meant it to be read, and why the simplest sentence of his spoke to me in touching tones. Above all I loved his philosophy, giving myself to it with total, once-for-all abandon. I felt I could never wait until I was old enough to go to secondary school and do the year known as 'Philosophy'. I even wished that, when I did come to that final year, nobody in the class would do anything except live by the tenets of Bergotte; and if I had been told that by that age I would be passionately fond of metaphysicians as unlike Bergotte as possible, I would have felt the despair of the young lover who feels he has given his heart for life and to whom someone mentions the other women he will love when he is older.

One Sunday as I sat with my book in the garden, my reading was interrupted by Swann who had come to call on the family.

'What's that you're reading? May I look? Well, well, Bergotte! Wherever did you hear of him?"

I replied that it was Bloch who had recommended him.

'Yes, I remember him. He's that lad I saw here once, the one who's the image of Mahomet II in the portrait by Bellini. No, I mean it, it's quite striking — the same eyebrows like circumflex accents, the same drooping nose, the same high cheekbones. You'll see, one day when he grows a pointed beard it will be the same person. In any case, he has good taste, Bergotte is a man of wit and charm.'

Then, noticing how much I appeared to admire Bergotte, Swann on a kind impulse made an exception to his rule of never dropping the names of people he knew: 'I know him very well. If you would like him to autograph your copy, I could ask him for you.'

I lacked the daring to accept his offer, but took the opportunity to ask Swann a few questions about Bergotte: 'Could you possibly tell me who his favourite actor is?'

'Well, as for male actors, I've no idea. But I do know that as far as he's concerned, there's no actor, or actress for that matter, to touch La Berma. Have you seen her in anything?'

'No, sir, I'm not allowed to go to the theatre.'

'That's a pity. You really should ask your parents to reconsider it. I daresay La Berma in Phèdre or Le Cid is nothing more nor less than an actress but, you know, I have no great belief in the "hierarchy" of the arts.' And I noticed again something that had often struck me in his conversations with my grandmother's two sisters: whenever he used a turn of phrase which might seem to imply he was actually expressing an opinion on a subject of importance, he took care to mark it off from the rest of his speech by delivering it in a peculiar tone of mechanical irony, as though he was pronouncing it in inverted commas and trying to disown it, saying in effect: 'the hierarchy, don't you know, as silly people say'. The only problem being, of course, that, if it was silly, why use the word 'hierarchy' in the first place?

He went on: 'The acting of La Berma will convey to you as uplifting an experience as any artistic masterpiece. I mean, it will be as inspiring as, well, let's say, as ...' (and here he burst out laughing) 'as the figures of the Queens in the porch of Chartres Cathedral!' Until that moment his aversion to expressing a serious opinion had seemed to me the mark of the Parisian sophisticate, the antithesis of my grandmother's sisters and their dogmatic provincialism; I also suspected it was one of the forms of wit favoured by the set whom he frequented, in which, by way of reaction against the unbridled lyricism of previous generations, people attached excessive importance to small points of fact, which their predecessors had seen as vulgar, and frowned on the making of fine phrases. Now, however, something in this attitude of Swann towards things shocked me. The impression he gave was of not daring to have an opinion on anything and of not being at his ease unless he could give you scrupulously accurate information. But what he did not seem to realise was that to start from the assumption that such attention to detail was of importance was in itself an expression of opinion. I was reminded of the time when he came to dinner and I was so miserable because Mama would not be coming up to kiss me good-night - had he not maintained, that night, that the balls given by the Princess of León were of no importance whatsoever? Yet he devoted his life to that very same kind of pointless pursuit. I could not make head or tail of such behaviour. In which other life, if not in this one, was he ever going to say what he really thought about things, pass judgments that would not have to be put in inverted commas and stop frittering his life away, with such conscientious civility, in occupations that he simultaneously condemned as futile? There was another thing, not peculiar to Swann however, that I noticed in his way of speaking about Bergotte and which in those days was to be noticed in all the admirers of that author, my mother's literary friend and Dr du Boulbon not excluded. Just like Swann, they would say of Bergotte: 'A man of singular wit and charm, with a way of saying things that's unmistakably his own. Mind you, just a little bit overdone, but quite delightful. You need never look at the name on the cover, you can tell it's him at a glance.' But nobody would have dreamed of saying: 'The man's a great writer. His talent is enormous.' In fact, at that time no one ever credited him with any talent at all. And the reason for this was that at that time no one realised he had any. We invariably take a long time to recognise in the individuality of a new writer's characteristics a replica of the prototype labelled 'Great Talent' in our private museum of concepts. For the very reason that his characteristics are new, they do not appear to be an accurate likeness of what we call talent. So instead we talk of his originality, his charm, the delicacy or power of his writing; until one day it occurs to us that those very qualities are the definition of talent.

'Are there any books by Bergotte in which he mentions La Berma?' I asked M. Swann.

'Yes, I think so — in his little study of Racine. But it's bound to be out of print by now. Although, you never know, it may have been reprinted. I'll find out for you. But, you know, I can ask Bergotte anything at all that you might like to know, since he makes a point of dining with us about once a week throughout the year. He and my daughter are as thick as thieves. They go off on excursions together and visit old country towns and cathedrals and castles.'

Since I had not the slightest inkling about gradations of social status, the fact that my father forbade us to have anything to do with Swann's wife and daughter had long ago made me imagine an immense gulf between us and them but had also had the incongruous effect of adding glamour to them in my eyes. I was sorry that my mother did not dye her hair and put on lipstick, as did Mme Swann (or so I had heard our neighbour Mme Sazerat maintain) not to please her husband but for the sake of M. de Charlus. I was sure she must despise us all roundly, which upset me especially because of Mlle Swann, who was by all accounts such a pretty child and whose charming, unchanging face, improvised by myself, frequently figured in my daydreams. But from the moment when I learned from Swann that his daughter was a being of such a rare species, enjoying as her natural element what to me were inaccessible privileges; that when she asked her father and mother if anyone was coming to dinner, the answer she heard consisted of the two scintillating syllables, the name of this golden guest who, to her eyes, was merely an old friend of the family: Bergotte; that the small-talk she listened to at the dinner table, the equivalent to her ears of my great-aunt's conversation, was made up of words

spoken by Bergotte about all the matters on which he had never touched in his books and on which I longed to hear him utter his oracles; and that when she went on a trip to another town, he walked by her side in glorious incognito, like one of the ancient gods who used to come down to dwell among mortals; from that moment not only did I appreciate the full worth of such a precious creature as Mlle Swann but I also knew how crass and uncouth I would seem to her, and this gave me such a keen sense of the impossible bliss of ever being a friend of hers that I was overcome by desire and despair. From then on, whenever I saw her in my mind's eye, she would be standing in the porch of a cathedral explaining the statues to me and, with a smile that showed how much she thought of me, introducing me as a friend of hers to Bergotte. And thenceforth the glow of fascination shed on my thoughts by the cathedrals, the charm of the hills and dales of the Ile-de-France region and the plains of Normandy were for ever reflected on to the figment of Mlle Swann that I formed in my mind, so ready was I to fall in love with her. Of all the conditions that determine the birth of love, the one that is most essential and which can enable love to forego all the others is that we should believe that a fellow creature partakes of an unknown mode of existence which we too could share if only that person were in love with us. Even women who claim they judge a man solely on his physical appearance are really seeing that appearance as the outward effect of a special form of life. This is why they love soldiers or firemen — the uniform takes the place of good looks; they have the impression that the heart beating under the soldierly bearing is different, adventurous and tender; and a young monarch or a crown prince on a royal visit abroad, may make the most flattering conquests without the benefit of the regular profile which an outside broker, for instance, might well find indispensable.

While I sat out in the garden reading, which to my great-aunt was an inconceivable thing to do except on a Sunday, a day when one is not supposed to do anything serious and when she herself, for example, would never sew (on a weekday she would have said, 'What! Are you still amusing prourself with that book? It's not Sunday today, you know!' — her implication being that 'amusing oneself' was a pernicious and childish waste of time), my Aunt Léonie would be chatting with Françoise until it was time for Eulalie to come and visit her. Aunt Léonie would announce that she had just seen Mme Goupil go past 'without her umbrella, if you please, and wearing that silk dress she's had made in Châteaudun. If she's got far to go before vespers, she may find she's in for a good soaking.'

'I daresay, I daresay,' said Françoise in a tone meaning, 'I daresay not', so as not to rule out the possibility of some more auspicious outcome.

'Oh, dear!' gasped my aunt, clapping a hand to her brow, 'that reminds me — I never found out if she *did* get to mass after the elevation of the Host! I must remember to ask Eulalie ... I say, Françoise, just look at that black

cloud up there behind the steeple and the nasty shine of the sun on the slates. We're to have rain before this day is out, mark my words. It couldn't possibly have gone on the way it's been; it was far too close. The sooner it breaks the better, if you ask me, or my Vichy water won't go down properly,' she concluded, attaching infinitely more importance to the rapid digestion of her mineral water than to her fear that Mme Goupil's dress should be ruined.

'Mm, yes, I daresay.'

'And the thing is, that when it rains there's not much shelter for anyone who happens to be caught out in the Square.' Then my aunt suddenly turned white and exclaimed, 'Good heavens! Is it three o'clock already? That means vespers have begun and I've forgotten all about taking my pepsin! No wonder my Vichy water's giving me heartburn!'

Falling upon her missal, bound in violet-coloured velvet and with gilt clasps, scattering from it in her hurry the picture-cards with lacy borders of yellowing paper that serve to mark the pages of holy days, and swallowing her digestive drops the while, my aunt set about scanning the sacred words, her understanding of which was slightly impaired by her attempts to work out whether the dose of pepsin, when taken so long after the Vichy water, might now be unable to catch up with it and help it 'go down'. 'Three o'clock! Wherever does the time go?'

There was a tap on the windowpane, as though something light had touched it, followed by a faint spreading sprinkle as though grains of sand were being dropped from an upper window, then the flow of sounds broadened and evened out, took on a regular rhythm, became liquid, voluminous, musical, countless and universal — it was the rain.

'There, Françoise, what was I just saying? Look at the way it's coming down, would you? Listen, isn't that the side-gate bell I can hear? Run down and see who on earth can be going out in weather like this!'

Françoise came back to announce: 'It's only Madame Amédée' (my grandmother). 'She said she was just going out for a little walk. And it's really pouring, mind you.'

'Oh, I'm not a bit surprised,' said my aunt, casting her eyes to heaven. 'I always did say her way of thinking was different from everybody else's. Well, rather her than myself outdoors at this very minute.'

'Yes, trust Madame Amédée! She's always the unconventionable one!' murmured Françoise genially, keeping until she was alone with the other servants her opinion that my grandmother was really a bit 'dotty'.

'Well, now, there's the Benediction over! Eulalie will certainly not be coming now,' sighed my aunt. 'She must have got put off by the weather.'

'But it's not even five o'clock yet, Madame Octave. It's only half past four.'

'Only half past four? And here's me having to draw back even the net curtains to get a chink of daylight! I ask you, at half past four! A whole week

before the Rogation days! I tell you, my dear Françoise, God in His heaven must be angry with us. I mean, what is the world coming to these days? It's just what my poor old Octave used to say, we've been neglecting the Lord and the Lord is getting His own back on us.'

There was a hectic flush to my aunt's cheeks; it was time for Eulalie's visit.† Unfortunately, no sooner had Eulalie been admitted to the presence than Françoise came back and, with a smile that was intended to tally with the joy she was sure my aunt was bound to feel on hearing her good tidings, enunciated her news most carefully to show that, notwithstanding the indirect form of speech, she was repeating like a good servant the very words that the visitor himself had deigned to use: "is reverence would be pleased not to say delighted if Madame Octave was not resting and was able to receive 'im. 'is reverence 'as no wish to impose. 'is reverence is waiting downstairs. I told 'im to wait in the parlour.'

To tell the truth, the priest's visits were not so great a source of happiness to my aunt as Françoise supposed and the jubilant expression with which she saw fit to illuminate her features each time she came in to announce him did not altogether correspond with the feelings of her invalid. The priest (a fine man, with whom I wish I had spent more time, for though his mind was closed to the arts, he was an expert in Latin etymologies), accustomed as he was to holding forth about his church to any distinguished visitor (he even intended to write a book on the Combray parish), used to exhaust my aunt with his interminable, and unvarying, expatiations. If, however, he chanced to arrive while Eulalie was with my aunt, then she found his visit positively irksome. She would much rather have had Eulalie by herself to enjoy, and not have everyone at the same time. But since she did not dare send the priest away without an audience, she had to content herself with making a sign to Eulalie not to leave when he did, so that she might have her to herself for a while after he had gone.

'What's this someone's been telling me, Father, that there's a painter who has set up his easel in your church to copy one of the stained-glass windows? I don't mind telling you that to this day I've never heard of such a thing! Whatever will they think of next? And what he's copying is the ugliest thing in the whole church!'

'Well now, I wouldn't go so far as to say it's the ugliest. Because, you know, alongside certain parts of Saint-Hilaire that do deserve to be seen, there are other things that are very old in our poor basilica, which is the only one in the whole of the diocese that has never ever been restored! Lord knows the porch is dirty and out of date, but it does have a kind of majesty. Or take those tapestries of Esther. Personally I wouldn't give twopence for them, but there are connoisseurs who rate them immediately after the ones at Sens. I don't mind admitting, either, that despite certain touches of,

[†] This transition to Eulalie's visit, odd in French, may result from a misreading of the MS. I amplify minimally (JG).

ahem, realism, they have other features that suggest a proper power of observation. But as for those old stained-glass windows! I ask you, where is the sense in preserving windows that don't let in any daylight and that make it harder to see clearly with their shifting colours that you can't even put a name to? And that, mind you, in a church where the flagstones are all at different levels and I'm not even allowed to have them replaced, if you please, because they're the tombs of the Abbots of Combray and the Lords of Guermantes, the erstwhile Counts of Brabant, the forebears in direct line of the present Duc de Guermantes, and also of the Duchess because she's his cousin and was a Guermantes in her own right before she married him.'

(Every time the name of the Duchesse de Guermantes cropped up in conversation, my grandmother, who steadfastly took no notice of other people's private lives and was notorious for misremembering names, would maintain that she must be related to Mme de Villeparisis, at which we would all burst out laughing. She would make stout efforts to defend herself, mentioning a certain card she had once received from her old school-friend announcing an engagement or a death in the family: 'I seem to remember there was a mention of Guermantes in it somewhere.' For once I joined everyone else against her, thinking it out of the question that there could be a link between a girl my grandmother had once been at boarding-school with and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.)

'Just think of Roussainville for a moment,' the priest continued. 'Nowadays there's nothing there except a farming parish. But in the olden days the district enjoyed great success through its trade in felt hats and clocks. I'm not sure of the derivation of the name Roussainville, by the way. Though I shouldn't be surprised if the original form of it was Rouville, from the Latin Radulfi villa, don't you know, just as Châteauroux comes from Castrum Radulfi. But I'll leave that subject for another occasion. Anyway, the church at Roussainville has the most magnificent stained glass! Nearly all its windows are modern, too, including that imposing Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray, which it would really be more proper for us to have here in Combray. I've heard people say it's every bit as good as the windows in the cathedral at Chartres. In fact, just yesterday I was talking to Dr Percepied's brother who makes a hobby of that sort of thing, and he's of the opinion that it's a superior piece of work! And I said to this artist fellow (who seems an exceedingly polite person, by the way, and by all accounts is a real virtuoso of the palette), I said: "What's so outstanding about this old window, don't you see it's even a bit more dingy than the others?"'

'I'm sure that if you were to ask the Bishop for a new window,' said my aunt in a feeble voice, already toying with the idea of feeling 'tired', 'he wouldn't stand in your way.'

'Oh, you may rest assured I have already asked him, Madame Octave,' replied the priest. 'The trouble is, though, it was the Bishop himself who put a spoke in the wheel in the first place by proving that the subject of the silly window was Gilbert the Bad (a Knight of Guermantes, and a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who was herself a Lady of Guermantes) receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire himself.'

'I don't see where Saint Hilaire comes in, though.'

'Aha! Have you never noticed a lady in a yellow dress down in one corner of the window? Well, that's Saint Hilaire! He happens to have different names in different provinces, as you must know, like Saint Illiers or Saint Hélier and even Saint Ylie over in the Jura region. Incidentally, those various corruptions of sanctus Hilarius are by no means the most interesting ones that one finds with the names of the blessed Saints. Take your patron saint, Eulalie, my girl, sancta Eulalia, do you know what they've made of her in Burgundy? Saint Eloi, if you please! She has turned into a man saint! How would you like that, Eulalie, being turned into a man after you're dead?'

'Oh, Father, you're always having your little jokes!'

'The brother of Gilbert the Bad was Charles the Stammerer, a good Christian prince who had the misfortune to lose his father at an early age that was Pepin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental illness - who went on to exercise supreme power with all the presumptuousness of the hothead who has lacked discipline in his formative years, and who was capable of taking a dislike to a man's face and putting a whole town to fire and sword because of it. Gilbert, who was desirous of avenging himself on his brother Charles, burned down the church in Combray, the original church I mean, the one that Theodebert had made a vow to build on the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the blessed saint vouchsafed him victory over the Burgundians, when he and his retinue were setting off to do battle with them from the country house he had not far from here, at Thiberzy -Theodeberciacus, in fact. And all-that's left of that original edifice, because Gilbert burned down the rest of it, is the crypt, and I daresay Théodore has shown you over it. Gilbert went on to vanquish the hapless Charles with the aid of William the Conqueror' (whom the priest pronounced Will'am), 'which is why we have a great many English visitors to the church. However, he seems to have been unable to placate the citizenry of Combray, who fell upon him one day as he was coming out from mass and chopped off his head. All of which and more you can find, by the way, in a little book Théodore lends to people.

'But the thing about our church that is unquestionably the most remarkable is the view you get from the steeple, and that is quite breathtaking. Mind you, infirm as you are, Madame Octave, I shouldn't advise you to try climbing our ninety-seven steps - which happens to be exactly half the number up to the famous dome in the cathedral of Milan! It would be a job even for a healthy person, especially since you have to bend double as you climb so as not to split your skull open, and you get your things covered by all the cobwebs in that staircase. In any case, you'd need

to rug up well,' he went on, failing to notice the indignation with which my aunt greeted the suggestion that she might be capable of making the climb up the steeple stairs, 'because once you're at the top, you wouldn't believe how blowy it can be! There have been visitors who have said they felt the chill of death up there. Even so, on Sundays there are visiting societies that come from miles around just to admire the beautiful vista and when they go back home they're not disappointed, I can tell you. You'll see, next Sunday, if the weather holds, there'll be all sorts of people, since it's Rogation Sunday. It really is undeniable that from up there the view is quite magical and you get sudden glimpses of the plain that have a charm all of their own. When the weather is clear, you can see as far as Verneuil. But the great thing is that you get a simultaneous sweep of different things that you can usually only see separate from one another, like the course of the Vivonne, for instance, running alongside the ditches of Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, and usually separated from them by a screen of tall trees, or the various different canals of Jouy-le-Vicomte (from Gaudiacus vice comitis, of course). Every time I've been over to Jouy, I've always seen a bit of a canal, right enough, and then I've turned a corner and found another one but by that time I've lost sight of the first one. And even though I put the different bits together in my head, it never seemed to come out right. But from up there in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, you should see the difference it makes! It's an intricate network covering the whole area. The only thing is, you can't see any water. It just looks like great big cuts, carving the town so neatly into its different districts that it's like a cake that's been sliced up into separate portions. What you would really need to be able to do, to get it just right, is to be up in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire and at Jouy-le-Vicomte — at the same time!'

My aunt was so tired out by the priest's prattle that soon after his departure she was obliged to call an end to Eulalie's visit too.

'Here you are, my dear,' she said in a frail voice, producing a coin from a little purse that she kept within reach, 'that's a little something so that you won't forget me in your prayers.'

'Oh, Madame Octave, I don't know if I should, I'm sure! It's not as if that's why I come, as you well know!' Eulalie would say each time, as hesitant and embarrassed as though it was the very first occasion, and making a show of mortification which amused my aunt no end but also gratified her — if it should happen that Eulalie looked less put out than usual as she received her coin, my aunt would later remark: 'I wonder what's got into Eulalie? I gave her exactly the same as I always give her and she didn't look at all pleased!'

'I don't think she's got anything to complain of,' sighed Françoise, who tended to look on the sums of money given to her by my aunt, for herself or her children, as small change, and to see as wealth squandered on a worthless creature the coin that my aunt dropped into Eulalie's hand each Sunday, so discreetly that Françoise never managed to see how much it was.

Not that Françoise coveted for herself the money given to Eulalie. She shared, in sufficient measure, in my aunt's enjoyment of her fortune, well aware that the wealth of one's employer elevates oneself as the servant, lending one prestige in the eyes of the world, and that she herself derived signal renown in Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte and farther afield from my aunt's numerous farms, her frequent and lengthy visits from the priest and the extraordinary number of bottles of Vichy water which she consumed. Françoise was only avaricious on my aunt's behalf and if it had been up to her to manage the fortune, which would have been her dearest wish, she would have protected it against the designs of others with a maternal ruthlessness. Nor would she have objected strongly if my aunt, whom Françoise knew to be incorrigibly generous, had gone on giving her money away, as long as she gave it to rich people. Perhaps she felt that the rich, having no need of my aunt's presents, could not be suspected of liking her only for what they could get out of her. Besides, gifts made to people of wealth and position, like Mme Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin or Mme Goupil, all of them people 'of the same station' as my aunt, people of 'the same ilk', would have seemed to Françoise to be part of that strange brilliant life led by the rich, full of hunting and shooting, invitations to balls and visits to one another's houses, that she smiled on and admired from a distance. But this was not the case if the beneficiaries of my aunt's generosity were the sort of persons described by Françoise as 'folk like me, folk that are no better than what I am', the sort she most despised, in fact, unless they called her 'Madame Françoise' and considered themselves her inferiors. When, despite her promptings, my aunt continued to please herself, throwing her money away on worthless creatures, as it appeared to Françoise, she was disgruntled at what she saw as the niggardly gifts that came her own way, compared to the copious sums she imagined were squandered on Eulalie. In the vicinity of Combray there was no farm, however substantial, that Françoise suspected Eulalie could not afford to buy, out of what she saw as the ill-gotten gains of the old maid's visits. It is true that Eulalie made a similar estimate of Françoise's hidden hoards. As soon as Eulalie was out of the door, Françoise would make ritual and inhumane prophecies about her likely fate. She loathed Eulalie, but also feared her, and felt bound to put a good face upon it while in her presence. She made up for this after Eulalie's departure, although she never actually mentioned her by name, preferring to utter sibylline oracles or Ecclesiasteslike maxims of a general nature, with a particular applicability which was not lost on my Aunt Léonie. 'Flatterers are very good at worming their way into a body's good books and lining their pockets. But with a bit of patience, the good Lord will punish them one fine day,' Françoise would mutter, as she peeped at Eulalie from behind the curtain to make sure she had shut the gate properly, with the sidelong glance and the oblique innuendo of Racine's Joash, thinking exclusively of Athaliah as he generalizes:

'The joy of the wicked melteth away like waters that run continually'. But when the priest had come to call as well, and his interminable visit

had worn out my aunt, Françoise would see Eulalie out of the bedroom, saying, 'I'll leave you to rest now, Madame Octave, you look quite exhausted.' To which my aunt, her eyes closed, lying as still as death, would give no reply, except to heave a great sigh which sounded as though it might be her very last. But Françoise had barely time to go down the stairs when the four tremendous peals of the hand-bell would reverberate through the house and my aunt, bolt upright on her bed, would screech: 'Has Eulalie left yet? You wouldn't believe it! I've gone and forgotten to ask her if Mme Goupil did get to mass before the elevation of the Host! Run and catch her!' But Françoise would come back without having caught her up.

'Now that is a nuisance!' said my aunt, shaking her head. 'And it was the only important thing I had to ask her!'

In this way my Aunt Léonie's life was spent, a life made up of identical days and shaped by the gentle changeless routine of what she called, with a disparagement that was feigned and a tenderness that was heartfelt, her 'little daily round'. The tranquillity of this daily round, normally protected by all and sundry — and not merely by members of the household (all of whom had long experience of the pointlessness of urging a better way of life upon her and had gradually come to respect the one she had chosen) but even by people in the outside world, such as the packer who worked three streets away from our house and who would always send round to Françoise to make sure my aunt was not 'resting' before he started hammering on his packing-cases — was profoundly disturbed on one occasion that year. Like a hidden fruit which ripens all unnoticed and drops of its own accord from the branch, the scullery-maid's labour began one night. It was a difficult birth, she was in terrible pain and, there being no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to set off before daybreak to fetch one from Thiberzy. My aunt, unable to 'rest' because of the scullery-maid's screaming, was in great need of the ministrations of Françoise, who, despite the short distance to Thiberzy, was very late getting back to the house. And so my mother said to me during the morning, 'Run up and see if your Aunt Léonie's all right.' I went into her outer room from where, through the open door, I could see my aunt - she was sound asleep, lying on her side, and I could hear a faint snore. I was on the point of tiptoeing out again, but the noise I had made coming in must have found its way into her sleep and changed it into a different gear, as one says of motor-cars, for the music of her snoring paused a moment and then modulated to a lower key, at which she woke and half-turned towards me so that I could see her face — it bore an expression close to terror and it was clear she must have just escaped from some horrible dream. From where she was lying, she could not see me and I stayed where I was, unsure whether to go in to her or to leave. She seemed soon to gather her wits and recognise the

falsity of the visions which had terrified her. Her face glimmered with a faint smile of joy and pious gratitude to God for making real life less horrific than dreams, and in her usual way of muttering to herself when she thought she was alone, she said, 'Oh, thank the Lord! It's just the scullery-maid who's in labour! And here I was dreaming it was poor dear Octave who had come back to life and was trying to make me go out for a walk every day!' A hand groped towards her rosary, lying on her bedside table, but as she was already dropping off again, it never reached it; and so, with peace in her heart, she went back to sleep and I slipped out of her room without her or anyone else ever knowing what I had overheard.

To say that my aunt's daily round was never subject to variation, apart from extremely rare occurrences such as the birth of the scullery-maid's baby, is to leave aside the regular identical departures from that daily routine which did not so much disturb its uniformity as introduce into it a secondary cycle of routine. For instance, every Saturday, to give Françoise time to go to the afternoon market at Roussainville-le-Pin, we all had lunch one hour earlier. And my aunt was so accustomed to this weekly departure from her routine that she was as strongly attached to this particular habit as to all the rest. In fact, she was so 'inhabited' (as Françoise said) to this rhythm that if she had had to wait until the normal time one Saturday for her lunch, it would have unsettled her just as much as if she had been forced to have her lunch on a weekday at the earlier Saturday hour. Moreover, all of us felt that the earlier lunch-times gave Saturdays a special character, making them into days of genial good-nature. At a time when one usually had another hour to occupy before being able to enjoy the relaxing atmosphere of another mealtime, one would realise that one was just about to witness the premature arrival of endives, the bonus of an omelette, an undeserved steak. The recurrence of our asymmetrical Saturday was one of those minor communal, local, not to say civic, events which can bind together a close circle of associates or people who lead secluded lives, creating among them a kind of national spirit and furnishing the favourite theme of conversation, jokes or traditional tales that grow taller in the telling; if one of us had had epic aspirations, the material for a cycle of folksagas was ready to hand. From early in the morning, even before we were dressed, for no particular reason, except to savour the bracing pleasure of our common purpose, we would jolly one another, in great good humour and with something approaching patriotic feeling, 'Come along! Not a moment to waste! We must remember it's Saturday today!' while my aunt closeted herself with Françoise and planned for the longer day than usual: 'What if you were to do them a nice piece of veal today, since it's Saturday?' At half-past ten, if anyone should pull out a watch and say unthinkingly, 'I say, still an hour and a half until lunchtime', everybody else was delighted at being able to say: 'What are you talking about! It's Saturday, don't forget!'; and a quarter of an hour later we were still chortling over this and saying we

must go upstairs and tell Aunt Léonie who would enjoy the joke. The very face of the sky seemed to have changed. After lunch, the sun, fully aware it was Saturday, dawdled across the sky for an extra hour, and if somebody. thinking we must be late for our walk, should say, 'What, is it really only two o'clock?' on noticing the two passing peals from the belfry of Saint-Hilaire (which are in the habit of meeting no walkers out in the country lanes, still deserted because of the midday meal and the afternoon nap, or along the bright stream, forsaken even by its angler, and which pass across the vacant sky unnoticed except by a few loitering clouds), everyone would chorus: 'Yes, but you're forgetting we lunched an hour earlier today! Remember? It's Saturday!' The surprise of a Barbarian (our name for anyone who was ignorant of our Saturday's special feature) who had called to speak to my father at eleven o'clock and found us all already sitting down to our midday meal, was one of the events which had afforded Françoise the greatest fits of merriment of her lifetime. Not only did it amuse her that the disconcerted visitor had had no idea that we lunched early on Saturdays, but she was overcome with mirth at the memory of my father's unthinking jingoism (with which, of course, she totally sympathised) when, oblivious to the Barbarian's ignorance of our Saturday custom, he turned to him and met his astonishment at seeing us already eating with the simple explanation: 'Well, I mean, it is Saturday, isn't it?' Each time she reached this point in her narrative, Françoise had to wipe the tears of hilarity from her eyes; then, so as to prolong the pleasure, she embroidered the dialogue a little and added a reply from the Barbarian, still unenlightened by this mention of Saturday. The rest of us, far from objecting to her embellishments to the story, usually found them insufficient and we would say, 'Yes, but I thought he said something else as well as that, didn't he? There was more to it the first time you told it.' And even my great-aunt would lay aside her needle-work, raise her head and look over her pince-nez.

Another peculiarity of Saturdays was that, during the month of May, we would go to church after supper for the evening celebrations of the 'Month of Mary'. Since we were liable to meet M. Vinteuil, who was severely critical of 'the deplorable deportment of the younger generation of today, when everything's going from bad to worse', my mother made sure I was impeccably turned out before we set off. It is from those Month of Mary services that I date the beginning of my love for hawthorns. What was striking was not just that there were hawthorns inside the church (for, after all, we too were permitted within the holy walls) but that their place was on the altar itself, that they were inseparable from the mysteries they helped celebrate, in among the sacred candelabras and vessels, their twigs horizontally entwined like party decorations and made even prettier by their sprigs of scalloped leaves, sprinkled, like a bride's dress, with little clusters of dazzling white buds. Yet, though I scarcely dared look directly at them, I sensed there was real life in this artificial finery and that it was Nature

herself who, by cutting out these profiles on the leaves and adding the perfect touch of those white buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was both a popular festivity and a solemn mystical occasion. Here and there on some of the higher twigs, petals were opening with such guileless grace and holding with such charm and nonchalance to the posy of stamens, as fine as gossamer, that veiled their contours like a last filmy covering, that when I tried to catch and mime in my imagination the action with which they burst into bloom, I saw it as the restless, reckless head movement of a lively, shining, absent-minded girl, glancing at me from her flirtatious, contracted eyes.

M. Vinteuil, with his daughter, had taken the seats next to us. He came from a good family and had been the piano teacher of my grandmother's sisters. Since coming into some property on the death of his wife, he had retired to Combray, where he had often come to call on us. But his acute prudery eventually stopped him coming to our house, so that he should not have to meet Swann, of whose marriage ('an impossible marriage, quite the sort of thing one expects in this day and age, of course') he thoroughly disapproved. My mother, having been told that he was something of a composer, had once said to him sociably that she hoped he would play her one of his pieces the next time she went to visit him. Nothing would have given M. Vinteuil more pleasure, but he was so intensely polite and scrupulously considerate that he always tried to see things from other people's points of view, and was afraid of being a bore or seeming selfish if he followed his own desires or merely let slip a hint of them. On the day when my parents had visited his house, Montjouvain, I had gone with them. They allowed me to stay outside and, since I had ensconced myself among some bushes on a steep, overgrown knoll right behind the house, I found myself on an exact level with the upstairs sitting-room, not two feet away from the window. My parents were then announced, at which I saw M. Vinteuil quickly set out a sheet of music in a conspicuous position on the piano. Then, as soon as my parents came into the room, he took it away again and laid it aside. I daresay he was loath to have them think he was only glad to see them because it gave him a chance to play his own compositions. Each time during the visit when my mother brought up the subject again, he said the same thing: 'Well, I can't think who put that on the piano. It's not where it belongs,' then turned the conversation to other matters, for the very reason that he was less interested in them. His sole passion was for his daughter, who looked such a sturdy tomboy that people could not help smiling at all the precautions he took for her welfare, always being sure to have a spare shawl to drape over her shoulders. My grandmother used to remark on the expression of gentle delicacy, verging on timidity, that often flitted across the freckled face of this brusque-mannered girl. Whenever she spoke, hearing what she had just said as it must sound to her listeners, she became anxious about possible misunderstandings and then, shining through the masculine features of the 'good sport', one could discern the finer contours of a tearful, girlish face.

When the time came to leave the church and I genuflected at the altar, I caught a sudden, bitter-sweet, almondy smell from the hawthorns, and as I straightened up I noticed on the white blossoms tiny paler patches under which I imagined the smell must be hidden, as the taste of a frangipane must lie in the crustier parts or the flavour of Mlle Vinteuil's cheeks in their freckles. Despite the stillness and silence of the hawthorns, this intermittent fragrance suggested a vibrant murmur of vitality, buzzing about the altar as intensely as about any hedgerow swarming with living antennae, of which one was reminded by certain reddish stamens that seemed to have kept something of the springtime virulence, the irritant power, of stinging insects transformed into flowers.

We would stand outside the church porch for a little while to chat with M. Vinteuil. He would separate boys squabbling in the Square, taking the part of the smaller ones and lecturing the bigger ones. If his daughter told us in her deep voice how glad she was to see us again, she seemed instantly to turn into a more tactful sister, blushing at such bold words from a thoughtless boy, as though afraid we might think she was fishing for an invitation to our house. Soon her father would drape a cloak about her shoulders, they would climb into the little trap which she drove and set off for Montjouvain. Then, if it was warm and there was a moon, instead of taking us straight home, my father, in a moment of reckless inspiration, and since the following day was Sunday and we would be going to late mass, took us on a long walk round by the Calvary, an expedition which to my mother, who easily lost her bearings and had difficulty finding her way anywhere, was a triumph of his strategic genius. Sometimes we went as far as the viaduct, its spans leading away from the station like great stone strides and suggesting to my mind the last frontier of civilisation, beyond which stretched exile and distress, because each year as we arrived from Paris in the train we were well warned to be ready before we reached Combray and to look smart about getting off at the station, since the train only stopped there for two minutes before setting off again across that viaduct, out of the lands of Christendom, of which Combray seemed to be the farthest flung outpost. We would come home along the avenue from the station, past the pleasantest houses in the district. The moonlight had copied Hubert Robert's paintings, strewing each garden with his broken white marble steps, his fountains and half-open gates, and had destroyed the Telegraph Office, of which all that remained was the stump of a truncated pillar, standing there with all the beauty of an immortal ruined monument. I would be dragging my feet and dropping with sleep, and the fragrance of the lime-trees seemed to be a reward only to be won at the cost of immense hardships and not worth the trouble. From gardengates, set far apart from one another, dogs which had been wakened by our untoward footsteps in the silence began their antiphonal barking, the like of which I still hear some evenings, and which must have become the last refuge of that avenue leading from the station when it was abolished and converted into Combray's public park, because, wherever I happen to be when those alternating barks start to sound and answer each other, I always glimpse that old street with its lime-trees and its moonlit pavement.

COMBRAY II

Without warning, my father would stop us in our tracks and ask my mother, 'Where are we?' Exhausted by the walk but proud of him, she would say in her loving voice that she had not the slightest idea. At which, with a laugh and a shrug of his shoulders, as though he had just produced it with the key out of the pocket of his jacket, he would show us, right in front of our eyes, the little back door set in our garden wall which, along with the corner of the Rue du Saint-Esprit, had turned up here to wait for us at the end of these unfamiliar byways. My mother would gasp her admiration for him: 'You really are wonderful!' And from that instant, I need walk not a step further, as the ground took over that function from me in this garden where my actions had long since been unaccompanied by any conscious attention on my part, and where Habit, lifting me like an infant in its comforting arms, carried me to my bed.

Although my aunt's Saturdays always lasted longer than other days, by beginning an hour earlier and depriving her of Françoise, she spent the whole week impatiently looking forward to them, because they contained all the novelty and entertainment that her frail, disordered frame was capable of enduring. Which is not to say, however, that there were not times when she longed for some greater variation in her way of life, those unwonted times when one yearns for something different from what one has, and when those who are prevented by a lack of energy or imagination from finding within themselves some principle of self-renewal look to the coming minute or the passing postman for something new, even if it means a change for the worse, some excitement or sorrow; when the strings of one's responsiveness to life, silenced by happiness like a neglected harp, need to be played upon, even if by a violent hand which may damage them; when the will, despite winning its long, hard battle for the right to enjoy its own whims and woes to the full, suddenly wishes to be ruled by the iron hand of coercive circumstance, however cruel this may prove. Since my aunt's reservoir of vigour was drained dry by the slightest exertion and only filled up again drop by drop during her rest-periods, this replenishment took so long that it might be months before her energy reached the overflow level at which anybody else would siphon it off into activity, but at which she was incapable of deciding how to consume it. Just as the desire to substitute potatoes in Béchamel sauce for the mashed potatoes in butter that she ate every lunch-time with relish, without fail and without ever tiring of them, eventually grew out of that very habit of pleasure, I am sure she derived from the accumulation of those monotonous days that she found so satisfying the expectation of some domestic cataclysm which, though it

might only last for a moment, would force her to make one of those irrevocable changes in her life which she recognised as likely to have a salutary effect but which, if left to her own devices, she could never bring herself to make. Her love for us all was sincere, but she would have enjoyed mourning us; she must often have been tempted by the furtive hope that, one day when she was feeling quite well and was not worked up about something, she would be told the house was burning down about her ears, that the rest of us had already perished in the flames and soon there would be not a stone left standing, but that she herself, by getting out of bed at once, would have time enough to make good her escape, a scenario that offered not only the two secondary advantages of enabling her to cherish indefinitely her love for us and to astound the whole village as she followed our coffins like a walking ghost, crushed but courageous, but also the much more precious benefit of compelling her at the right moment, without timewasting or the possibility of any nerve-racking indecision, to go and spend the summer at Mirougrain, a pretty farm she owned, where there was a waterfall. However, since no such event, on the success of which she must have often pondered during her interminable solitary absorption in her jigsaw-puzzles, had ever happened (and if it had ever begun to happen, she would have been thrown into despair by its first unforeseen circumstance, by the very first syllable of bad news, the sound of which proves for ever unforgettable, by anything that was marked by the actual reality of death and was thus very different from the mere logical abstraction of its possibility), she contrived now and again to add interest to her life by concocting imaginary melodramas that she followed through with passionate concern. She would suddenly take it into her head that she was being robbed by Françoise, that she set a little trap for her and caught her red-handed; just as, when she played a game of cards with herself, she was in the habit of playing both hands, her own and her opponent's, so she would utter out loud for her own benefit the clumsy apologies of Françoise and then confute them with such fiery indignation that anyone coming into the room at that moment would find her bathed in sweat, her eyes flashing with fury and the bald pate showing under her lop-sided hairpiece. Françoise may sometimes have heard from the next room the viciously sarcastic remarks aimed at her, which it would not have satisfied my aunt merely to invent and leave in a state of unvoiced immateriality but which she had to make more real by muttering to herself. There were times, too, when even these bed-bound performances proved insufficient to my aunt's designs, and she tried to stage a more public production. Thus, one Sunday, closeted mysteriously with Eulalie, she would impart her doubts about the honesty of Françoise and her intention to be rid of the woman, and on another day she would tell Françoise her suspicions about the truthworthiness of Eulalie, who would never darken her door again; and then, a few days later, she would develop an antipathy to her erstwhile confidant and be as thick as thieves with the

villain, each of whom, by the time of the next performance, would have once more exchanged roles. Of course, whatever suspicions she might occasionally harbour about Eulalie's conduct were bound to be short-lived, flaring up and burning themselves out for lack of fuel, since Eulalie, after all, was not a member of the household. This, however, was not the case with her suspicions regarding Françoise, which were fostered by my aunt's perpetual awareness of her presence under the same roof, but which, for fear of catching a chill if she left her bed, she never dared put to the test by slipping downstairs to the kitchen. Gradually the entire workings of her mind had as their sole aim to guess what at any moment of the day Françoise might be up to and what she might be trying to hide. She took to observing the most fleeting expressions on Françoise's face, detected inconsistencies in what she said or a furtive desire that she seemed to be concealing. Then my aunt would demonstrate to her that she had caught her out, with a sudden word that made the poor woman blanch and that my aunt seemed cruelly to relish thrusting into her heart. The following Sunday, a revelation by Eulalie — as a break-through can open up a whole unsuspected field for investigation in a new branch of science which hitherto has followed only the beaten track would convince my aunt that the truth went far beyond her wildest suspicions.

'But Françoise must know all about this,' Eulalie would say, 'now that you've gone and given her a carriage.'

'Given her a carriage?' gasped my aunt.

'Well, I mean! What was I supposed to think? There she was, as pleased as Punch, sitting up in an open coach and being driven to the market at Roussainville. I says to myself, it's Madame Octave who's given her that.' My aunt and Françoise, like the hunter and his quarry, gradually reached the stage of being ever alert for each other's stratagems and trying to forestall them. My mother feared that Françoise might develop a real hatred for my aunt, from whom she had to put up with the harshest treatment imaginable. Certainly Françoise came more and more to pay close attention to my aunt's slightest words and gestures. Whenever she had a question to ask of her, she would ponder for a long time on the best way to go about it. Then, once she had presented her petition, she would keep a wary eye on my aunt, trying to read from her facial expression what she was thinking about it and what answer she would make to it. And so it was that (unlike the artist who has read the Memoirs of seventeenth-century personages and tries to feel closer to the Sun King by having his own genealogy traced back to an old family of that period or by corresponding with one of the present crowned heads of Europe, thus completely overlooking what he is misguidedly seeking in outward forms which, because they are replicas of the past, are dead) an ageing lady in a small country town, who had never so much as given a thought to Louis XIV, but was merely responding to her own irresistible eccentricities and acting on malicious impulses engendered by idleness, could nonetheless see the most insignificant of her daily occupations — like her morning toilet, her lunch or afternoon nap — acquire in their tyrannical idiosyncrasy something of the interest which was to be found in what Saint-Simon calls the 'mechanics' of everyday life at Versailles, and could well have believed that her moody silences, a hint of good humour or haughtiness in her eye, would inspire as much passionate and awed interpretation in Françoise as any silence, good humour or haughtiness of the Sun King had inspired in the common courtier, or even the grandest nobles, who presented a petition to him in one of the tree-lined avenues in the grounds of Versailles.

One Sunday when my aunt had been visited simultaneously by the priest and Eulalie and had then rested for a while, we had all gone up to say good-night to her. Mama was commiserating with her on her bad luck in always having her visitors together:

'I hear things didn't work out very well for you again this afternoon, Léonie,' she said comfortingly. 'You got all your visitors at the same time.'

My great-aunt interrupted with, 'Half a loaf, you know...' — ever since her daughter had taken to her bed she had made a point of cheering her up by showing her the bright side of everything. However, my father also spoke up at this point: 'Now that the whole family is here, I'll take this opportunity to tell my tale once for all to everybody, so as not to have to tell it to each of you individually. I'm afraid to say it looks as though we may be on bad terms with Legrandin. I saw him this morning and it was all he could do to bring himself to wish me good-day.'

Rather than wait to hear the rest of my father's story (as I had been with him after mass when he had met M. Legrandin), I went back downstairs to the kitchen to find out what was on the menu for dinner, which I always found as interesting as the daily newspaper and as exciting as the programme of a party to which one is invited. As M. Legrandin had come out of the church at the same moment as ourselves, in the company of a lady who owned a castle in the vicinity of Combray and whom we only knew by sight, my father had greeted him in a reserved but friendly enough manner, although we had not paused for a chat; M. Legrandin had barely acknowledged my father's greeting and had even seemed astonished, giving the impression that he had not recognised us and showing that remote unfocussed gaze peculiar to those who choose not to be pleasant and who seem to see you suddenly at the far end of some interminable vista and such a long way off that they accord you the merest nod of the head, in keeping with your puppet-like dimensions.

It must be said that the lady with Legrandin was virtuous and highly regarded; it was impossible to put down his behaviour to embarrassment at being caught in some amorous escapade, and my father had wondered what he could have done to upset Legrandin: 'I should be very sorry to think he was annoyed at me for something, especially since, among all those people

got up in their Sunday best, that little casual jacket of his and his soft bow-tie gave him such an unaffected air, such a suggestion of genuine simplicity, an almost ingenuous manner that is really most appealing.' As it turned out, the family council resolved unanimously that my father was under a misapprehension, or else that Legrandin at that moment must have been absorbed in thought. In any case my father's misgivings were scotched the very next evening. As we came home from a long walk, whom should we meet near the Old Bridge but Legrandin himself, who because of the holidays had several days to spend in Combray. He strode up to us, holding out his hand and addressing me: 'I say, you sir, the bookworm, are you familiar with the line by Paul Desjardins that goes: "Already the woods are black, but still the sky is blue"? Don't you agree that it shows a perfect observation of this hour of the evening? Or perhaps you have never read Paul Desjardins? You should, dear boy, you should! Nowadays I'm told he is turning into something of a preacher, but for many years he did the most limpid water-colours in words - "Already the woods are black, but still the sky is blue...". May the sky always be blue for you, my young fellow! And then, even at the hour which for me is approaching now, when already the woods are black, when night falls fast, you will be able to find consolation, as I do, by turning your eyes towards the sky.' He took a cigarette from his pocket and stood there gazing at the horizon for a long time. 'Farewell, then, friends,' he added suddenly and walked away.

By the time I went down to enquire about the menu, preparations for dinner were already well under way, and Françoise, in command of the forces of nature which, like those giants in fairy-stories who take jobs as cooks, had become her assistants, was hammering at coal, entrusting the potatoes to steam and using fire to put the finishing touches to culinary masterpieces that had been begun in some of the array of vessels shaped by the potter's hand, which ranged from the great jelly-basins, casseroles, boilers and fish-kettles to the terrines for game, cake-moulds and little cream-jars, and included a whole battery of cooking pots of every shape and size. Passing the kitchen table, I would pause to look at the peas, freshly podded by the scullery-maid and drawn up in equal numbers like sets of little green marbles ready to be played with; but what filled me with delight was the asparagus, steeped in ultra-marine and pink with its delicate stipplings of mauve and azure imperceptibly shading from the head down to the foot — which was still stained with earth from the vegetable garden through an unearthly range of rainbow hues. It seemed to me that these celestial shades revealed the enchanting creatures who, having changed themselves for fun into vegetables, were now manifesting through the disguise of their firm, edible flesh, with its early dawn tints, its faint ghost of a rainbow, its fading twilight blue, the same precious essence that I could still detect in my bedroom all night long, after having eaten them at dinner, as they played their coarse little prank, as poetic and bawdy as a Shakespeare comedy, of turning my chamber-pot into a vase of perfume.

Giotto's hapless Charity (as Swann called her), under instructions from Françoise to 'pluck' it, would have a basket of asparagus beside her; she looked as doleful as if she was suffering all the woes of the world; and the faint coronets of blue which crowned the asparagus shoots above their pink tunics were finely etched, each star drawn in clear detail, like the flowers tied about the brow of Virtue in the Paduan fresco, or decorating her basket. Françoise, meanwhile, would be turning on the spit one of those chickens that she had the unrivalled knack of roasting, which had pervaded all of Combray with the aroma of her worth and which, when the time came for her to serve them, brought out all the kindliness in my personal conception of her character, the rich roasted smell of the flesh that she could make so creamily tender being to my mind merely the specific fragrance of one of Françoise's own virtues.

However, the particular day when my father put his encounter with Legrandin to the family council and I went down to the kitchen was one of the days when Giotto's Charity, still suffering from the after-effects of the recent birth, could not be allowed out of bed; and Françoise, trying to do the work single-handed, was very late. When I arrived downstairs, she was out in the back-kitchen which opened on to the hen-run, engaged in killing a chicken which, by virtue of its desperate and quite natural resistance (accompanied the while by a frantic Françoise's shouts of 'Oh, the dirty beast! The dirty beast!' as she endeavoured to slit its throat under the ear), brought out the saintly kindliness and tender Christian graces of our maid slightly less than it would the next day on the dinner-table, with its skin gold-laced like a chasuble and its precious juices poured drop by drop from a ciborium. Once it was dead, Françoise drew off its blood, which flowed without quenching her spite, for she gave another shudder of anger, glanced down at the corpse of her foe and uttered one last 'Dirty beast!' I went back upstairs in a fit of quaking, wishing that Françoise could be dismissed forthwith. But, then, who would there have been to fill those nice hot-water bottles, to make me such fragrant coffee and even — to roast me those chickens? And, of course, everyone else had been through this craven computation. My Aunt Léonie, for instance, was well aware, unlike myself, that though Françoise would cheerfully have laid down her life for her daughter or her nephews, she could be remarkably unfeeling towards other people. In spite of which, my aunt had kept her on, fully aware of her cruel streak but appreciative of the services she rendered. It was only gradually that I discovered that the virtues of Françoise, her kindliness, her deferential discretion, concealed backstairs tragedies, as history shows that the reigns of those Kings and Queens who pray piously in church windows were sullied by bloodshed and slaughter. I came to realise that human beings, apart from those to whom she was related, were proportionately

more capable of moving her to compassion for their misfortunes the farther away from her they lived. Her floods of tears, on reading in a newspaper about disasters happening to total strangers, dried up as soon as she could picture the victims with any degree of precision. One night, just after the birth of the scullery-maid's baby, the poor girl suffered the most appalling abdominal cramps. Mama, who heard her cries, got out of bed to wake Françoise, whose only reaction was the callous remark that all that screaming was just play-acting and that the girl liked to 'give herself airs'. The doctor, having been half-expecting some such attack, had put a bookmark in a medical dictionary we had in the house, at the page where the symptoms were described, telling us to look it up in case of need to find out what first-aid measures would have to be taken. My mother sent Françoise off to fetch the book, telling her to be sure not to let the bookmark fall out. A long time later there was still no sign of her and my mother, in high dudgeon, thinking that Françoise had slipped off back to bed, told me to run along to the study and see what was what. In the study I came upon Françoise — having decided to look at the page where the bookmark was, she had started reading the clinical description of the girl's attack and, now that she was dealing with a hypothetical patient with whom she was unacquainted, she was sobbing her heart out. At each painful symptom mentioned in the book, she exclaimed, 'Oh, goodness gracious! How in Heaven's name can God want a poor human creature to suffer such tortures! Oh, the poor thing!'

But then, as soon as I had called to her and she had come back with me to the bedside of Giotto's Charity, her tears ceased abruptly. Here, among the irritation and bother of having to get up in the middle of the night because of the scullery-maid, she found neither the pleasurable sensation of tenderness and pity which she knew so well and had so often derived from a reading of the newspapers, nor any other pleasure of the same kind; and on seeing for herself the suffering which in printed form had moved her to tears, her sole response was to grumble ill-naturedly and even to pass vicious remarks when she thought we had gone out of earshot: 'Well, serves her right, anyway! She shouldn't have done what you have to do to get like that! She got her pleasure out of it, so she should just grin and bear it now. To think there are lads so God-forsaken as to go with a slut like this! Puts me in mind of that old country saying of my poor mother's:

"Love a dog's bum and to your nose It smells as sweet as any rose"."

Although she thought nothing of going to see her baby grandson when he had a slight cold, setting off in the middle of the night even when she was not well herself and would have been better to stay in bed, walking the ten miles there and back just to be sure he was comfortable and getting home before daybreak in time to start the housework, at the same time this strong family feeling and her wish to base the future greatness of her dynasty on a firm

toundation were embodied in the maxim which informed the entire politics of her relationships with the other servants: to make sure that none of them could ever stay for long in the service of my aunt. Indeed, to Françoise, it was something of a point of honour to prevent any of them from having anything to do with my aunt; she preferred to rise from her bed, even if she was ill, to pour out the dose of Vichy water herself, rather than give the scullery-maid a chance to enter her mistress's bedroom. She reminded one of that hymenopteran described by Fabre, the burrowing wasp, which, in order to provide fresh meat for her young after her own death, puts her knowledge of anatomy at the service of her cruelty and paralyses with exquisite skill and ingenuity the weevils and spiders which she captures, by stinging them right in the nerve-centre that controls the use of the limbs but none of the other vital functions, so that the helpless insects must remain where they are, close to her eggs, and provide her larvae, once they have hatched, with game that is docile, harmless, incapable of flight or resistance, but not a bit high. Françoise, similarly, showed her undying resolve to make the house an unpleasant place for other servants by ruthlessly devising all sorts of sharp practices, one of which, for example, came to light years later when we learned the real reason why we had eaten asparagus nearly every day that summer: it turned out that it was because the smell of it caused the poor scullery-maid, whose job it was to scrape it, such violent bouts of asthma that she eventually had to give in her notice.

As for Legrandin, the day came, alas, when we had to make a definitive reappraisal of the man. It was one Sunday after the encounter with him at the Old Bridge which had made my father admit he was mistaken. At the end of mass, as sunlight and outdoor sounds filled the church with something so unecclesiastical that Mme Goupil and Mme Percepied (and all those who an hour before, when I had arrived a little late, had been so deep in prayer, their eyes closed, that I might have believed they were unaware of my presence, had not their feet helped me reach my seat by pushing gently at a little bench that was in my way) began loudly chatting with us about totally secular things as though we were already out in the Square, we caught sight of Legrandin, standing in the heat and glare of the porch against a background of colour and bustle from the market and being introduced by the husband of the lady with whom we had recently seen him to the wife of another wealthy local landowner. Legrandin's features were imprinted with the most extraordinary zeal and animation; he made a deep bow, rounded off by a sudden secondary movement like a recoil, which brought his spine smartly backwards to a position behind its starting-point and which he must have picked up from the husband of his sister, Mme de Cambremer. This quick straightening-up action sent an impassioned muscly ripple through Legrandin's rump, which I had not realised was so well padded; and somehow that commotion of sheer matter, that wholly

carnal undulation, devoid as it was of any spiritual expression and prompted by the most uncontrollable and contemptible sedulity, suggested all at once to my mind the possibility that there existed a very different Legrandin from the one we knew. The lady asked him if he would go and tell her coachman something and, as he walked over to the carriage, his face was still shaped by the shy, joyous devotion put there by the introduction. He smiled in a dream of delight; then he turned to hurry back to the lady but, since he was walking at a faster pace than his usual one, his shoulders swung ridiculously back and forth and in the total, reckless assiduity of his bearing he looked like nothing so much as a mindless and mechanical puppet, worked by happiness. As we came out of the porch and drew near to him, since he was too polite to look away, he became lost in sudden thought and gazed in profound abstraction at such a distant point on the horizon that he could not see us and so did not have to greet us. His face was still ingenuousness itself, above the straight-cut casual jacket which seemed uncomfortably aware of being out of place here amidst such abhorred luxury. And his loose, polka-dotted, Bohemian bow-tie, stirred by the breeze from the Square, fluttered on Legrandin like the standard of his unrepentant isolation and upstanding independence. Just as we reached the house, Mama realised that we had forgotten the cream-tart and sent my father and me back to the baker's to ask them to deliver one straight away. Not far from the church we passed Legrandin, coming the other way and seeing the lady to her carriage. As he brushed past us he continued speaking to his companion but, out of the corner of his blue eye, he gave us a glancing expression which somehow managed to remain within his eyelids and, being unaided by any muscle in his face, to pass quite unnoticed by the lady; however, in an effort to make up in intensity of feeling for the exiguousness of his expression, he contrived to brighten the blue blink that was allotted to us with a cheery good-will that was more than merely playful and verged on the roguish; he fined the already refined subleties of friendliness down to the merest suggestion of the meaning wink, the word-to-the-wise, the hint when enough's said, the secrets shared in a glance of complicity; and all in all he managed to raise the reassurance of friendship to the level of a protestation of tenderness or a declaration of love, as his secret heartbreak, invisible to the wealthy lady, shone out for us alone from two adoring pupils set in a stony face.

It so happened that the previous day Legrandin had asked my parents if I might go and dine with him that very evening: 'Come and keep an old friend company. You shall be to me like the bunch of flowers sent to one by a friend travelling in a distant country to which one will never again return — bring to me from the distance of your adolescence the perfumed flowers of a springtime that I too once knew, long ago. Come to me with the primrose, the blue-flowered chicory, the buttercup, come with the stonecrop that makes the favourite posies in Balzac's flora, come with the flower of

Resurrection morning, the Easter daisy and the snowballs of the guelderrose which begin to sweeten the air in your great-aunt's flower-garden even before the last snows from the squalls of Easter week have melted. Come with the silken raiment of the lily, worthy of Solomon arrayed in all his glory, and the multi-coloured pansies, but come especially with the breeze that is cooled by the last frost and can open the first rose of Jerusalem to the two butterflies that have been waiting at its door since this morning.'

The family were now in two minds about Legrandin's invitation to me to dine with him. But my grandmother refused to believe that he could have been rude: 'Well, you must admit he goes about dressed in that unaffected way of his and never tries to cut a fashionable figure.' She declared that, at all events, taking the gloomiest view, even if he had been intentionally rude, the best thing would be to behave as though one had not noticed. And even my father, though more annoved than anyone else at Legrandin's behaviour. may have nursed a lingering doubt about what it really meant. For it was like any behaviour or attitude by which the true hidden character of an individual is revealed — by being unrelated to any of his previous statements, it cannot be corroborated by reference to any evidence from the culprit himself, who will certainly not own up; and so one must fall back on the evidence of one's senses, which simply makes one wonder, in the face of this single anomalous memory, if they have not perhaps been the victims of an illusion; with the result that such incongruous behaviour, the only sort that is of real importance, often leaves a residue of doubt in the mind.

That night I dined with Legrandin on the moonlit terrace of his house. He said, 'There is a charming quality to this silence, don't you think? A certain novelist, whom you will read later in life, holds that, for wounded hearts like mine, the only balm is shadow and silence. And you know, my good chap, there does come a time in one's life — a time which for you is still far off when one's tired old eyes can only tolerate one sort of light, the light that a fine evening like this one prepares for us and distils out of the darkness, and when the only music one's ears can bear is the music played by moonlight on the flute of silence.' I sat listening to the words of M. Legrandin, in which I always took great pleasure. But I was constantly mulling over the memory of a woman whom I had recently set eyes on for the first time; it occurred to me, now we knew Legrandin to be acquainted with several of the local gentry, that he might know her as well, and I plucked up the courage to ask him: 'Excuse me, sir, but do you happen to know the lady, I mean, the ladies of Guermantes?' As I uttered this name I felt a kind of gladness at the power I seemed to have over it, which derived from the fact that by saying it out loud I converted into the objective existence of a sound what had hitherto been merely a figment of a dream.

But at the mention of the name Guermantes, I saw a faint brown flaw appear in the blue eyes of our friend, as though they had been pierced by an invisible point, while the rest of the iris reacted by becoming bluer than ever. The rim of his eyelid darkened and drooped. Then his mouth, which had set in a bitter line, recovered enough to smile, while his eyes continued to express pain, like the eyes of a handsome martyr whose body bristles with arrows.

'No, I do not know them,' he said. But instead of delivering his unamazing answer with its trite information in the natural, everyday tone of voice one would expect, he articulated these words with great emphasis, leaning forward and stressing them with a nod of the head, managing to imply not only the assertive tone used to lend credence to an improbable statement (as though his not knowing the Guermantes could only be explained as the sheerest accident) but also the rhetorical flourish by which a man who finds himself unable to conceal a painful circumstance proclaims it to the world in a way calculated to suggest not just that he is quite unruffled by having to make this confession, but that he actually finds it easy and pleasant, is doing it of his own accord, in fact, and that the circumstance in question (being unacquainted with the Guermantes) might well be the result of some family tradition or moral scruple on his part, or even some sacred vow which specifically ruled out any contact with the Guermantes.

'No,' he went on, his words now explaining his previous intonation, 'no, I do not know them. I've never bothered. I've always thought it more important to safeguard one's complete independence. My real trouble is I've got a revolutionary streak in me, as you know. All sorts of people have tried to talk me out of it. They've told me how mistaken I am not to go to Guermantes, that people must think me a boor or an old fogey. But I don't mind having that sort of reputation — it fits me like a glove! Because the only things in life for which I have any fondness left are a few church buildings, two or three books, about the same number of paintings, and a moonlit evening when the scent from the flowerbeds that my old eyes cannot make out is wafted towards me on the breeze of your youthfulness.'

It was not very clear to me how, by not going to visit people one did not know, one was clinging to one's independence, nor how one could acquire in that way a reputation for being a boorish old churl. What was clear, on the other hand, was that Legrandin was not being altogether truthful when he professed this exclusive fondness for churches, moonlight and youth; he had a great fondness for people with fine country mansions, and when he was with one of them he was so fearful of displeasing them that he dared not let it be seen that he counted among his friends mere commoners like the families of solicitors or stockbrokers, preferring, if this truth had to come out, that it should come out in his absence, when he was out of earshot, that if the verdict was to go against him, it should be, as the lawyers say, by default—verdict was to go against him, it should be, as the lawyers say, by default—in a word, Legrandin was a snob. He never put any of this, of course, into the words that my family and I enjoyed so much. And if I asked him, 'Do you know the Guermantes?', it was Legrandin the fine talker who replied, 'Oh,

no, I have never wished to make their acquaintance.' But unfortunately he only managed to say it by delayed action, as it were, since a different Legrandin (one he kept carefully hidden inside himself, never showing him because he was in possession of too many compromising secrets about our Legrandin and his snobbery) had already given his reply, which consisted of the wounded look, the grin of pain, the excessive solemnity of the intonation and the thousand and one quick arrows now crippling our Legrandin who swooned before me like a Saint Sebastian of snobbery, and which clearly meant: 'Oh, God, you're hurting me! No, I do not know the Guermantes! But please, please, do not remind me of the bane of my life!' For although this different Legrandin, the irrepressibly embarrassing, blackmailing Legrandin could not rival our Legrandin's smooth tongue, his power of expression, composed of what are called reflexes, was infinitely more quick and ready, with the result that by the time Legrandin the fine talker tried to silence him, he had already divulged his compromising information and all our friend could do then, apart from acutely regretting that these revelations by his alter ego must have created a bad impression, was attempt to play it

It must be added that this does not mean Legrandin was insincere in his fulminations against snobs. There was no way he could know, at least from his own resources, that he was one himself, since the only passions of which we can be aware are those of other people, and whatever we manage to find out about our own we must learn from others. Our own passions can only act upon us in a second-hand fashion, through the intermediary of the imagination, which replaces our original motives with a more presentable set of proxies. Legrandin's snobbery had never once urged him to dance attendance on a duchess. What it did was ask his imagination to show him the duchess as a paragon of graciousness. Legrandin could then cultivate the lady, sure in his self-esteem that he was attracted by those qualities of mind and virtuousness that are a closed book to the unspeakable snobs of this world. That he too was one of them was known only to other people, who, because they were incapable of following the intermediary processes of his imagination, could see side by side Legrandin's social activities and their root cause.

After these events, nobody in the family had any illusions left about M. Legrandin and we began to see much less of him. Mama was thoroughly amused each time she caught him red-handed, so to speak, committing the sin to which he never admitted and which he went on calling 'the sin for which there will be no forgiveness', snobbery. My father, however, had trouble accepting the snubs meted out to him by Legrandin in the same spirit of disinterested delight; and when it was proposed that my grandmother and I should go and spend the summer holidays one year at Balbec, he said, 'I must make a point of letting Legrandin know you're going to Balbec. We'll see if he suggests putting you in touch with that sister of his.

I'd wager he's forgotten ever telling us she lives about a mile from the place.' My grandmother, on the other hand — being of the opinion that when one is at the seaside one should spend every waking hour down on the beach 'inhaling the ozone', and that it is best to be completely unknown on holiday, as the time spent calling on people or going out with them is time that should be better spent in the invigorating sea air - said she would prefer no mention of our holiday plans to be made to Legrandin, for already in her mind's eye she could see his sister, Mme de Cambremer, arriving on the doorstep of our hotel at the very moment when we were going fishing and obliging us to spend the afternoon indoors entertaining her. But Mama laughed off these misgivings, convinced that any such danger was not very great; as Legrandin would not be anxious to arrange an introduction for us to his sister. As things turned out, we had no need to broach the subject of Balbec with Legrandin, for he himself, all unaware that we were thinking of visiting those parts, sprang my father's trap one evening when we met him down by the banks of the Vivonne:

'There are some very beautiful shades of violet and blue in the clouds this evening, are there not, my friend?' (he said to my father). 'The blue in particular is more of a flower-blue than a sky-blue. It's a cineraria blue, in fact, which is a most surprising thing to see in the sky. And do you see that little pink cloud up there? Would you not agree it's the colour of a flower, a carnation, say, or a hydrangea? The only place where I've ever carried out more profitable observations in the line of this atmospheric botanising is along the Channel coast, where Normandy and Brittany meet. In those parts, not far from Balbec and its wild landscapes, there is to be found a little bay, full of a quiet charm, compared to which the sunsets, those crimson and golden sunsets of the great Auge Valley - which I would not dream of disparaging, by the way — are simply insipid and insignificant. You see, in the evenings, that damp temperate atmosphere suddenly brings out bouquets of the most celestial blooms, incomparable blues and pinks, which sometimes don't wither for hours. Others are more deciduous, and lose their petals almost at once. But that only makes it even more lovely, as the whole sky is strewn with countless pink and sulphur-yellow petals. And in that little bay, called Opal Bay, the golden sands seem even more pleasant than ever, because, like fair Andromeda, they are bound to the frightful crags of the neighbouring coastline, that sinister strand, notorious for shipwrecks, on which many of those in peril on the sea come to grief every winter. Ah, yes! Balbec! the most ancient bone in the geological skeleton of our land, the true Ar-mor, the Sea, land's end, the God-forsaken region that Anatole France — an enchanter that our young friend here should read — has described so vividly, lost in its everlasting mists, as the authentic land of the Cimmerians from the Odyssey. And the best thing about Balbec, where hotels are already being built, superimposed on to that charming timeless landscape without defacing it, is the delight of having all that wild unspoilt beauty at one's disposal for day-trips!'

'Ah, I see,' said my father, 'do you know somebody in Balbec, then? The fact is this young fellow and his grandmother will be going there for a couple of months. My wife may be going with them.' Legrandin, caught napping by my father's question at a moment when they were looking straight at one another, and being unable to look away, went on staring more and more intently with each passing second at my father, smiling sadly the while, with a frank, friendly air that suggested he was unworried about looking him straight in the eye, and eventually seemed to have looked right through my father's face, as though it had become transparent, and to be focussing on a bright cloud far away behind it which could give him a mental alibi and enable him to prove that when he was asked whether he knew anybody in Balbec he was actually thinking of something else and had not heard the question. It was the sort of gaze which generally inspires a companion to say, 'A penny for your thoughts.' But my father, ruthlessly inquisitive and irritated, went on, 'You seem to be very familiar with Balbec. Have you any friends in that part of the world?' With a final despairing effort, Legrandin's smiling gaze became as fond and vague and sincere and absent-minded as possible, until he must have realised there was nothing for it but to reply: 'I have friends wherever a clump of trees, wounded perhaps but unvanquished, have come together to supplicate with a pathetic obstinacy the inclement and unrelenting sky.'

'That's not my point, old chap,' interrupted my father, as obstinate as the trees and unrelenting as the sky. 'I was asking whether you knew anybody in those parts, just in case anything were to happen to my mother-in-law and she might need somebody to turn to.'

'Oh, yes, there and everywhere else, I know everyone and no one,' replied Legrandin, who did not give up so easily. 'I am very close to things and very distant from people. But, actually, the things in that part of the world are very much like people, people of rare stamp, people of fine stuff who have been let down and maltreated by life. It may be a feudal fortress you meet up on the cliff or by the side of the road where it has paused to savour its sorrows in the fading pink of an evening sky in which a golden moon is rising, and which sees its own colours flaming at the masthead of the homecoming fishing-boats as they furrow the dazzling waters. Or it may be a mere house, standing all by itself and rather ugly, with its shy romantic manner, hiding from all eyes its eternal secret of happiness and disillusionment. It is an untruthful place,' (he added, with Machiavellian finesse) 'a place that is purely fictitious and would make unwholesome reading for a child. So I certainly should be very loath to recommend it to this young friend of mine who is already only too given to melancholy, whose heart is only too ready to be touched. Climes that are redolent of the amorous secret or the pointless regret may agree with disillusioned old dreamers like myself. But they are invariably harmful to the temperament that is as yet incompletely formed. You take my advice,' (he went on insistently) 'the waters of that little bay, with their strong Breton tinge, may act as a sedative though even that's debatable) on a heart like my own which is no longer unbroken and for whose wounds there is no other palliative. But at your age, my boy, those waters are contra-indicated. Well, good night, neighbours!' he finished, taking his leave with his usual evasive abruptness. Then, turning to face us again, he raised a physicianly finger and summed up the consultation: 'No Balbec for you before you're fifty!' he called out. 'And even then it will depend on the state of your heart.'

After that, my father raised the subject with him whenever we met, tormenting him with his questioning, but it was a waste of effort — if we had gone on pressing him, M. Legrandin (like that erudite forger who turned out bogus palimpsests with much hard work and learning, a mere hundredth part of which would have earned him a better but honest living) would eventually have constructed an elaborate system of landscape-ethics and celestial geography for the whole of Lower Normandy, rather than have to admit that his own sister lived within a mile of Balbec and be obliged to offer us a letter of introduction to her, the prospect of which would never have been a subject of such consternation to him if he had been completely certain — as he should have been, given his familiarity with the character of my grandmother — that we would never have used it.

We always came home early from our walks so as to have some time to spend with Aunt Léonie before dinner. Early in the season when the evenings were still short, as we reached the Rue du Saint-Esprit the colours of the sunset would be lingering on the windows of our house and a broad band of red glowed through the woods up by the Calvary and was reflected lower down by the pond, a glow which, because it was often accompanied by a sharpish nip in the air, had become associated in my mind with the glow of the fire roasting the chicken which was soon to add to the poetic pleasure of the walk the pleasures of warmth, rest and eating one's fill. By the summer, of course, the sun had still not set as we walked home; and while we sat in my Aunt Léonie's bedroom, the tall curtains and the loops that held them caught the slanting rays coming in at the window, divided, decomposed and filtered the light, which inlaid the lemon-wood of her chest-of-drawers with grains of gold and filled the room with the delicate oblique glimmer of late sunshine in a forest clearing. But on certain days, which were few and far between, the chest-of-drawers would have long since lost its momentary golden inlay, there would be no touch of sunset colours across the windowpanes when we reached the Rue du Saint-Esprit and the red glow on the pond below the Calvary hill would have become an opal sheen, bisected by a long, brittle, tapering stripe of moonlight which was shivered to pieces by the ripples. Then, as we came closer to the house, we could make out a figure standing by the front door and Mama would say to me: 'Oh, dear! There's Françoise out looking for us! Your aunt must be worried, because we are late!' Wasting no time in removing our outdoor things, we hurried upstairs to give the lie to Aunt Léonie's dire imaginings and let her see that nothing untoward had happened to us; we had just gone round by 'the Guermantes way', that was all, and, by Jove, when you went for that walk, as my aunt well knew, you could never be sure what time you would get home.

'What did I tell you, Françoise?' exclaimed my aunt. 'Didn't I say they must have gone by the Guermantes way? Good Heavens, they must be famished! And your lovely leg of mutton must be all dried up by now. What a time of the night to be getting home! Well, well, so you went by the Guermantes way!'

'I thought you knew, Léonie,' said Mama. 'I was sure Françoise must have seen us leaving by the little side gate through the vegetable garden.'

The fact was that in the environs of Combray there were two different ways which one could go for a walk, and they were so diametrically opposite to each other that, depending on which way one was going, one would not even leave the house by the same gate: the first was the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, also called 'Swann's way' because it led past the estate of M. Swann; and the second, the Guermantes way. The closest acquaintance I ever came to have with Méséglise-la-Vineuse was its 'way', the road that led towards it, as well as the sight of strangers who appeared in Combray on Sunday walks, people whom my aunt 'did not know' any more than the rest of us did, and who for that reason were deemed to be 'people who must have come over from Méséglise'. As for Guermantes, it was to become more familiar to me, although much later in life; but throughout the years of my adolescence, just as Méséglise was a place as inaccessible as the horizon, for ever hidden from view, no matter how far one went towards it, by the folds of a landscape which looked quite different from the countryside round Combray, so too Guermantes seemed to be some theoretical place, the not quite real destination that lay at the end of the way there, a sort of abstract geographical term like the Equator, the North Pole or the Orient. In those days, to go to Méséglise by the Guermantes way, or vice versa, would have seemed to me a proposition as preposterous as to go to the west by setting off due east. Because my father always spoke of the Méséglise way as affording, to his knowledge, the finest view of a plain, and of the Guermantes way as the ideal river landscape, I came to conceive of them as two hard and fast entities and endowed them with the kind of cohesion and uniqueness which is only to be found in the figments of the mind; I felt that the slightest detail of each of them was invaluable and that it revealed the excellence peculiar to the whole, in comparison with which the purely material lanes one took to get to their sacred sites, and from which they were marked off by their capacity as the Ideal-View-of-the-Plain and the Ideal-River-Landscape, seemed to me as devoid of interest as the back streets near a theatre must seem to a keen playgoer looking forward to a performance. But the main_

thing about them was that I interpolated between them not just the measurable mileage that separated them but the distance between the two different parts of the brain in which I thought about them, the kind of distance of the mind that not only sees things as discrete but dissociates them entirely from one another and puts them on quite different planes. And this separateness of the two places was made even more absolute by our custom of never walking in the two different directions on the same day, keeping the Méséglise way for one outing and the Guermantes way for another, thus shutting them off from one another, beyond each other's ken, in the sealed and uncommunicating containers of different afternoons.

When we were going to take our walk along the Méséglise way, we left the house (but not too soon after lunch, and undaunted even by a cloudy sky, since the walk was not a very long one and did not take us very far afield) as though we were going nowhere in particular, by the front door, and set off along the Rue du Saint-Esprit. The gunsmith would greet us as we passed, we would post any letters we had on our way, we might drop in to tell Théodore from Françoise that she needed cooking-oil or coffee, and then walk on out of the village by the road that would take us past the white fence round M. Swann's grounds. Before we reached his estate we would be met by the scent of his lilacs, out to welcome strangers. From among the little fresh green hearts of their leaves, the flowers leaned inquisitively over the fence, showing their white or purple plumes, still glossy, even in the shade, from the sunshine in which they had steeped. Some of the trees, half-hidden by the little tiled gate-keeper's lodge called the Archers' House, surmounted its Gothic gable with their pink minarets. The nymphs of springtime would have seemed vulgar beside these young houris who, even in this French garden, retained the sharp, undiluted tints of Persian miniatures. Despite my desire to embrace their lithe waists and hold their fragrant curls to my face, we always went straight past, my family having stopped going to Tansonville since Swann's marriage; and instead of taking the path that ran along beside Swann's fence and led straight up into open fields, so as not to seem to be peering into the grounds we followed another path which also led to the fields, but by a less direct route, and brought us up well past Swann's place. One day, however, my grandfather said to my father: 'Do you remember Swann saying yesterday that his wife and daughter were off to Rheims and he was going to take the opportunity of spending twenty-four hours in Paris? Since his womenfolk are away, we can cut along by the fence and that will save us going the long way round.'

We paused for a moment by the fence. Lilac-time was almost over; some of the trees still gushed great purple pendants of blossom, like clusters of delicate bubbles, but in many other areas of the foliage where only a week before waves of them had been breaking into fragrant froth, all that was left now was a crusty shrunken scum, withered black, empty and unscented. My grandfather was showing my father how the grounds had changed, and in what ways they had remained the same, since the day he had walked in that garden with old M. Swann, trying to console him for his wife's death, and he gratefully took the opportunity of recounting once more the events of that day.

In front of us, a broad sunlit path bordered by beds of nasturtiums led up towards the château. To the right was a stretch of flat ground and here Swann's parents had put in a pond, which was surrounded and shaded by great trees. However, even in his most artificial creations man must work with the raw materials supplied by nature; and there are certain places which will for ever impose their own particular hegemony on their surroundings and will be just as ready to hoist their ancestral standards in the middle of ornamental grounds as they would even if remote from human agency, in a wilderness that for ever returns to surround them, created by the very exigencies of the position they occupy and superimposed on the things made by men. So it was that at the near end of the broad path leading down to the ornamental pond, there had re-formed in two circlets, woven from forget-me-nots and periwinkle flowers, the natural, delicate, blue crown which sits above the water's shaded gaze; and the iris, drooping its blades with regal nonchalance, held out above the agrimony and the wetfooted frogbit the tattered purple and yellow fleurs-de-lis of its lakeland

Although the absence of Mlle Swann made me indifferent to the first glimpse I had ever been allowed to catch of Tansonville (by depriving me of the awesome chance of seeing her appear along one of the paths, of being recognised and despised by the little girl who had Bergotte for a friend with whom to go and look at cathedrals), it seemed, for my grandfather and father, to have added a passing pleasant feature or two to Swann's grounds and to have made that afternoon into the very day for a walk in that direction, as a cloudless sky adds to the attractions of a day in the mountains; as for me, I wished their plans for a nice walk could be thwarted by the miraculous appearance of Mlle Swann and her father, so close to us that we would not have time to avoid her and would be obliged to make her acquaintance. When I suddenly noticed what could have been a sign of her presence — a large raffia basket lying on the lawn beside a fishing-line whose cork was floating on the water - I quickly diverted the attention of my father and grandfather. Of course, Swann having told us that he really should not absent himself at a time when he had some of his people staying at Tansonville, the fishing-line could always belong to one of the guests. There was no sound of footsteps along any of the paths. An invisible bird, bisecting the height of an uncertain tree, did its best to make the day seem short, exploring the surrounding solitude with its long drawn out note; but it received back such a curt answer, so powerful a repercussion of silence and stillness, that it sounded as though it had only succeeded in stopping for ever the instant it had been trying to speed. The light glaring from the

unchanging sky was so implacable that one felt like evading its constant stare; and even the dormant water, its repose incessantly disturbed by an irritation of insects, and dreaming perhaps of some imaginary Maelstrom, increased the disquiet I had felt at the sight of the cork float by seeming to be sweeping it along at great speed across soundless reaches of reflected sky; it stood almost vertical in the water, apparently on the point of diving under, and I had already begun wondering whether, leaving aside my desire to get to know her and my dread at such a prospect, I was not duty bound to bring it to Mlle Swann's attention that she had a bite — when I had to run after my father and grandfather who were calling to me, surprised that I had not followed them into the little lane leading up to the open fields. When I reached the lane, it was buzzing with the scent of hawthorn blossom. The hedge seemed to form a sequence of little chapels, barely visible through the thickly clustered flowers which were piled up like side-altars; on the ground underneath them, the sunlight printed a bright lattice-work as though shining through the quarries of a stained-glass window; the perfume spread about me, as rich and as sharply defined in its extent as though I was still at the Lady-altar in church, and each of the flowers, too, just as ornamentally arranged, held with an absent-minded air its sparkling bunch of stamens. those delicately radiating ribs in the same flamboyant Gothic style as the ones to be seen in the open-work of the balustrade on Saint-Hilaire's roodscreen or the fine tracery of the mullions in its windows, the stone of which glowed with the flesh-tints of full blown strawberry blossom. In comparison with these hawthorns, how quaintly rustic the wild roses would seem in a few weeks' time, when it was their turn to ramble along this same sunny country lane, in their smocks of blushing self-coloured silk that the slightest breeze would rumple.

But however long I stood in front of those hawthorns, breathing in their invisible unvarying scent, holding it steady in the focus of my mind (which did not know what to make of it), losing it and finding it again, trying to pick up the rhythm which tossed their blossoms from side to side with a childish sprightliness and at intervals as unexpected as certain musical intervals, all they offered me was the same profuse fascination, endless and inexhaustible. which, like those enchanting tunes one plays over and over without coming any closer to the secret of their charm, I never managed to apprehend any better. From time to time I turned away from them, so as to bring fresh resources of the mind to bear upon them. I would climb through the hedge and up the steep embankment behind it which led to the fields, on the hunt for a mislaid poppy or a few straggling cornflowers which decorated that margin of the wheatfields as the rural motif which is to dominate in the central panel of a tapestry can be seen sprinkled here and there around the border of it; these solitary flowers, like the isolated houses which tell one of the proximity of a village, were harbingers of the vast, sweeping expanses where the wheat rolled like an ocean swell, the clouds were white horses and

the sight of a single poppy hoisting its red ensign into the wind on its flimsy rigging, above its greasy black buoy, could make my heart miss a beat, as though I was a traveller who, on seeing the first dune, with an upturned boat being caulked, cries out in anticipation, 'The Sea!'

Then I would go back down to view my hawthorns as one goes back to a work of art that one feels one can study with greater profit after not looking at it for a moment; but even though I blinkered myself with my hands so as to be able to focus only on the blossom, the impression it created in me, still elusive and unclear, made futile efforts to emerge and be matched with the flowers. The flowers themselves were of no help at all in elucidating this impression; nor could I turn to any other flowers to help identify it. Then, in a moment of the joy one feels on seeing a new work by one's favourite painter, a work that is quite different from any of his that one has seen before, or on seeing for the first time a painting that one knows only in the form of a pencil sketch, or on hearing in the full colours of an orchestration a piece with which one is familiar only as a piano study, I heard my grandfather call me and saw him pointing at the hedge of Tansonville: 'Here! Come and see this pink one, since you're so fond of hawthorns! Isn't it lovely?' And it was a hawthorn-bush, but with pink blossom, and even more beautiful than the white. This one, like the others, was dressed for the holidays — but for the only real holidays, that is the holy days, which unlike secular holidays are not ordained by contingent whim to take place on some day which is quite unspecial, some quite ordinary day that does not belong to them and has no essentially festal character — but the dress was richer than the hawthorns' usual holiday attire: the blossoms cramming the branches, crowding one on top of the other so as to leave no space undecorated, like the pompons clustered round a rococo shepherdess's crook, were 'in full colour' and hence of superior quality, according to the aesthetics of Combray as evidenced by the price-list in the village square grocery or in Camus's shop, where the dearest biscuits were the pink ones. Certainly I preferred to eat my cream-cheese pink, that is when I had been allowed to crush strawberries in it. And now these flowers had chosen a shade that brought to mind something edible or some last loving touch to a special party dress, the sort of shade which, by reason of those associations, proves to children's eyes its greater beauty and its manifest superiority over all other colours, and which, for that same reason, will always retain for them something brighter and more natural than the rest, even after they have realised that it was not the shade itself that made their mouths water or had been specially chosen by the dressmaker. I had, of course, immediately sensed, just as I had with the white blossom but with greater wonder, that no artificial device or human skill played any part in expressing the festive intention of these pink flowers; but that it was Nature's own spontaneous gesture to express it in this way with all the ingenuous goodwill of a village shop-keeper making her altar-piece for a church festival, overloading the

bush with these rosettes in too sweet a colour and too fussily provincial a manner. On the topmost branches, looking like so many of those little roses in pots wrapped in lacy paper that used to sprinkle their spots of colour about the altar on the greater feast-days, were clustered countless tiny buds of a paler shade, which as they opened showed, deep in their hearts, as inside little bowls of pink marble, tints of red chalk, and revealed even more clearly than the full-blown flowers the special irresistible essence of this thorn-bush which, wherever it put out its buds or burst into bloom, could not help flowering in pink. Dressed for the Month of Mary celebrations and seeming to be part of them already, set into the hedge just like the other hawthorns, but as different from them as a girl in a party frock is different from people in everyday clothes who are going to stay at home, it stood there coolly glowing and smiling in its primped pink costume, graceful and sacred.

Through the hedge, in the grounds of Tansonville, one could see a path edged with jasmine and pansies, as well as with verbenas in between which stocks opened their cool purses, in the fragrant faded pink of old Spanish leather; a long watering-hose, painted green, coiled over the gravel of the path and, at each of the points where it was punctured, spread over the flowers its vertical prismatic fan of multicoloured spray, which absorbed their perfumes. Suddenly I stood still, rooted to the spot by one of those sights which not only commands the attention of one's eyes but, by requiring a deeper range of perceptions, engages one's entire being. We were being watched by a girl with strawberry-blonde hair and a scatter of pinkish freckles, who looked as though she might just have been out for a walk and who was holding a spade in her hand. Her black eyes were gleaming, and since I was incapable at that age (as I am to this day) of reducing a strong impression to its objective components and was too deficient in what is known as the 'power of observation' to be able to conceptualise the colour of them, for a long time after that, whenever I thought of her, I instantly remembered them as being a vivid blue, for the simple reason that she was fair-haired; and so it is possible that if her eyes had not been so black (which was what struck one about her at first sight), I might never have fallen so deeply in love as I did with her eyes of blue.

I looked at her, first, with that look which does not communicate merely with the eyes, but is crowded with all one's other petrified and anxious senses, the sort of look that seeks to touch, capture and make off with the body one is looking at, and its soul as well; and then, in my fear that at any moment my father or grandfather would see the girl and deprive me of her by sending me on along the path, the look I cast at her became a different one, a gaze of unconscious longing, trying to beg her, or even to force her, to pay some attention to me, to notice who I was! She turned her eyes aside to cast a glance of appraisal at my approaching father and grandfather, and no doubt the impression she formed of them was that we were all ludicrous, for she turned sideways so as to spare her indifferently disdainful face the

unpleasant experience of being within their range of vision; and while they continued walking along the lane and went past me without having set eyes on her, she glanced askance in my direction, with a sidelong look that had in it no definite expression and even seemed not to be aware of my presence, but with a steady eye and a half-smile that, according to all the principles of good manners instilled in me, I could only take as a sign of the most obnoxious contempt, while at the same moment one of her hands was making an indecent gesture for which my inner handbook of etiquette knew of only one meaning, when it was publicly aimed at a stranger, which was that it was a piece of outright offensiveness.

A sharp, bossy voice called out, 'Now then, Gilberte, come along! Whatever are you doing?' It came from a lady dressed in white, whom I had not noticed until that moment, standing a few yards away from a gentleman in a linen suit, a total stranger to me, who was staring at me with his eyes popping out of his head; and the girl, her smile suddenly disappearing, went off carrying her spade without another glance in my direction, and with an air that was docile, inscrutable and sly.

So it was that this name 'Gilberte' passed close to me, given to me like a talisman that might one day enable me to find the girl whom it had just turned into a person and who, a moment before, had been nothing but an imprecise presence. As it passed in spoken form above the jasmines and the stocks, as tart and cool as the spray from the green sprinkler, it imparted to the clear space through which it moved, and which it had marked off from the rest of the air, all the iridescent mystery of the life led by this girl whom it identified to the blessed creatures who lived with her and went about with her, and made manifest under that pink thorn-bush, at the level of my own shoulder, the hurtful quintessence of their intimacy with her and the whole unknown world of her existence which I would never be able to enter.

The impression made on me (as we walked away and my grandfather muttered, 'Poor old Swann! What a dance they're leading him! Fancy sending him off to Paris like that so that she can be alone with her Charlus! That was him, you know, I recognised him. And to think that child is involved in their iniquity!') by the tyrannical tone in which Gilberte's mother had spoken and to which the girl had submitted, momentarily soothed my pangs, by demonstrating that she was compelled to obey somebody else and was thus not superior to everything in the world, gave me a glimmer of hope and diminished my love for her. But very soon that love grew strong again, my humiliated heart, by way of reaction, yearning to rise to the same level as Gilberte or to bring her down to mine. I loved her and regretted not having had the time and the presence of mind to insult her, to hurt her feelings and make her remember me. I thought she was so lovely that I wanted to go back down that lane and shout after her, with a nonchalant shrug, 'You look ugly and horrible! I hate the sight of you!' But I continued on my way, carrying for ever within myself a first glimpse of a form of happiness forbidden to children like me by natural laws that it would have been impossible to infringe, in the shape of a little girl with sandy hair and freckles, holding a spade and laughing to herself as she cast sidelong glances at me from her cunning, inexpressive eyes. And the enchantment which her name had lent to that spot under the pink blossoms where it had been heard by her and by me, was soon to touch and impregnate with its fragrance anything connected with her — her grandparents, with whom my own had had the inestimable joy of being acquainted, the sublime profession of stockbroker, the heartbreaking district near the Champs-Elysées where she lived in Paris.

'Léonie,' said my grandfather when we got home from our walk, 'I do wish you had been with us this afternoon! You just wouldn't have recognised Tansonville. If I had dared, I would have snipped off a twig of those pink hawthorns you used to be so fond of.' My grandfather would recount the details of our walk in this way to Aunt Léonie either to amuse her or because there was still some hope of encouraging her to get out and about. For in the past she had dearly loved Tansonville, and Swann himself had been one of the very last visitors she went on receiving at a time when she had already closed her door to nearly everybody else. And just as Swann was informed, when he came nowadays to ask for her (she being the only member of our family with whom he still tried to maintain any contact), that she was tired but that she would see him the next time he called, so she said to my grandfather on this occasion, 'Yes, well, one day when it's nice, I'll go for a drive as far as the gates of Tansonville.' She said this in all sincerity. She would have been glad to see Swann and Tansonville again; unfortunately she could muster enough strength only for the desire to do so, and the fulfilment of the desire would have taxed that strength beyond its limits. There were times when a spell of fine weather would give her back a little of her former vigour and she would get out of bed to dress; but then, even before she had reached the other room, fatigue would set in and she would gasp for her bed. What had begun for her — but at an earlier age than usual - was the great renunciation of life that old age, retiring into its cocoon, makes in the face of death, which can be observed in the final stages of very long lives, even coming between lovers who have been everything to each other or between friends who have enjoyed the closest and dearest of relationships and who, one year, fail to make the necessary journey or to turn up at the expected time and place, stop writing and know from then on that they will never again communicate in this world. My aunt must have known perfectly well that she would never see Swann again or set foot out of doors, but this definitive confinement must have been pleasurable to her for the very reason which, as far as we could see, ought to have made it more irksome: for it was imposed upon her by the daily dwindling which she could observe in her own reserves of energy, and which, because it rewarded any action or movement with fatigue, not to say pain, brought to her silent, solitary inactivity all the sweet, beneficent blessings of rest.

My aunt never did go and see the hedge of pink hawthorns, but I was perpetually asking my parents whether she would go, and whether she had once upon a time been a frequent visitor to Tansonville, trying in this way to make them talk about Mlle Swann's parents and grandparents who seemed to my mind as great and glorious as the gods. The name 'Swann' had taken on a kind of mythological significance for me and in conversation with my parents I was constantly fretted by the need to hear them utter it; not daring to say it myself, I would bring them by devious ways to speak about subjects that were close to Gilberte and her family or which actually referred to her, subjects which briefly assuaged the pain of exile from her; so I pretended to believe that my grandfather's business had been in our family before his day, or that the hedge of pink hawthorns that my Aunt Léonie longed to see actually stood on common land, thereby compelling my father to correct my misapprehensions and tell me, to all appearances quite voluntarily and independently of me, 'No, no, that business belonged to Swann's father,' or 'The hedge is part of Swann's grounds.' At those moments, when the sound of this name was suddenly matched with its constant imprint in my thoughts, I could not help catching my breath under the stifling weight and bulk of it which, each time I heard it spoken, seemed to have a greater mass than that of any other name because it was pregnant with all the other secret occasions when I had spoken it to myself. Hearing the name caused me a thrill of pleasure that I was slightly ashamed of having dared procure from my parents; the enjoyment I derived from it felt so great that I supposed they could only have given it to me at the cost of much bother to themselves, and unrewarded bother at that, as there was no pleasure for them in the sound. So then I would change the subject, partly out of a sort of tactfulness, partly out of moral qualms, as all the singular suggestiveness with which I endowed the name 'Swann' struck me as inherent in it when they said it; and, because it suddenly seemed as though my parents were bound to experience that suggestiveness, that it meant the same to them as to me, and that they were therefore aware of my imaginings, sharing them and condoning them, I was saddened by the feeling that I had defeated and depraved them.

That particular year my parents had decided to return to Paris a little sooner than usual. On the morning when we were to leave Combray, my hair had been curled in preparation for a family photograph, a new hat had been cautiously poised on my head and a coat of quilted velvet buttoned about me; my mother, having looked for me high and low, eventually ran me to earth in the steep little lane beside Tansonville, taking a tearful farewell of my hawthorns, trying to embrace the prickly branches and, like a princess in a tragedy, irked by her futile finery, in a fit of ingratitude at the bothersome hand that had knotted these bows and carefully arranged my curls,

trampling underfoot my curl-papers and my brand new hat.† My mother, unmoved by my tears, could not help protesting at the sight of my battered headgear and the ruined coat. I did not even hear her, as I was wailing at the hawthorns: 'Oh, my dear little hawthorns! You would never want to make me sad or take me away! You've never caused me any unhappiness! I shall always love you!' As I dried my tears, I promised them that when I was grown up I would not do the senseless things done by all other people but that, each spring, even if I was in Paris, instead of calling on people and participating in pointless conversations, I would go out to the country to see the first hawthorn blossom.

On the walk towards Méséglise, after one had reached the fields, it was all open country from then on. The wind which eternally traversed this country, like some invisible vagrant on his unvarying beat, was to my mind the tutelary spirit of Combray. Every year, on the day we arrived down from Paris, I could never feel I was really at Combray until I had climbed up the lane to find this wind, running over the ploughed fields and making me run after it. The wind always went everywhere with you on the Méséglise way, across that swelling plain where for mile after mile it was unhindered by hills or dales. Knowing that Mlle Swann often went to spend a few days in Laon (which, though it was miles away, seemed to be brought nearer to me by the lack of intervening ups and downs), whenever I stood on the edge of the wheatfields on a hot afternoon and saw a single gust of wind sweep from the distant horizon, moving first the farthest wheat, then swelling like a wave right across the whole vast expanse and finally dying out in warm murmuring ripples among the sainfoin and clover at my feet, the plain which I shared with her at that moment seemed to bring us closer together, or even to unite us; and, telling myself that that very same gust of wind had blown on her face too, that, if only I could understand it, it was whispering a message from her, I kissed it as it passed. To the left was a village called Champieu (from Campus pagani, according to the priest), while on the right one could see protruding above the wheat the twin rough-cut rustic steeples of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as spiky and serrated, as yellowed and coarse-grained, as intricately patterned with cusps and crinkles as two ears of corn.

Among the inimitable patterns of their leaves (unmistakable for the leaves of any other fruit-tree), apple-trees, symmetrically spaced out, opened broad petals of white satin or dangled the bashful blushing clusters of their buds. It was on walks along the Méséglise way that I noticed for the first time the roundness of the shadows cast on the sunlit ground by apple-trees, and the sheerness of the oblique golden silks spun under the leaves by the setting sun, which remained intact and untattered although my father poked his walking-stick right through them.

Sometimes the afternoon sky would be visited by a wan, furtive moon, as † An echo of Racine in this sentence is lost in translation (JG).

colourless as a cloud, like an actress whose cue will not come for some time and who catches a moment of a performance from the back of the theatre, unobtrusively, hoping not to be noticed and still in her street clothes. It used to gladden me to come upon the moon in paintings or books, although the works in which I enjoyed it were very different — at least in my earlier years, before Bloch had taught my eyes, and my mind's eyes, other more refined harmonies — from the ones in which the moon would strike me nowadays by its beauty and in which I would have been incapable of recognising it then. In those days it would be, for instance, in a novel by Saintine or a landscape by Gleyre, where the moon could be seen sharp in the sky like a silver sickle, the sort of works whose naive inadequacy was matched only by my own responses, and my enjoyment of which was indignantly deplored by my grandmother's sisters. Their belief was that children should be presented with works one knows in one's maturity to be indisputably admirable, and that children, by enjoying them early in life, show their innate good taste. They must presumably have fancied that aesthetic merits are material objects that no open eye can fail to see and appreciate, and for the enjoyment of which there is no need to have nurtured for years one's own crude and gradual approximations to them.

It was along the Méséglise way, at Montjouvain, a house standing beside a large pond and flanked by a steep, overgrown hillside, that M. Vinteuil lived. So we often saw his daughter along that road, driving a pony and trap at great speed. One year, we stopped seeing her out by herself, and from that time on she was always accompanied by an older friend, a woman who had a bad name in the district and who eventually took up permanent residence at Montjouvain. People said, 'Poor M. Vinteuil! They say love is blind, but you'd think he'd be able to see what everyone knows is going on. Fancy a man like that, who is scandalised by an unseemly word, giving houseroom to such a woman! According to him she's an outstanding person, a heart of oak, with a most extraordinary gift for music that's never been developed. If you ask me, whatever it is she's playing at with his daughter, it's certainly not music!' It was a fact that M. Vinteuil did express this high opinion of her, in accord with the remarkable principle that people will always inspire admiration for their moral rectitude in the family of anyone with whom they are having sexual relations. Carnal love, so unjustly disparaged, actually constrains us to manifest every last particle of generosity and selflessness that we contain, and these qualities shine for the eyes of our close associates. Dr Percepied who, because of his deep voice and shaggy eyebrows could always get away with playing the part of a villain (although his physique was quite unsuited to the role) without ever forfeiting the unshakable and quite undeserved reputation he enjoyed of being a rough diamond, could make the priest and everyone else laugh till they cried by saying gruffly, 'Well, I'm told our Mlle Vinteuil is making music with her girl-friend! Which seems to come as something of a surprise to you all. It's not for me to say, though, is

it? Only, it was her old man who told me so, you see, yesterday. And there's no reason why a girl shouldn't like music. I'm not one to stand in the way of a youngster who's got artistic aspirations. Nor is Vinteuil, apparently. Because he makes music with his daughter's girl-friend too, you know. Oh yes, there's a deuce of a lot of music-making going on in that establishment, I can tell you! I say, why are you all laughing? They just go in for rather too much music-making, that's all! I met old Vinteuil up by the cemetery the other day. He can hardly stand on his own two legs any more.'

For anyone who, like ourselves, saw M. Vinteuil at that time avoiding people he knew, looking away when he caught sight of them, ageing in a few months, turning in on himself and his grief, becoming incapable of any exertion which did not contribute directly to his daughter's happiness and spending long days at his wife's grave, it would have been difficult not to realise that he was in fact dying of a broken heart, or to imagine he was unaware of the rumours that were going about. He had heard them; he may even have believed them. There is probably nobody, however virtuous, who cannot be brought by the complexity of circumstance to live in daily intimacy with a vice he utterly abhors — and which he may not even fully recognise through the misleading mask of particular details that it must wear so as to achieve that state of daily intimacy and make him suffer: inexplicable words and odd behaviour, one evening, from a person whom in other respects he has many reasons for loving. But a man like M. Vinteuil must have suffered more acutely than most in resigning himself to the sort of situation which it is mistakenly believed is exclusive to those who lead the Bohemian life, but which in fact arises whenever a child needs to accept and accommodate in himself a vice produced in him, like the colour of his eyes, by nature itself, possibly through the grafting of his father's virtues on to those of his mother. Nor did it mean that, because M. Vinteuil may have been aware of his daughter's conduct, he worshipped her any the less. Fact has no access to the world where beliefs grow; it had no hand in their birth and cannot bring about their death; it can give them the most unremitting lie without managing to discredit them, and a family may be overwhelmed by a welter of misfortunes and maladies without once questioning the clemency of their god or the competence of their doctor. But when M. Vinteuil saw his daughter and himself as others, knowing their reputation, must see them, when he tried to adopt the position that belonged to him and his daughter according to public estimation, the sentence of social condemnation he passed on himself was exactly the same as the one his worst enemy in Combray would have passed: he saw himself and his daughter as the lowest of the low, and this was why his manner had of late shown humility and respect for those whom he saw as above himself (even if they had previously been far beneath him), the desire to rise to their level which is an almost automatic corollary to any downfall. One day as we were walking along a street in Combray with Swann, M. Vinteuil came round a corner and was right on top of us before he could think of avoiding us; with the smug charitableness of the man of the world whose own moral principles have disintegrated and who sees nothing more in another man's disgrace than the opportunity to treat him with the kind of benevolence which, the more gratifying it appears to the recipient, the more flattering it will be to his own self-esteem, Swann, who had until then never spoken a word to M. Vinteuil, stood talking to him for a long time and, before taking his leave of us all, even invited him to send his daughter along to Tansonville one day to play the piano. Two years before, this invitation would have appalled M. Vinteuil; but now it filled him with feelings of gratitude so potent that he felt obliged not to be so tactless as to accept it. Swann's friendly offer towards his daughter seemed in itself such an honourable and delightful token of patronage that M. Vinteuil thought better of actually taking him up on it, so as to enjoy the totally Platonic pleasure of retaining that patronage. When Swann had gone away, M. Vinteuil said to us, with the gushing veneration of a middle-class woman, herself clever and attractive but spellbound in the presence of any foolish frump of a duchess, 'What a charming man he is! And what a great pity he got himself into that disgraceful marriage!'

At which, since even the most sincere people have a streak of hypocrisy in their make-up and can suspend for the duration of a conversation with someone their true opinion of him, only to express it again in his absence, my parents joined M. Vinteuil in deploring Swann's marriage, judging it on principles and proprieties which, by the very fact that they and he invoked them as though they were all good citizens of the same sort, they seemed to imply were not being infringed at Montjouvain. M. Vinteuil never sent his daughter to Swann's house; and the one who regretted this most was Swann himself. After having a word with M. Vinteuil, he would remember that for some time he had been meaning to ask him about a person of the same name as himself who, Swann thought, might be a relative of his. He had been going to make a point of raising the matter with M. Vinteuil if he brought his daughter to Tansonville.

Since the Méséglise walk was shorter than the other one and for that reason was reserved for days when the weather was uncertain, the prevailing climate on the Méséglise way was rather rainy and we made sure of never losing sight of the edge of Roussainville woods, so as to be able to seek the dense shelter of their branches, if need be.

The sun would often hide behind a cloud, lining it with yellow and deforming its own curvature. All brilliance, but not the light of day, faded from the landscape, in which all animation seemed to have been suspended, while the hamlet of Roussainville sculpted the white reliefs of its roof-ridges against the sky with breathtaking precision and detail. A breeze blew away a crow which it dropped farther off; and against the whitening sky the blue of the distant woods was clearer, as though painted in camaieu on one of those decorated panels one sees above the mantelpiece in old houses.

But there were other times when we would be caught by the rain with which the little weather-man hanging outside the optician's shop had threatened us; the drops of water, like migratory birds all setting off in a body at the same moment, would fall from the sky in close formation. During their rapid flight, they do not separate or fall at random, but each drop holds to its position and attracts the following one after itself, so that the sky is as dark as when the swallows leave. We would take refuge in the woods. When the migration seemed to be over, there would always be some stragglers dawdling down late. But we would leave our shelter, for raindrops enjoy foliage and by the time the earth underneath had almost dried out there would still be one or two playing about on the veins of a leaf, hanging motionless from the tip and flashing in the sun, and then sliding over the edge and dropping from a height into one's face.

Another place where we often had to shelter, mixed up with the stone saints and patriarchs, was the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs. What was so striking about that little church was its Frenchness. The scenes above its main door, with their saints, their crusading kings with fleurs-de-lis in their hands, their weddings and funerals, were all depicted as they might have been in the peasant soul of Françoise. The sculptor had sketched a few additional scenes relating to Aristotle and Vergil, much as Françoise in her kitchen would refer to Saint Louis as though he had been a personal friend of hers, (and usually to put my grandparents to shame, by comparison, for being less 'righteous'). One sensed that the same historical notions about the ancient world and Christendom, shared by the mediaeval sculptor and the nineteenth-century mediaeval peasant and marked as much by inaccuracy as by a guileless simplicity, had come down to them not from books but from a tradition that was timeless but quite direct, oral, deformed beyond recognition but full of life. Another Combray personality whom I recognised, latent in a stone prophecy made by the Gothic sculptor of Saint-André-des-Champs, was young Théodore, the delivery-boy from Camus's grocery. Indeed, Françoise looked on him so clearly as kith and kin and as her contemporary that when my Aunt Léonie was ill enough for Françoise to need assistance with turning her in bed or helping her over to her armchair, she would always summon Théodore, rather than give the scullery-maid the chance to come up and 'make a good impression' on my aunt. This lad, reputed (quite rightly) to be a ne'er-do-well, was so familiar with the spirit which had decorated the church of Saint-André and especially with the respectfulness that Françoise believed was due to 'poor invalids' and to 'her poor mistress', that his face as he raised my aunt's head from the pillow had the innocent fervour of the cherubs who flitted about the bas-reliefs, bearing tapers and ministering to the swooning Virgin, as though those faces cut in stone, as grey and bare as woods in winter, were, like them, merely in a state of dormancy, or held in reserve, ready to burgeon back into life in countless common faces, reverent and crafty like

Théodore's, glowing and ruddy like ripe apples. Against the wall, but not set into it like the little angels, standing on a little plinth like a stool to keep her feet off the wet ground, a saint of more than human stature showed the full cheeks, the firm plump breasts swelling the stone drapery like ripe fruit in a muslin bag, the narrow forehead, the neat pert nose, the deep-set eyes and the stolid, able-bodied, courageous look of the local peasant-women. And that similarity, which somehow invested the statue with a mildness I had not expected to find in it, was often corroborated by the presence of some country lass, sheltering there like ourselves, whose purpose in the porch seemed to be to offer one, like climbing plants growing up a wall that bears a carving of themselves, an opportunity to assess the truthfulness of the work of art by a comparison with its original. Soon, away in front of us, like a promised or an accursed land, we would see Roussainville, whose walls I never entered, still being chastised like a village in the Bible by all the slanting lances of the storm lashing the homes of its inhabitants, when for us the rain was already over, or else being forgiven by the Lord as His sun came out again and sent down to it, like the rays from a monstrance on an altar, golden shafts fraying into uneven lengths of light.

There were times, too, when the weather became so bad that we had to turn for home and spend the rest of the day indoors. Dotted here and there about the distant countryside, which because of the wet and gloom resembled the sea, isolated houses, moored to a hillside drenched in darkness and rain, glimmered like small boats, all sails struck for the night, riding out a storm. But what did rain and thunderstorms matter? Bad weather in summer, unlike the shifty, unreliable fair weather of winter, is only a surface disturbance, a passing whim of the prevailing but underlying fine weather which has settled over the land, consolidating its position with thickets of foliage (that rain may sprinkle without ever impairing the enjoyment of their freehold), and festooning for the whole season village streets, the walls of houses and back gardens with its bunting of white or violet silks. From the little drawing-room, where I would sit reading until dinner-time, I could hear the water dripping off our horse-chestnuts, but I knew the torrents of rain would only smarten up the leaves and that the trees, like pledges of summer's good intentions, promised to stay there throughout the stormy hours of darkness and to ensure the continuation of the fine weather; that the rain could do its worst, but tomorrow at Tansonville there would be just as many little heart-shaped leaves waving at me over the white fence; and so it was without sadness that I watched the poplar out in the Rue des Perchamps desperately bowing and scraping before the storm and heard from the bottom of the garden the last muffled thunder murmuring among the lilacs.

If it had been raining since the morning, the family gave up the idea of a walk and I stayed in. But at a later period, on days like that I took to going for a tramp by myself along the road to Méséglise-la-Vineuse. This was during

the autumn when we had to come down to Combray for the reading of my Aunt Léonie's will, she having eventually died, vindicating not only those who had argued that her debilitating way of life would be the death of her but also the others who had always maintained that the illness from which she suffered was not imaginary but organic and that this would be proved, in the teeth of all scepticism, on the day it killed her. In death, she was greatly mourned by only one person, but to that one the bereavement was terrible: Françoise, throughout the fortnight of my aunt's final illness, never forsook her for one moment, never once took time even to change her clothes, let no other person do a single thing for her and did not leave her side until she was dead and buried. It was only then that we realised that the dread in which Françoise had lived of my aunt's harsh words, suspicions or bad temper had produced a sentiment in her that we had all assumed was hatred but which was veneration and love. Her only true mistress, with her unpredictable changes of mind, her unthwartable wiliness and her soft heart that was so easy to touch, her absolute ruler, her enigmatic and all-powerful monarch had left her. Compared with the woman she had lost, we were of little importance. It was a far cry from the first holidays we had spent at Combray, when we ranked as highly in Françoise's estimation as my aunt. That autumn my parents, busy with all the formalities to be seen to, consulting lawyers, interviewing tenant farmers and having little leisure time to spend on walks (which the weather would spoil in any case), took to letting me go without them along the Méséglise way, well wrapped up against the weather in a voluminous tartan cloak which I was especially pleased to drape about my shoulders because its bold checks outraged Françoise, whose mind was hermetically sealed against the notion that mourning had nothing to do with the colour of one's clothes. In fact, she was generally disgruntled by our ways of showing our grief at the death of my aunt, since we had not held a large funeral dinner for the neighbours, we did not affect a special tone of voice when speaking of my aunt and I had even been heard to hum. I daresay that, if I had come upon her epic conception of mourning in a book — and in that I was no different from Françoise — this Song of Roland type of grief, grief as depicted in the porch sculptures of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have struck me as appealing. But whenever Françoise and I were together, at the urging of some demon I wanted her to lose her temper and so I took the first opportunity of saying that I was saddened by my aunt's death only because she was a good woman, albeit a trifle ridiculous, and not at all because she happened to be my aunt; that although she was my aunt, I might well have thought her thoroughly obnoxious and her death, in that case, would not have saddened me a bit; the sort of statement, in fact, that I would have thought quite out of keeping in a book. If Françoise, like a poet full of a tumult of tongue-tied verities on the sorrow of bereavement or family memories, apologised for being unable to refute my theories, saying, 'I'm no good at saying what I mean,' I exulted, gloating over her confession of incompetence with the heavy-handed, down-to-earth irony one might have expected from Dr Percepied; or if she added, 'Say what you like, she was kithing kin. There's nothing like respect for your own kithing kin,' I would cast my eyes to heaven and tell myself, 'Serves you right for trying to carry on a discussion with a semi-literate who can't even speak properly,' judging Françoise with the pettiness which one is liable to despise in others when assessing them in the unperturbed impartiality of one's private thoughts, but which one is just as capable of using oneself when acting out one of the more vulgar little performances of life.

The pleasure I enjoyed on my walks during that autumn was enhanced by the fact that I had usually spent hours on that particular day engrossed in a book. Jaded from having spent the whole morning reading in the parlour, I would toss my tartan cloak about my shoulders and sally forth. My body, having been constrained to immobility for hours, had gathered momentum and energy in the process and, like a wound-up top, needed to release them in all directions as soon as it was set in motion. The walls of houses, Tansonville's hawthorn hedge, the trees in Roussainville woods, the bushes above Montjouvain, all were stabbed and slashed by my umbrella or walking-stick and heard my cries of joy, these actions and words being nothing but confused ideas which had gone to my head but which, because they preferred the pleasure of an easier release through that immediate outlet, were never to enjoy the state of calm and clarity to which they could only have been brought by a slow and arduous elucidation. Most of the expressions which supposedly translate what we feel do nothing more than rid us of the particular feeling, by expelling it in an indistinct shape that does not teach us anything about it. When I try to sum up what I owe to the Méséglise way, all those humble discoveries for which it provided the chance setting or the essential inspiration, I am reminded that it was during that autumn, on one of those walks, not far from the steep overgrown bank sheltering Montjouvain, that I was struck for the first time by this disparity between our impressions of the world and the way we usually put them into words. After an hour of rain and wind against which I had skirmished with glee, as I reached the edge of the pond at Montjouvain and stood in front of a little tiled shed in which M. Vinteuil's gardener kept his tools, the sun had just reappeared and its rain-washed gildings were gleaming once more in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the shed and on the wet tiles of its roof, along the ridge of which a hen was stepping. The weeds growing out of the wall and the under-plumage of the hen were being blown flat by the wind, letting themselves be stretched to their fullest length, with the unresisting abandon of passive, weightless things. In the water of the pond, on which the sun was once more making reflections, there appeared a pinkish mottling to which until that moment I had never paid any attention. Seeing a pallid smile on the water and the face of the wall returning the smile from the sky, I

brandished my rolled-up umbrella and exclaimed with passion, 'Oh, dash it all! Dash it all! But, as I did so, I sensed it should have been my duty not to be satisfied with such opaque words, but to attempt some deeper clarification of my feeling of delight.

It was also at that moment — thanks to a passing peasant whose already surly expression soured even more when my umbrella almost poked him in the eye and who replied coolly to my 'Lovely weather for a walk, what!' — that I learned that the same emotions are not produced simultaneously in all mankind, in some pre-ordained order. Later I was to find that, if I felt like a chat after spending rather a long time with a book, the friend with whom I was dying for a chat had probably just enjoyed a good conversation and was now looking forward to a spot of quiet reading. Or if I had just thought affectionately of my parents and made resolutions that were very sensible and most likely to endear me to them, they at the same moment had just heard of some peccadillo of my own which I had forgotten and for which, as I brought them my eager kiss, they would take me to task.

Sometimes the rapturous excitement I experienced in being alone was mingled with another joyous sensation that I could never separate very clearly from the first, and which was caused by my desire to find a peasantgirl on the way and to throw my arms about her. The pleasure that accompanied this sensation always arose suddenly, out of thoughts about something quite different, before I had time to relate it back closely to what had stimulated it, and it struck me as only slightly superior to the pleasure I had been enjoying in those thoughts. Everything that happened to be in my mind at that moment — the pinkish reflection of the tiled roof, the weeds in the wall, the village of Roussainville which I had been wanting to visit for a long time past, the trees in its woods, the steeple of its church — was enhanced by this new undercurrent of excitement, which made all those things appear more desirable (whereas I believed it was they that were producing the new excitement) and which, when it filled my sails with its strong, strange, beneficent breeze, seemed bent wholly and solely on whisking me faster towards them all. And while this longing for a woman to appear added an element of heady exhilaration to the charms of nature, these very charms filled out my joy in her presence, which might have been too confined. It seemed to me that the beauty I saw in the trees came from her and that the innermost meaning of this landscape, of the village of Roussainville and the books I was reading that year would be suddenly revealed to me by her kiss; and as my imagination drew strength from my sensuality and my sensuality infected all areas of my imagination, my desire for her grew limitless. At the same time — as happens in those dreaming moments one spends among the beauties of nature when, because habit's activity is in abeyance and our abstract notions about things are set aside, we are passionately convinced of the unique, living individuality of the spot where we are — the peasant-girl of my desire seemed to me not just a random specimen of the general category known as Woman, but a natural and necessary product of this especial plot. For in those days, everything that was not me, the earth and all other beings, seemed more precious, more significant — and endowed with a more real and believable existence than they can ever appear to fully grown men. Between the earth and all other beings I could make no distinction. I desired a peasant-girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, or a fisher-girl from Balbec, exactly as I desired Méséglise and Balbec themselves. The pleasure they were capable of giving me would have seemed less genuine, I would have lost faith in it, if I had been able to alter at will any of the conditions governing it. To be in Paris with a Balbec fisher-girl or a peasant from Méséglise would have been to possess a sea-shell I might have missed on the beach or a fern I might never have found among the woods; it would have meant subtracting from the pleasure she would bring me all the other pleasures that my imagination had vested in her. Whereas to ramble like this through the woods of Roussainville without a peasant-girl to kiss was to be deprived of their most secret treasure, the deepest roots of their beauty. Such a girl, whom I perpetually pictured among shadowy patterns of foliage, was herself a type of local plant, but of a higher species than the others and with a structure that enabled one to sample more accurately than through them the essential flavour of that part of the country. This struck me as all the more plausible (as did the notion that the caresses with which she would reveal that essence to me would be of a unique variety, offering a kind of pleasure that no other girl's could offer) because I was at the age, and would still be at it for a long time, when one has not yet abstracted that kind of pleasure from the possession of the different women with whom one has enjoyed it, when one has not yet reduced it to a general principle according to which they come to be seen as the interchangeable instruments of an identical mode of enjoyment. At that age, this pleasure does not exist in the mind, distinctly formulated in a separate and coherent shape, as the aim one has in being with a woman or as the cause of the anticipatory tremors that stir in one. One hardly even thinks of it as a pleasure one is to enjoy; one sees it as her charm, as something residing in her; for one's thoughts are not of oneself, they are all for going beyond the confines of the self. And when one eventually attains this moment of pleasure, long awaited, imprecisely foreshadowed, immanent and concealed, it brings to such a climactic fulfilment all the other previous pleasures given by the tender glances and the kisses of the woman in one's arms, that it feels more like a delightful spasm of one's own gratitude towards her for her kindness and touching preference for oneself, that we see made manifest in these great joys and favours.

I was to be for ever unrequited, alas, in my entreaties to the old keep at Roussainville, begging it to send me some lass from its village, in token of the times when it had been the sole confidant of my earliest sexual longings, when all I could see was that old tower through the window-pane in the little

room smelling of orris powder right at the top of the house in Combray where, faint with qualms of uncertainty and full of the hesitant heroism of an explorer venturing into the unknown or a man in despair committing suicide, I opened up new areas of my self which I feared might prove fatal to me, until the sprays of the wild black currant reaching down through the half-open window were marked by a natural glair like the trail of a slug. But now it was in vain that I appealed to the tower, as I held the whole expanse of country in my field of vision and tried to summon a female creature out of it by the unaided power of the eye. Even when I went as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, I never found the peasant-girl who would have been bound to be there if I had been accompanied by my grandfather and thus unable to engage her in conversation. Even when I stared and stared at the trunk of some distant tree, from behind which she was just going to materialise and come to me, the scanned horizon remained empty of her, darkness was falling and now it was only by hoping against hope that my attention, as though to summon up whatever creatures might be hidden here, focussed on this sterile place, this stale and barren plot. And when, despite my reluctance to go home without having clasped to myself the woman for whom I had yearned so much, I was finally obliged to turn back towards Combray and admit to myself that the chance of encountering her along this way was becoming less and less likely, it was no longer in high spirits but in sheer fury that I struck at the trees in Roussainville woods which, for all the peasant-girls they harboured, might as well have been painted cut-outs in a stage set. But even if I had come upon some such girl, would I have dared approach her? I felt she could only have regarded me as a madman; and I stopped believing that the eternally unrequited desires I had on these walks could have any truth or substance to them outside myself or that they could be shared by others. They now seemed to me nothing but the most subjective, impotent and illusory figments of my own temperament. They no longer had the slightest link with nature or reality, which immediately lost all its previous charm and meaning and served as the most incidental of settings for my existence, as a railway carriage may serve as the fortuitous setting for a passenger's experience of the plot of a novel with which he whiles away a journey.

It may also have been from an impression I received at Montjouvain, some years afterwards, an impression that was to remain unclear for me at the time, that a certain notion of the meaning of sadism was to form much later in my mind. As will become apparent, the memory of this impression was to have an important part to play, for quite different reasons, in my later life. It happened on a very hot day; my parents had been away somewhere life. It happened on a very hot day; my parents had been away somewhere for the whole day and had told me I might be home as late as I wished; and having been as far as the pond at Montjouvain, in which I liked seeing the reflection of the tiled roof, I had lain down in the shade and fallen asleep among the bushes on the slope above the house, at the very spot where I had

waited for my father† on a previous occasion when he had gone to see M. Vinteuil. By the time I woke, it was almost dark. I started to get up but then I saw Mlle Vinteuil (or rather someone I supposed was Mlle Vinteuil, because I had seen her quite infrequently at Combray and at a time when she was still a child, whereas now she was becoming a young woman); she had most likely just come home and was now standing right in front of me and at the most a couple of feet away, in the room where her father had entertained my father and which she had adopted as her own little sitting-room. The window being open and the lamp lit, I could watch her every movement without her seeing me; but if I had tried to leave I would have rustled the bushes, she would have been bound to hear me and might have believed that I had hidden there for the express purpose of spying on her.

She was in deep mourning, her father having recently died. My family had not paid her a visit; my mother had not wished to do so, because of the only virtue that ever restricted her kindliness: her sense of decency; but she was deeply sorry for the girl. She remembered the last sad years of M. Vinteuil's life, taken up first by the chores of being mother and nursemaid to his daughter and filled latterly by the heartbreak this daughter had caused him; she could not forget the ravaged expression the old man's face had worn throughout that final period of his life; she knew he had abandoned for good any idea of ever transcribing into definitive form the works of his last years, the few poor pieces by a retired piano teacher and village organist that, despite the lack of intrinsic value with which we credited them, we did not despise for all that, because they had had so much value for the man himself, constituting his sole purpose in living before he had sacrificed them to his daughter, and most of which were now going to be lost for ever, as they had never been properly put on to paper, but had been preserved in the old man's memory or jotted illegibly on loose sheets; she thought of the other even crueller selfsacrifice which had been forced upon M. Vinteuil: the impossibility of a life of decent contentment and respectability for his daughter; and when she was reminded of the state of appalling distress that had blighted the closing years of the life of my great-aunts' old music teacher, she felt utterly bereft and shuddered to think of how much more bitter than hers must be Mlle Vinteuil's sorrow, since it would be tinged with the knowledge that she herself had almost brought her own father to the grave. 'Poor old M. Vinteuil,' said my mother, 'he lived and died for that daughter of his, and he never received his just reward. Will he receive it after his death, I wonder, and if so in what form? Nobody but she could ever give it to him.'

On the mantelpiece, at the other end of Mlle Vinteuil's sitting-room, stood a little picture of her father. At the sound of a carriage turning in from the road, she quickly crossed the room, took the picture, then flounced on to the sofa, pulled up a little table and set the picture on it, much as M. Vinteuil had once laid out the piece of music he wanted to play for my parents. † Cf., p.87, where it was mes parents (JG).

Presently her friend entered the room. Mlle Vinteuil, her hands behind her head, greeted her without getting up and moved her body to one side of the sofa as though to give her room to sit down. But in so doing she sensed that this could appear as though she was trying to impose on her friend and manoeuvre her into a position which might be disagreeable to her. It occurred to her that the friend might prefer to sit apart from her, on a chair; her action struck her as tactless and in her delicacy of nature she was upset by it. So she stretched out again, taking up the whole sofa and yawning with her eyes closed to make it plain that the only reason she had lain down in the first place was because she was sleepy. Through the brusque and bossy familiarity of her manner towards her friend, I could detect the exaggerated, excruciating self-abasement and sudden scruples of her father. A moment later she stood up, came over to the window and pretended to be having difficulty closing the shutters.

'Why don't we leave everything open? I'm so hot,' said the friend.

'But it's such a bore to think somebody may see us,' replied Mlle Vinteuil. Then it presumably occurred to her that her friend would read into these words an invitation to herself to answer with certain other words, which Mlle Vinteuil was in fact hoping to hear, but which in her retiring way she preferred to let her friend be the first to utter. Her eyes, which I could not make out, must have had the expression which my grandmother liked so much, as she added hastily, 'When I say somebody may see us, I mean reading, somebody may see us reading. It's just such a bore to think that in every insignificant thing you do, somebody may be looking at you.'

With her instinctive generosity and ingrained politeness, she left unspoken the words she had turned over in her mind as the only ones that could lead to the proper fulfilment of her desire. For, in herself, she was perpetually being the abashed and suppliant virgin, shaming an uncouth swaggering bully-boy into self-effacement.

'Oh, sure!' teased the friend, 'I suppose the countryside is just teeming with people all trying to spy on us at this hour! Anyway, what if people do see us? That only makes it better.' These words, which she accompanied with a fond, malicious wink, she delivered on a good-natured impulse and in a tone of voice that she tried to fill with cynicism, as though they were a favourite speech that Mlle Vinteuil enjoyed hearing recited. At this, Mlle Vinteuil shuddered and stood up again. In her scrupulous and sensitive heart, she was at a loss for the spontaneous words which would have been required to further the scene for which her eager senses clamoured. She searched as far as possible into her own true moral nature for the way of speaking best suited to the immoral person she wanted to be, but the words which she thought would have come naturally to such a person felt wrong in her own mouth. In the few attempts she made at expressing herself in that way, since her every impulse towards bravado was paralysed by her inveterate shyness, she only contrived to sound stilted and was for ever falling back on polite banalities like, 'Aren't you cold? I say, you're not too hot, are you? Would you like me to leave you with your book?' This time she managed to say, 'Your Ladyship seems to be harbouring lustful designs this evening,' no doubt echoing a statement she had once heard from her friend.

In the open neck of her mourning-dress, Mlle Vinteuil felt her friend peck a kiss, gave a little cry and evaded her; then they chased each other, leaping about the room, flapping their wide sleeves like wings, cackling and twittering like birds in amorous display. Eventually Mlle Vinteuil collapsed on the sofa, with her friend lying on top of her. In this position, the friend's back was turned to the occasional table with its picture of the old music teacher, and Mlle Vinteuil, realising that the other girl would not catch sight of it unless she herself drew attention to it, said as though she had just noticed it, 'Oh dear, there's my father's picture staring right at us! Who on earth can have put it there? I must have said twenty times that that's not its place!'

I remembered this was what M. Vinteuil himself had said to my father about the sheet of music. The picture must have been a standard prop in their performance of a ritual outrage, and the friend's answer sounded like a rehearsed liturgical response, 'Oh, leave him where he is! He's not here to bother us any more. Just think how he would snivel and try to cover you up if he could see you here with the window wide open! Ugly old brute!'

'Oh, don't, please,' replied Mlle Vinteuil, showing by this mild form of rebuke how good-hearted she was - not that her words were meant to express shock at such language being applied to her father (evidently this would have been a reaction which she had long since glibly quibbled herself into not feeling at such moments), but only her reluctance to appear selfish by letting her friend give her the full pleasure to be conveyed by the blasphemous insults to her father. As a response to them, that smiling moderation and the tender hypocrisy in her form of reproach may have seemed to her straightforward good nature to be a particularly odious and mealy-mouthed mode of the evil which she was trying to make her own. But she could not resist the sweet temptation of being treated gently by someone who was so ruthless to an unprotected dead man; she jumped on to her friend's knees and held out a chaste brow to be kissed, for all the world as though they were mother and daughter, in delight at the thought that between them, by following M. Vinteuil beyond the grave to deprive him of his paternity of her, they had achieved the ultimate in cruelty. Her friend took the girl's head in both hands and gave her a kiss on the forehead, with a docility that derived from her great affection for Mlle Vinteuil and her desire to brighten the sad life now led by the orphaned girl.

'Do you know what I wouldn't mind doing to this horrid old creature?' she asked, lifting the picture. She whispered something in Mlle Vinteuil's ear that I could not catch.

'Oh! You wouldn't dare!'

'What? You think I wouldn't dare spit on him? On this thing?' said the friend with studied callousness.

I heard no more, as Mlle Vinteuil, looking weary, awkward, busy, trustworthy and sad, came over to close the shutters and the window, but by now I knew what the late M. Vinteuil was receiving from his daughter by way of posthumous reward for all the pain she had caused him during his

And yet, since then, I have thought that if M. Vinteuil could have lifetime. witnessed this scene, he might well have preserved some scrap of faith in his daughter's goodness of heart; and he might not have been completely mistaken in so doing. On the face of things, Mlle Vinteuil's behaviour gave a total impression of evil, such as it would have been difficult to find manifested to a like extent in anyone other than a sadist; a scene in which a daughter makes her friend spit on the picture of a father whose life was devoted to her own well-being is more likely to be seen in the lurid glare from the footlights of a popular theatre than in the homely glow of a sittingroom lamp in a real country-house; and sadism is almost the only credible basis in real life for the aesthetic conventions underlying melodrama. It would no doubt be possible to find a real girl who, although not a sadist, was capable of violating just as cruelly as Mlle Vinteuil the memory and wishes of her dead father; but in her case the outrages would not be as deliberately condensed into an act of such artless and primitive symbolism; and the iniquity of her behaviour would be less apparent to other people, and even to herself, as she would be indulging in evil without admitting it to herself. Despite this, however, beneath the surface appearances of Mlle Vinteuil's behaviour, the evil in her heart, at least in the early stages, could not have been undiluted. A sadist such as she was is an artist in evil, which no thoroughly bad persons could ever be, as their form of evil would not be extraneous to their true selves, would feel quite natural to them and would in fact be indistinguishable from them; and since they would have no conception of, and no respect for, values such as virtue, remembrance for the dead or a daughter's love for her father, they could never take any sacrilegious delight in flouting them. Sadists of Mlle Vinteuil's kind are creatures of such purity of sentiment and innate virtuousness that even sensual pleasure strikes them as something bad, a privilege reserved for the wicked. When they allow themselves to partake briefly of that privilege, they try to adopt, for themselves and their accomplice, the guise and self of the wicked, so as to be under the momentary illusion of eluding their own tender hearts and virtuous consciences and descending without them into the inhuman world of the senses and their pleasures. I realised how strong her longing for this descent must have been, on seeing how inconceivable it was that she would ever make it. At the very moment when she strove to be the opposite of her father, what she brought to mind was the old piano teacher with his mental attitudes and ways of expressing himself. What she

desecrated, what she used as the tool of her pleasures (though it stood between her and them, preventing her from enjoying them directly) was not so much her father's photograph but his features in her own face, his mother's blue eyes that he had handed down to her like a family heirloom, and a range of gestures expressing amiableness and civility which interpolated between Mlle Vinteuil and her vice a whole phraseology and mentality which were not designed for it and prevented her from experiencing it as anything very different from the numerous courtesies and social duties to which she devoted much of her time. It was not evil which gave her any inkling of sensual pleasure, it was the pleasure itself that she saw as evil. And since any such pleasure she enjoyed was inevitably linked in her mind to the wicked thoughts which were usually absent from her virtuous nature, she came to see something diabolical in pleasure and to identify it with Evil itself. Mlle Vinteuil may have sensed that there was no fund of genuine badness in her friend and that, in speaking her blasphemous words, she was being insincere. She could, of course, have the pleasure of kissing her face with its smiles and expressions which, even if they were a pretence and she was in fact capable of genuine goodness and sympathy, were still analogues, in iniquity and vice, of what would have been expressed by the features of someone capable of a genuine relish for cruelty. She could briefly imagine that with a partner of this depravity she was really playing the games that would have been played by a girl who genuinely harboured such barbaric sentiments towards the memory of her father. But she might not have found evil to be a state of such rare, refreshing estrangement from one's self, which it was so restful to visit now and then, if she had noticed in herself, as in everyone else, that indifference to the pain one inflicts on others, which, whatever names one gives to it, shows the monstrous, unchanging shape of cruelty.

To go for a walk by the Méséglise way was relatively simple; but it was quite a different matter to go via the Guermantes way, as the walk was longer and one had to be sure of the weather. When it looked as though we were going to have a stretch of fine weather; when Françoise, in desperation that there was not a single drop of rain for the 'poor crops', lifted her eyes to the rare white clouds drifting on the calm blue surface of the sky, groaned and lamented, 'Look at them! They look just like a pack of dog-fish, frisking about, showing their muzzles. A lot they care about sending down rain for the poor farmers! But as soon as the wheat's up to a good size, you'll see, it'll rain cats and dogs, without a break, and it might as well be raining on the sea for all it'll care!'; and when my father had received unvaryingly favourable responses from the gardener and the barometer, we would say at dinnertime one night, 'If the weather's like this tomorrow, we'll try the Guermantes way.' We would set off straight after lunch, leaving by the small garden gate which took us out into the Rue des Perchamps, a narrow little street with a sharp bend in it, overgrown with long grasses among

which two or three wasps would always be spending the day botanising; as strange a little street as its name (from which I felt it derived its curious features and its cantankerous personality) and which one would seek in vain in present-day Combray, its former site being now occupied by the primary school. But of that new building, my absent-minded memory (like the architectural disciples of Viollet-le-Duc who, in the belief that they have discovered the remains of a Romanesque choir under a Renaissance roodscreen and a seventeenth-century altar, restore a whole church to its presumed twelfth-century condition) leaves not a single stone standing, as it puts through once more the restored Rue des Perchamps. Moreover, the data on which memory must rely in making its reconstructions are more accurate than those which restorers usually have at their disposal: namely, certain pictures preserved by memory itself to show what Combray was like when I was a child, which may well be the only ones left in existence and are themselves doomed to oblivion; and because it was the village itself, the village as it was in those days, which imprinted these images in me before it vanished, they are as moving — if one may compare an obscure miniature to the glorious works which my grandmother used to like giving me in reproduction — as the old engravings of Leonardo's Last Supper or Gentile Bellini's painting of the portico of Saint Mark's, which show these masterpieces in a state which is gone for ever.

Going down the Rue de l'Oiseau, we would pass in front of the old Bird and Arrow Inn which in the seventeenth century had seen in its great yard the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes and de Montmorency, who sometimes had to come down to Combray to settle Montmorency, who sometimes had to come down to Combray to settle some dispute with their farmers or for a ceremonial occasion. We would walk along the mall, seeing the steeple of Saint-Hilaire through its trees. I wished I could sit down and read away the rest of the day to the sound of the bells; for the day was so fine and peaceful that when an hour rang out it sounded not as though it was breaking the calm, but merely emptying it of what it contained, as though the steeple, with the painstaking, unhurried what it contained, as though the steeple, with the painstaking, unhurried punctuality of somebody who has nothing else to do, had just pressed the surplus of silence at the right moment and squeezed out one after the other the few golden drops slowly and naturally accumulated in it by the heat of

What was most attractive about the Guermantes way was that almost from beginning to end of the walk one followed the course of the Vivonne. We crossed the stream for the first time, ten minutes after leaving the house, by a footbridge known as the Old Bridge. I used to run to this bridge each year, on the second day of our stay in Combray, after the sermon on Easter Sunday, if the weather was good, so as to see the river (still in the untidy state that prevails on the morning of a festivity, when the few magnificent decorations already in place show up the sordidness of the household utensils still not cleared away) as it swanked along in its new sky-blue

between bare dark banks, accompanied merely by a motley group of premature daffodils and primroses, while here and there the stem of a bluebilled violet would bend with the weight of the droplet of fragrance stored inside its cornet. Crossing the Old Bridge, we came to a tow-path which at that point was hung each summer with the blue foliage of a hazel under which a straw-hatted angler had taken root. In Combray, where I knew perfectly well whose identity as Blacksmith or Grocer's Delivery Boy was concealed by the beadle's regalia or the choirboy's surplice, that angler was the only person whose disguise I never managed to pierce. He must have known my people, as he would always raise his hat when we passed by; at which I would try to ask what his name was, but somebody always signed to me to be quiet in case I frightened the fish away. We turned along the towpath, looking down on the stream from the top of a bank several feet high; the opposite bank was low and stretched away in wide sweeping meadows towards the village and the railway station, which stood some distance from it. These meadows were studded with the overgrown remains of the castle of the old Counts of Combray, which in the Middle Ages had been defended on this side by the course of the Vivonne against the marauding Lords of Guermantes and the Abbots of Martinville. All that was left of this castle were some barely noticeable stumps of turrets, rising like hummocks in the fields, and a remnant of battlements from which the arbalesters had once shot their stones and the watchmen had scanned Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec and Bailleau-l'Exempt (all of them fiefs of Guermantes encircling the enclave of Combray), and which were now almost as low as the grass and over-run by the boys from the Christian Brothers' school who came to have a lesson there or at play-time — a fragment of the past which had all but disappeared under the ground, lying there on the river bank as homely as a stroller taking his ease, but making me ponder on it long and hard, filling out the name 'Combray' with a mediaeval stronghold vastly different from the little town of today, and teasing my mind with the incomprehensible olden-day face it tried to hide under the buttercups. At this spot where they had chosen to gather in the grass, the buttercups were very numerous, standing about singly, in couples or in great throngs, as yellow as egg-yolk and seeming such a vivid shade because, in my inability to divert any of the pleasure their sight caused me into the expectation of a taste of butter, I accumulated that pleasure in their golden petals until it was potent enough for me to see in them beauty for beauty's sake; and this pleasure I had felt since early childhood, when I would reach out both arms towards them from the tow-path, though I was still incapable of sounding out properly the pretty name they bore, reminiscent of a fairy-tale princess, who might have arrived here from Asia many centuries before but had now become naturalised for ever in our village, content with its unprepossessing horizon, fond of the sun and the river bank, faithful to the glimpse of the

station, but like some of our oldest French paintings, still retaining amid their plebeian simplicity a golden touch of Oriental poetry.

I liked to stand by the Vivonne and watch boys trying to catch minnows in bottles which, by being filled by the river in which they themselves were immersed, by becoming both 'containers' with transparent sides like solidified water, and the 'contents' of a larger container of flowing crystal, gave a more delicious and tantalising impression of coolness than they would have standing on a table laid for lunch, because they showed that coolness in a state of perpetual elusive alternation† between insubstantial water in which the hands could never hold it steady and unliquefied glass which could never refresh the palate. I promised myself I would go back there on a later occasion with a rod; at my request, a piece of bread was spared from the snack we carried with us and I threw down into the Vivonne pellets of it which seemed to be all that was required to create a phenomenon of supersaturation, as the water round about them instantly solidified into oval clusters of starving tadpoles which until that moment the river had presumably been keeping in a state of invisible solution, on the very point of

crystallization.

Soon after this, the course of the Vivonne became blocked with waterplants. To begin with, we came upon isolated ones, such as a certain waterlily which, unfortunately for itself, had managed to grow across the current and now was given not a moment's rest; like a ferry-boat worked by a selfpropelling mechanism, it no sooner reached one bank than it was sent back to the other, eternally doomed to make its non-stop double crossings. Pulled away from the bank, its stem unfolding, lengthening, snaking across the surface until it was stretched to its utmost, close to the opposite side, where the current caught it again, the green hawser recoiled on itself and hauled the poor plant back to what can only be called its starting-point, as it no sooner paused there for a second than it immediately set off again for a repetition of the same manoeuvre. Every time we walked that way, it was always in the same predicament, bringing to mind those neurotics (among whom my grandfather included Aunt Léonie) who over a period of years go through the weird unvarying motions of the habits they for ever believe they are just about to give up, but which they never break; trapped in the treadmill of their own manic anxieties, their unavailing struggles to get out of it only make sure it goes on working, and set off the mechanisms of their strange, inescapable and pernicious regimen. Such was this poor neurotic lily, like one of those damned souls whose singular torments, fated to be borne throughout all eternity, stirred the curiosity of Dante, who would have paused there to hear the victim himself recite at greater length the details and cause of them, had not Vergil stridden away and forced him to run to catch up, as my family did to me.

[†] The French gives allitération which is implausible and could be a misreading of alternation (JG).

Farther along, however, the current slowed and passed through a private property, opened to the public by its owner, who had undertaken a kind of aquatic horticulture, turning the little ponds formed by the Vivonne at that point into veritable flower-beds of water-lilies. Both banks along that stretch of the river being closely wooded, the great shadows cast by the trees usually turned the depths of the water dark green; but there were times, as we were going home on certain tranquil evenings after a thunderstorm earlier in the day, when these depths would be a sharp, vivid blue, almost violet, looking like a cloisonné enamel in Japanese style. Here and there on the surface, like a ripening strawberry, lay a lily with a scarlet heart and pale edges. Farther on where the flowers were more numerous, they were paler and not as sleek, coarser in texture and full of crinkled folds, coiled on the stream in such randomly graceful convolutions that they looked like the drifting debris left by garlands of moss-roses, the gay, pathetic confetti from some dalliance on the water. Another spot seemed to be reserved for the common sorts of lilies, showing the natty pink-and-white of sweet rocket and looking like china ornaments washed with loving care; while, farther on still, crammed together in a long, floating flower-bed, were what looked like violas which had settled their icy blue butterfly wings on the oblique transparency of this water parterre — a parterre that had something of the sky in it, too, because the bed out of which the flowers grew was of a more precious and moving colour than the flowers themselves, and whether the afternoon had sprinkled beneath the lilies its expectant kaleidoscopic sparkle of happiness, silence and movement, or the evening had filled it, like some remote imagined harbour, with the dreaming pink shades of sunset, it seemed, in a contrasting background to the more constant tints of the petals, to change its appearance incessantly so as to match the passing hour in its profundity, its brevity and mystery, in a word its infinity, and thus seemed to be displaying its flowers upon the face of the sky.

On emerging from this park, the Vivonne began to flow again. How often must I have seen, and longed to imitate as soon as I was free to lead my own life, a man lying on his back in his rowing-boat? There he was, with his oars shipped, his head down, stretched out on the bottom-boards, letting his boat drift with the current, seeing nothing but the sky as it passed slowly over him and showing on his face a foretaste of heavenly bliss!

We would sit down among the irises on the river bank. In the holiday sky lazed a leisurely cloud. From time to time a carp, bemused by boredom, heaved out of the water with an anxious gasp. It was time for our snack. Before setting off again, we would sit for a long time in the grass eating our bread, chocolate and fruit while the peals from the bell of Saint-Hilaire, horizontal, faded but still densely metallic, undiluted by all the air they had had to pass through on the way, and corrugated by the rippling sequence of their sound-waves, reached us and vibrated through the flowers at our feet.

Sometimes, on the wooded river bank, we would come upon a little villa of

the sort that used to be known as a pleasure-house, standing by itself in this remote corner and seeing nothing of the world except the river which lapped at the foot of the garden. A young woman, whose pensive face and elegance in dress proclaimed her a stranger in those parts and who must have chosen this spot in which, as the saying goes, to 'bury herself' and enjoy the bittersweet pleasure of knowing that her name (and especially the name of the man whose love she had lost) was unknown thereabouts, would be framed in the window, which allowed her to see no farther than the skiff moored by the front door. She would raise abstracted eyes at the voices of people passing behind the trees on the bank, though she might be sure without even setting eyes on their faces that none of them had ever known, nor would ever know, the faithless one for whom she pined, that nothing in their past had ever been touched by a trace of him, just as nothing in their future would ever be. One sensed that in her renunciation of the past she had chosen to give up the places where she might at least have seen the man she loved, in favour of this place to which he was a total stranger. And I would watch her as she came home from a walk along lanes she knew he would never tread, and peeled from her resigned hands long gloves of unprized charm and grace.

Never, on that walk along the Guermantes way, were we able to reach the source of the Vivonne, a place which had often been in my thoughts but which seemed to me to exist on such an ideal, abstract plane that, the day when somebody told me it was actually located in the same department as Combray, a definite number of miles away from the village, I was as amazed as I had once been to learn that there was another fixed point on the earth's surface which in ancient times had been the entrance to the Underworld. Nor were we ever able to walk far enough to see the place I longed to reach: Guermantes itself. For, though I well knew that the lord and lady of the manor, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, actually lived there, and that they were real present-day people of flesh and blood, each time I thought of them I saw them either made of tapestry, like the Comtesse de Guermantes in the 'Coronation of Esther' in Combray church, or coloured by fitful shifting hues, like Gilbert the Bad up in his stained-glass window, changing from cabbage green to a shade of plum blue, depending on whether I was still at the stoup dipping my fingertips in the holy water or reaching our row of seats, or else quite insubstantial, like the reflection of Geneviève de Brabant, the ancestor of the Guermantes family, projected by my magic lantern on to the bedroom curtain or across the ceiling - in one form or another they were for ever shrouded in the mysteriousness of Merovingian times and tinged by the amber sunset glow given off by that strange syllable in their name: antes. However, although I could still see them as a Duke and a Duchess, that is as real, albeit curious, people, the fact was this ducal capacity of theirs underwent a process of infinite distension and total dematerialisation, so as to accommodate not only the place, Guermantes, of which they were Duke and Duchess, but also the whole of sunny 'Guermantes way' where we walked, the course of the Vivonne, with its lilies and its great trees, and all those lovely afternoons. I knew too that this title they bore, Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, was not their only one, that ever since the fourteenth century when they acquired the additional title of Counts of Combray (by marrying into a family whose former overlords they had vainly tried to conquer) they had been the First Citizens of Combray, while being the only citizens of Combray who never actually lived there. These Counts of Combray, whose very name and actual person possessed and encompassed Combray, who no doubt incarnated the strange doleful piety that was peculiar to Combray, were the owners of the entire village but not of any particular house, and must have belonged somewhere outside, in the streets, between heaven and earth, like that Gilbert of Guermantes of whom all I could see, if I looked up as I went to buy salt from Camus's grocery, was his reverse side in black lacquer showing through the stained-glass windows of the apse of Saint-Hilaire.

Another thing that happened along the Guermantes way was that I sometimes walked past damp low walls against which stood clumps of dark flowers. At the sight of them I would pause, with the feeling that I was about to conceive a notion of great value, since what I seemed to be looking at was a fragment from that land of streams which I had been longing to discover ever since I had come across a description of it in one of my favourite books. Guermantes, changing its appearance in my mind's eye, became identified with this imaginary land of seething torrents, after I heard Dr Percepied holding forth to us about the flowers and fine water-courses to be found in the grounds of the château of the Duke and Duchess. I imagined being taken there by Mme de Guermantes herself, who was suddenly and irresistibly attracted to me - she would sit with me for days on end, fishing for trout. In the evenings, her hand in mine, she would walk me past the little gardens of her liegemen, show me the flowers holding up their red and violet tapers against low walls and tell me their names. She would ask me the subjects of poems I was going to compose. I was reminded by these daydreams that, since I wanted eventually to become a writer, it was high time I decided what I was going to write. The trouble was that as soon as I began to wonder about this and cast about for a subject into which I could put an infinite depth of philosophical significance, my mind would cease to work, there was nothing for it to focus on except vacuity, and I realised I was devoid of genius, or if I had any then perhaps I was afflicted with a disease of the brain that prevented it from functioning. Sometimes I counted on my father to solve this problem. He was so powerful and so familiar with highly placed people that on occasion he had made it possible for us to infringe laws which Françoise had taught me were as inexorable as those of life and death - like the time when he managed to have an exception made in favour of our house, the only one in the whole district, so that the job of reconditioning its outer walls was postponed for twelve months; or when he got the Minister to

authorise the son of Mme Sazerat (who wanted to go to a spa) to sit for his examinations two months ahead of his turn, by joining the group of candidates whose names began with 'A' instead of waiting for the group beginning with 'S'. If I had contracted some grave illness or been kidnapped by bandits, in my unshakable conviction that my father was too close to the powers that be, and his letter of recommendation to God too irresistibly persuasive for my illness or captivity to be anything but a futile fiction in which I could come to no harm, I would have calmly awaited the inevitable return of comforting reality, the hour of cure or deliverance; and so perhaps my absence of genius, that dark and empty gulf that opened in my mind whenever I set about finding some subject-matter for my unwritten books, was itself nothing but an insubstantial figment of an illusion, to be banished by the intervention of my father who had most likely arranged with the Government and Providence that I was to be the greatest writer of the day. But at other times, as my impatient family chivvied me for dawdling behind, my present existence no longer struck me as an artificial creation of my father's which he could alter at will, but as a mere component of a total reality that had not been designed for me, against which I had no recourse, where I was without an ally and which concealed nothing beyond itself. At such times it seemed to me that I existed in exactly the same way as all other people, that like them I would grow old and die, and that the sole distinction I enjoyed among their number was to be one of those who had no gift for writing. Having reached this stage of demoralisation, I would forswear once for all my literary ambitions, despite the encouragement I had received from Bloch. For no amount of praise from others could prevail against the immediate and intimate realisation of my own intellectual poverty, just as the praise lavished on a wicked person for his good deeds is invalidated by a single pang from his own conscience.

One day my mother said to me, 'You know how you're always talking about Mme de Guermantes. Well, because the treatment Dr Percepied prescribed for her four years ago was so successful, she'll be coming down to Combray soon as a guest at his daughter's wedding. You may be able to set eyes on her during the ceremony.' Indeed, it was from Dr Percepied himself that I had heard most about Mme de Guermantes; he had even shown us a copy of an illustrated magazine in which she appeared, wearing the costume in which she had gone to a fancy-dress ball given by the Princess of León.

During the marriage service, as the beadle changed position, a movement he made gave me a sudden glimpse of a fair-haired lady with a large nose and sharp blue eyes, sitting in a side-chapel, wearing a bright, brand-new, billowy scarf of glossy mauve silk, and with a little pimple by her nose. Because I could distinguish on the surface of her face (as red as if she was too hot) diluted and wellnigh invisible iotas of analogy with the illustration I had seen, and especially because, when I tried to name the different features I noticed in her face, the words in which they took shape were exactly the

same as those I had heard Dr Percepied use ('a large nose, blue eyes') to describe the Duchesse de Guermantes, I said to myself: 'That lady looks like the Duchesse de Guermantes.' The chapel from which she was following the mass was the chapel of Gilbert the Bad, where under their flat tombstones, as golden and distended as cells of honeycomb, lay the old Counts of Brabant, and which I remembered being told was reserved for any member of the Guermantes household who might come to attend a ceremony in Combray, and it was hardly likely that there would be more than one woman looking like the picture of Mme de Guermantes and sitting in that particular chapel on the very day when she herself was supposed to be there — so it must be her! She was a great disappointment. The fact was that, in my fantasies about Mme de Guermantes, I had never noticed that I always saw her in the colours of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, in a different century, and looking quite unlike the rest of the human race. It had never occurred to me that she might have a red face, or a mauve scarf like Mme Sazerat's; and the oval contour of her cheek reminded me so much of people I had seen in our own house that my mind was momentarily visited by the suspicion that this lady, in her generative principle and in every single molecule of her composition, was not really the substantive Duchesse de Guermantes at all, but that her body, in complete ignorance of the name by which it was known, actually belonged to a category of women which included among others the wives of doctors and shopkeepers. 'So that's what she's like! That's all Mme de Guermantes looks like!' was what was proclaimed by the gaze of searching surprise I turned on this figure, who bore, of course, not the slightest resemblance to those other figures which had so often appeared in my fancies under the alias of 'Mme de Guermantes', because, unlike them, she was no arbitrary creation of my own, but had this very instant impinged on my eye in the church; and, being of a completely different nature to theirs, she was not, as they were, liable to changes of colour or given to absorbing the amber tinge of a certain syllable, but was in fact so real that everything about her, not excluding the little inflamed spot by her nose, certified her obedient observance of all the laws of life, just as, in a grand tableau rounding off a pantomime, it will be a crease in the fairy's dress or a tremble in her little finger that betrays the bodily presence of a living actress in what we are all but convinced must be only a projection from a coloured slide.

At the same instant, I was trying to fit another idea on to the very recent but unalterable picture that her prominent nose and piercing eyes had fixed in my sight (perhaps because it was those particular features which had been the first to impress my eyes, to make the initial impact on them, at a moment when I had not yet had time even to think that this woman before me might be Mme de Guermantes) — the simple idea: 'That is Mme de Guermantes'; but all I managed to do was make this idea move about in front of the picture of her, as though I was dealing with two discs lying in separate planes. The

Mme de Guermantes whom I had so often imagined, now that I saw she enjoyed factual existence independently of me, acquired even greater ascendancy over my imagination which, after the momentary paralysis of discovering a reality so different from anything it had expected, had now begun to react and was telling me: 'The glory of the Guermantes goes back beyond the time of Charlemagne. They had the power of life and death over their vassals. The Duchesse de Guermantes is a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant. She doesn't know, nor would she condescend to know, a single person in this church!'

Then, with the marvellous independence of the human eye, holding the glances it casts on a line that is so long and slack and elastic that they can float freely at great distances from itself, as Mme de Guermantes sat in her chapel above the tombs of her forebears, her gaze flitted about the church, climbed the pillars and actually settled briefly on myself like a stray sunbeam lighting the nave, but a sunbeam which, as it caressed me, seemed quite conscious of what it was about. As for Mme de Guermantes herself, as she sat there completely still, inscrutable as a mother ignoring the impudent tricks and indiscretions of her children who are playing together and shouting at people she does not know, it was impossible for me to tell whether, in this moment of idling of the spirit, she approved or disapproved of the vagrancy of her glances.

I felt it was important that she should not leave the church before I had been able to gaze at her properly, reminding myself that for years I had been looking forward to the eminently desirable prospect of a glimpse of her; and now that she was here I could not take my eyes off her, as though each look I cast in her direction could actually have carried away and hoarded up in myself the material memory of that prominent nose and those red cheeks, all those characteristics that seemed to be so many precious, genuine and telling points of information about her face. And now that this face of hers was acquiring beauty from all the thoughts I brought to bear upon it - chief among which may have been the perennial wish not to suffer a disappointment, that variant of the instinct for self-preservation which preserves one's better features — and since (being one and the same person as that other Duchesse de Guermantes whom I had hitherto imagined) she was once again taking her rightful position separate from the rest of the human race in which, because of a simple glimpse of her body, I had made the brief error of including her, I was irritated to hear people murmuring round about me: 'She's better looking than Mme Sazerat,' or 'She's nicer than Mlle Vinteuil,' as though she was actually comparable with them. Restricting my glances to her fair hair, blue eyes and the contour of the base of her neck, and ignoring any of her features which might remind me of other faces, I was in ecstasies at this intentionally unfinished sketch: 'How lovely she is! What dignity! What a perfect specimen of a proud Guermantes, the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant!' And the single-minded illumination shed on her

face by my attentiveness spotlit it so effectively that to this day, if I try to recall that wedding, I find it impossible to visualise a single person who was there, except her and the beadle who answered me in the affirmative when I asked him whether this lady actually was Mme de Guermantes. Her I do remember, however, especially as she was when the guests filed into the vestry, which was lit by the warm fitful sunshine of a day of wind and thunder, and in which Mme de Guermantes was surrounded by all those local Combray people whose names she did not even know, whose obvious inferiority enhanced her own supremacy too much for her to feel anything towards them except sincere benevolence, and whom she hoped to impress even more by a show of gracious simplicity. Moreover, being unable to cast the sort of intentional glances, full of a specific meaning, that one directs at acquaintances, all she could do was let her unfocussed thoughts stream out in front of her in a beam of blue light that she was powerless to switch off and that she could only hope would not embarrass or appear to despise all these nonentities round about her on whom it kept shining as it passed. I can still see, above the full silky swell of the mauve scarf, the mild astonishment of her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to direct it at any particular recipient, but so that it might be shared among everybody, the rather shy smile of the sovereign lady among her vassals, looking fondly and apologetically upon them. This smile fell upon myself as I stood there gazing at her. At which, remembering the look of hers which had settled on me during mass, as blue as a sunbeam filtered by Gilbert the Bad up in his stained-glass window, I thought to myself: 'She must be looking at me on purpose!' I was suddenly convinced she liked me, would go on thinking about me after leaving the church, and, that evening, back at Guermantes, might even pine for me. I fell in love with her there and then, for though at times one can fall in love with a woman simply and solely because she has looked at one askance (as I had assumed Mlle Swann had done), making one believe that she will be for ever unattainable, at other times it may be enough for her to look kindly on one (as Mme de Guermantes had done), making one believe she is far from unattainable. Her eyes glowed as blue as some unpluckable periwinkle that she intended for me; and the sun, though under threat of extinction by a cloud, still blazed outside in the Square and inside the vestry, tingeing with a pale geranium blush the red carpets which had been put down for the occasion and for the smiling Mme de Guermantes to tread, and adding to their pile a pinkish bloom, a muted veneer of light and that tonality of tenderness, or soft gravity, that blends with the pomp and joy of some passages of Lohengrin or certain canvasses by Carpaccio, and makes one understand why Baudelaire, in describing the sound of the trumpet, used the epithet 'delicious'.

From then on, whenever I went for walks along the Guermantes way, how much more heartbreaking it seemed to me to be without literary talent and to be doomed to the fate of never becoming a great writer! The pangs of

regret this caused me, as I mused along by myself some way behind the others, were so intense that, so as to stop feeling them, my mind, by a sort of spontaneous self-imposed inhibition in the face of pain, prevented itself from ever thinking of poetry or novels or any form of literary career, since my lack of talent forbade me to aspire to it. And then suddenly, without the slightest relevance to these literary preoccupations, in an area of my experience that was quite divorced from them, a glimpse of a roof, the sunlight on a stone, the smell of a lane would pull me up short with a twinge of pleasure and the hint that behind the surface appearance of those things they seemed to be concealing something which they appealed to me to seek out and which, for all my efforts, I could not discern in them. Because I felt that this something was inside them, I stood there, stock still, watching, sniffing, trying to think my way beyond the impression or the smell. And if I had to set off again and catch up with my grandfather, I would try to take them with me by closing my eyes, making an effort to remember with precision the outline of the roof, the exact shade of the stone which had seemed, in a way I could not understand, full of something, ready to open and offer me whatever it was they contained, and for which they served merely as a cover. Not that any impression of this kind could ever have given me back my forlorn hope that one day I might become a writer and a poet, since they always related to some particular object which was devoid of intellectual worth and unconnected to any abstract mode of truth. However, they did give me a variety of irrational pleasure and a certain illusory fertility of mind, thus allaying the chagrin and the sense of impotence that had beset me each time I attempted to find a philosophical subject for a great work of literature. But then the moral duty imposed upon me by these impressions of shapes, scents or colours — to try to find out what was concealed by them - was so irksome that I would soon be casting about for excuses that could relieve me of such an arduous necessity and save me the bother. As luck would have it, my parents called me, or I would feel I lacked the requisite calmness of mind at that particular moment to pursue my quest with profit, and that instead of wrestling fruitlessly with the problem there and then, I would be better advised to postpone thinking about it until I was back home. So I would concern myself no longer with the unknown something concealed inside a shape or a perfume, calm in the knowledge that, whatever it was, I was carrying it homewards with me, protected by its covering of remembered impressions beneath which I would find it still alive, like the fish which, on days when I had been out with a rod, I brought home in my basket, covered by a layer of grass to keep them fresh. Once I reached home, I would have other things to think about, and in this way (as my room was cluttered with flowers picked on walks and odds-and-ends I had been given) my mind became a great storehouse of stones lit by the sun, a roof-line, the sound of a bell ringing, the smell of leaves, a whole host of different perceptions through which I once caught inklings of a hidden reality that,

because I never managed to pluck up the will-power needed to draw it into full view, has long since died. However, there was one occasion — our walk had taken us much longer than usual and as the evening drew on, being still only halfway home, we were greatly relieved when Dr Percepied, tearing past in his carriage, recognised us and gave us a lift - when I received an impression of that sort and did not relinquish it until I had inspected it a little more thoroughly. I had been given the seat up on the box beside the coachman and we were travelling at top speed because the doctor, on his way back to Combray, was going to stop in Martinville-le-Sec to see a patient (while we waited for him outside in the coach). As we rounded a bend in the road, I felt that sudden special pleasure, quite unlike any other, at the sight, first, of the twin steeples of Martinville, which were lit by the rays of the setting sun and, because the coach was moving and the road was a winding one, appeared to move about from place to place, and then of the steeple of Vieuxvicq which, although in fact separated from the first two by a hill and a valley and standing much farther away on higher ground, seemed to be right beside them.

As I observed and made my mental note of the shape of their spires, their warm sunny surfaces and the way their contours seemed to change, I sensed that I had not exhausted my impression of them, that there was something else behind this movement and the sunset glow, something they seemed to offer and withhold at the same time.

All three steeples seemed so far away and we appeared to be making so little progress towards them that I was amazed to find us pulling up a few moments later outside the church at Martinville. I could not tell why the sight of them on the horizon had given me such pleasure, and the obligation I felt to seek out the reason for it struck me as extremely irksome; I wished for the time being to give no more thought to these sunlit mobile shapes, but just store them away in my head for future reference. If I had done so, it is likely that those two steeples would have gone the way of so many individual trees, roofs, smells and sounds which I had distinguished from the rest because each of them had brought me that same elusive pleasure into which I had never inquired any further. While waiting for the doctor, I got down to chat with my parents. Then we were off again, myself back up on the box, turning my head to look back at the steeples, and not long afterwards seeing them for the last time as we went round a bend. Since the coachman showed no readiness to engage in conversation and barely answered anything I said to him, I had to fall back on my own company, for lack of anyone else's, and make an attempt to recall my steeples. Soon their lines and sunlit surfaces split apart as though they were a kind of bark, a little of their hidden contents appeared, a thought that did not exist a moment before occurred to me, taking shape in words inside my head and so intensifying the pleasure caused me by the sight of them that I felt tipsy with excitement and could think of nothing else. At that moment I turned my head and glimpsed the shape of them once more — we had left Martinville far behind and the sun had gone down, so they were by now quite black. Now and then as I watched, bends in the road hid them from me; then they came into view one last time, before disappearing for good.

Without even thinking that what was hidden by the steeples of Martinville must be something resembling an agreeable turn of expression (since, whatever it was, it had appeared to me in the shape of words which pleased me) I begged a pencil and paper from the doctor and in compliance with the dictates of my conscience, in obedience to my enthusiasm and despite the jolting of the carriage, I set down the following passage which has come to hand again recently and required very little in the way of revision:

'All by themselves, standing up from the level plain and looking lost in the open countryside, aspiring skywards, were the twin spires of Martinville. Soon we saw three of them: they had been joined by a late comer, the steeple of Vieuxvicq, which with a bold pirouette sprang in front of them. Minutes passed, we were travelling quickly, yet the three steeples were still away to our front, like three motionless birds seen by sunlight, sitting on the plain. Then the Vieuxvicq steeple veered away, kept its distance, and the twin spires of Martinville stood alone, tinted by the light of the setting sun which even at that distance I could see playing on their sloping surfaces and smiling. We had taken such a time in our approach to them that I was still thinking of how much longer it would be before we reached them when the carriage turned and suddenly stopped right beside them; they had come at us so recklessly that we only just managed to pull up in time before running into the porch. We set off again; and when we were already a little way out of the village of Martinville, which had accompanied us for a few seconds before dropping back, the two steeples plus the third one at Vieuxvicq were still standing alone on the horizon watching us flee and waving farewell with their sunlit pinnacles. Now and then one or other of them would stand aside to let the remaining two have a view of us for a moment longer; but the road changed direction, they swivelled in the light like three golden pivots and vanished. Then, a little later, not far now from Combray, when the sun had already set, I glimpsed them one last time away in the distance, looking like three flowers stencilled against the low skyline of the fields. They reminded me also of the three lost maids in a legend, abandoned in some remote, deserted spot as night was drawing in; as we galloped farther and farther away and I saw them seek their timid way into the night, after a clumsy shuffle or two from their noble silhouettes, they pressed themselves together, slipped one behind the other, so as to form a single black outline of resignation and charm against the lasting pink of the sky, and faded into the dark.'

Once it was written, I never thought of that page again, but at the moment when I had finished writing it, on the edge of that box-seat where the

doctor's coachman used to place a basket full of chickens bought in the Martinville marketplace, I felt so happy in my conviction that I had now freed myself for good from those steeples and what they had been concealing that as though I was myself a hen who had just laid an egg I began to sing at the top of my voice.

On those walks, I had been able to dream throughout the afternoon of the pleasures to be derived from being the friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes, from trout-fishing or drifting down the Vivonne in a boat, and at such moments, in my greed for contentment, I had wanted life never to be anything but an unbroken sequence of happy afternoons. But when we were on our way home and I had caught sight of a certain farm, standing to our left a fair distance away from two other farmhouses which were very close together (and from which point, to come back down into Combray village, all one had to do was walk along an avenue of oaks flanked on one side by small enclosed fields containing regularly spaced out apple-trees whose shadows, in the sunset light, dappled the grass with Japanese patterns), that was the moment when my heart would miss a beat - I knew that we would be home within the half-hour, that in accordance with the rule obtaining on days when we walked along the Guermantes way and dinner was served late I would be sent up to bed as soon as I had finished my soup and that Mama, sitting on after my departure as though there was company to entertain, would not be coming up to kiss me good-night in bed. The zone of sadness which I had just entered was as clearly marked off from the other zone in which only a moment before I had been full of joy as a strip of pink sky may be separated from a band of green or black as though by a ruled line. One may see a bird flying against the background of pink, nearing the boundary of it, almost touching the band of black - and then it disappears into it. I was now so removed from the desires I had just been harbouring - to visit Guermantes, to travel and be happy - that even if they had come true there and then I could have derived no enjoyment from their realisation. How I longed to give them all for one night spent sobbing in Mama's arms! I shuddered, unable to tear my anxious eyes away from the face of my mother who was not going to come to my bedroom tonight, and, imagining myself already in that room, I wished I could die. That state would last until the following morning, when the first ray of comfort from the sun, as everyday as the gardener resting his ladder against the wall among the nasturtiums which climbed to my window, would make me jump out of bed and run down into the garden, unperturbed by the thought that some other evening would come when I would once again have to leave my mother. This was how I learned from the Guermantes way to discern in myself the succession of such moods, which at certain times can even divide each day up between them, as one of them recurs, displacing the other, as punctual as bouts of fever; moods which, though adjacent to each other, are so devoid of means of communication and so foreign to one another that when I am in one of them

I am incapable of comprehending, or even of imagining, anything I may have desired, or feared, or accomplished in the other.

This is why, for me, these two ways, the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way, remain linked to a great many small events in the particular mode of life which, of all the different parallel lives led by each of us, is the richest in happenings, the fullest in untoward incident — namely, the life of the mind. No doubt growth in this mode of life is imperceptible, and the discovery of the truths by which we have changed its direction and outlook and opened up new avenues to it must have been slowly maturing in us over a long period; but we are unaware of these truths, and for us they only begin to take effect from the day, from the minute when they become visible. The flowers in the grass, the water flowing in the sunlight, the whole background against which these things made their appearance will continue to gaze at the memory of them with its unconscious or unconcerned expression; and, of course, while they were subject to the lengthy scrutiny of some nameless passerby or a dreamy child (as a passing King may be inspected by a writer of memoirs among the anonymous crowd), this secluded spot, this corner of the garden could never have expected that it would be thanks to such an inconspicuous witness that they would be fated to survive in their most ephemeral minutiae; none the less, things like the hawthorn perfume, marauding along the hedgerow, where it would soon be replaced by the wild roses, and the dull crunch of footsteps along a gravel path, and the bubble formed against a water-plant by the current of the river and immediately burst, have been saved by the excitement with which I experienced them and which has managed to hand them down across a great many intervening years, while all about us well-trodden paths have faded from the face of the earth, those who trod them have died and with them the memory of those who trod them. Sometimes the fragment of rescued landscape which has survived in this way is so unattached to anything else, so isolated, that it drifts irresolutely in the memory like a flowered island of Delos and I am unable to tell where it comes from - from which country, which period of my life or, possibly, from which dream. But the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way I can only think of as deep strata in my mental geology, as the solid ground on which my foundations still stand. It was because I had an implicit belief in people and things as I explored those two 'ways' that the things and people they brought to my attention are the only ones I can now take seriously and in which I can find any joy. It may be that the spark of creative faith is extinguished in me, or that reality can only take shape in the memory, but if I am shown new kinds of flowers nowadays, they never seem to be genuine flowers. Between them, the Méséglise way with its lilacs and hawthorns, its cornflowers and poppies and apple-trees, and the Guermantes way with its river full of tadpoles, its water-lilies and buttercups, have shaped for all time the contours of the countrysides in which I would prefer to live, which must contain among their most essential

requirements the possibility of going fishing, drifting about in a boat, seeing the ruins of Gothic battlements, and finding among the cornfields a church like Saint-André-des-Champs, monumental, rustic and as golden-brown as a wheat-rick; and nowadays, on a journey, the cornflowers, hawthorns and apple-trees I happen to meet in the fields, because they exist at the same depth, the same subterranean level of the past, speak immediately to my heart. And yet, because there is a unique individuality in each place, when I yearn for the sight of the Guermantes way, my longing could never be satisfied by the sight of a river with water-lilies as fine as those in the Vivonne, or even finer, any more than I might have wished (at that evening hour when we reached home and I felt the stirrings of the anguish which later in life is transferred into the passion of love, from which it may even become inseparable) for some other mother, more beautiful and intelligent than my own, to come and kiss me good-night. Clearly, just as the one thing necessary to send me to sleep contented, in the state of unperturbed peace of mind that no mistress has ever been able to give me since (because one has doubts about a mistress at the very moment when one believes her, and can never totally possess her heart as I possessed my mother's in her kiss, without stint or ulterior motive or the residue of an intent aimed at somebody other than oneself) was that it should be my own mother, that she should offer me the face on which, just under the eye, there was an alleged blemish, as lovable to me as the rest of it; so the place I need to see is the Guermantes way that I once knew, with its avenue of oaks leading down past the lone farmhouse set a little distance away from those other two farms which were so close together; its sleek meadows which when the sunlight makes them as reflective as a pond are patterned with the leaves of appletrees; its whole landscape with that individual character which in dreams at night can still grip me with an almost supernatural intensity and which on waking I can never manage to recapture. No doubt the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way, by eternally and indissolubly uniting discrete impressions in myself through the simple accident of having exposed me to them at the same instant, rendered me prone to many disappointments and even many mistakes. For I have often wanted to see a certain person again without realising that this desire came from the hedge of hawthorn-trees of which that person reminded me; and the mere inclination to go on a journey has at times made me believe, and made someone else also believe, that a waning affection was regaining its former strength. But those two 'ways', by virtue of their very permanence, by remaining extant through the action of present-day impressions with which they can connect, give to these a surer foundation, a feeling of depth and an extra dimension that other impressions lack. They also add to them a charm and significance that are apparent only to myself — on summer evenings, when the harmonious sky growls like a wild animal and everyone else is grumbling at the thunder, it is because of

the Méséglise way that I stand by myself, surrounded by the noises of falling rain, and savour the scent of invisible but indestructible lilacs.

In this way I would often lie awake until morning, thinking back to the Combray days; to those sad sleepless evenings I used to spend; to a great many other days as well, restored to my memory more recently by the flavour (or, as they would have said in Combray, the 'fragrance') of a cup of tea; and, through an association of memories, to a love-affair that Swann had had before I was born, the story of which was told to me (many years after I left the village) with that close attention to detail which it is sometimes more possible to achieve in recounting the lives of people who died centuries ago than in recounting the lives of one's best friends, and which may seem as impossible to achieve as it used to seem impossible to talk to somebody in a distant city - until one discovers the way round the impossibility. All these disparate memories combined together to form a single mass, although one could always make out, running in between them (between the oldest layers, and the more recent ones caused by the flavour, and the third group which were the memories of somebody else, from whom I had acquired them), if not actual fissures or faults, at least the sort of veining and streaky mingling of colours which in certain rocks or marbles denotes differences in origin, age and formation.

By the time daybreak was at hand, of course, the temporary uncertainty to which I had awoken had long since faded from my mind. I now knew which room I was really lying in and (either by taking my directions from memory unaided, or by taking the hint of a faint glow glimpsed through the dark, under which I hung the window-curtains) had rebuilt it about myself in the gloom, renovated it throughout and refurnished it like an architect and an interior decorator who leave the windows and doors in their original shapes and positions, hung the mirrors where they belonged and put the chest of drawers back into its proper place. Then, hardly had daylight (instead of the reflection of a dying ember on a brass rod which I had mistaken for it) chalked on the darkness its first pale amendment to my arrangements, than the window and its curtains would move from the doorway where I had wrongly placed them, jostling quickly out of the way the desk that my untidy memory had left in their rightful place, pushing the fireplace in front of them and brushing aside the wall separating the bedroom from the passage; on the site where a moment before I had located the dressing-room there was now a small courtyard, and the apartments I had just rebuilt in the darkness had gone the way of all the others I had glimpsed in the dizzy indecision of waking, banished by the faint motif drawn above the curtains by the admonishing finger of first light.

Swann in Love



O BELONG to the 'little set', the 'little circle', the 'little clan' of M. and Mme Verdurin, only one condition was sufficient, but it was essential: one had to pay tacit allegiance to a Creed which held firstly that the young pianist who was Mme Verdurin's protégé that year (and of whom she would say: 'It's not fair that anyone should play Wagner as well as that!') was 'streets ahead' of both Planté and Rubinstein, and secondly that, when it came to diagnosis, Dr Cottard was better than Potain. Any new 'recruit' who remained unpersuaded by the Verdurins that parties given by people who did not belong to their set were deadly dull was expelled forthwith. Since women were less easily prevailed upon than men to put aside all worldly curiosity and to deny their own desire to find out for themselves what delights were offered in the salons of other hostesses, and since the Verdurins themselves felt that this spirit of free enquiry, this demon of frivolity, could prove contagious and fatal to the orthodoxy of their little church, they had been obliged to excommunicate one by one all the 'faithful' of the feminine gender.

That year, apart from the doctor's young wife, such female 'regulars' consisted almost exclusively (although Mme Verdurin was herself virtuous and came from a respectable middle-class family that enjoyed enormous wealth and total obscurity, with which she had gradually severed all connections) of a certain Mme de Crécy, a young woman who might have been more at home in the world of the fashionable prostitute and whom Mme Verdurin called by her first name, Odette, maintaining that she was a 'dear'; and the pianist's aunt, who looked as though she had once been employed as a caretaker; both of whom were unworldly and unsophisticated people, whom it had been so easy to persuade that the Princesse de Sagan and the Duchesse de Guermantes actually had to pay money to poor people so as to have anyone at all at their dinner-parties, that had one offered to get them an invitation to a function at the house of either of these great ladies, the former concierge and the good-time girl would have disdainfully declined.

The Verdurins did not issue invitations to dinner; one's place was regularly laid. There was never any set programme for the evening's entertainment. The young pianist would play, but only if he 'felt like it', since nobody was under any constraint - as M. Verdurin would say, 'We're among friends here. And here's to friendship!' If the pianist suggested playing the Ride of the Valkyries or the prelude to Tristan, Mme Verdurin would always object - not because she disliked these pieces but on the contrary because they affected her too deeply: 'You must want me to have one of my migraines! You know perfectly well the same thing happens every time he plays that! I know what I'm in for! Tomorrow morning when I try to get out of bed, you'll see, that will be it! Nothing doing! Curtains for me!' If the pianist did not play, they simply chatted and one of the company, usually their favourite painter at that time, would, in the words of M. Verdurin, indulge in ribald repartee that tickled everybody's funny-bone, especially the funny-bone, as it happened, of Mme Verdurin, who was so used to taking literally such metaphorical expression of her own feelings that on one occasion, Dr Cottard (a mere beginner at that stage) had had to reset her elbow which she had inadvertently dislocated in a fit of hilarity.

Full evening dress was frowned upon, partly because one was among 'chums' and partly so as not to resemble 'bores', whom they avoided like the plague and invited only to special gala evenings, which were held as seldom as possible and only for the purpose of entertaining the painter or spreading the fame of the musician. The rest of the time they were content to play charades or hold fancy-dress dinners, but strictly among themselves and without admitting a single outsider to their 'little circle'.

Gradually, however, as the 'pals' had come to occupy a more and more prominent place in the life of Mme Verdurin, the category of nuisances, bores and outcasts had come to include anyone or anything which kept the friends away from her and made them plead a previous engagement — the mother of one of them, perhaps, another's job, the country house or indifferent health of a third. If, say, Dr Cottard felt he really should leave immediately after dinner so as to make another visit to a patient whose condition was serious, Mme Verdurin would say, 'For all we know, your patient may well be much better off if you don't go round and disturb him this evening. He'll be able to have a good night's sleep without you. Then, tomorrow morning you can go round early and find he's quite better!' By the beginning of December each year, she would be unwell at the thought that her 'regulars' might let her down on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Each January 1st, for instance, the pianist's aunt expected the young man to attend a family dinner at her mother's.

'I mean, it's not as if your mother's going to die,' cried Mme Verdurin in a ruthless tone, 'just because you don't go and have dinner with her on New Year's Day, the way they do in the provinces!'

Easter always brought back the same anxiety. 'Doctor, I appeal to you as a man of science and a free-thinker! I naturally assume you'll be with us on Good Friday as on any other day,' she said to Cottard the first year, in an assured tone, suggesting she was in no doubt of the answer he would give. But until he gave it she was on tenterhooks, since if he were to stay away, she was likely to be left alone.

'I shall come on Good Friday . . . to take my leave, as we're off to spend

the Easter holiday in the Auvergne.'

'What! In the Auvergne! You'll be devoured by fleas and bugs! And serve you right, too!' To which, after a pause, she added, 'If you had only told us, we could have tried to organise something. We could have all made the trip

together in comfort.'

Similarly, if one of their 'regulars' had a friend, or one of the women members had a 'beau' who might be capable of causing an occasional defection from the ranks, the Verdurins (who had no objection to a woman having a lover, as long as she had him at their house, loved him via themselves and never preferred him to themselves) would say, 'Well, bring this chap of yours along!' And the 'chap' in question would be taken on for a trial period, to see if he would prove capable of keeping no secrets from Mme Verdurin and worthy of being incorporated into the 'little clan'. If he proved incapable, and unworthy, the 'regular' who had brought him along would be taken aside and done the favour of being estranged from his friend or mistress. But if he passed the tests, the 'recruit' joined the ranks of the regulars. So, that year, when the good-time girl told M. Verdurin that she had made the acquaintance of a charming man, a certain M. Swann, and insinuated that he would be flattered to receive an invitation from them, M. Verdurin passed on the petition there and then to his wife. (He himself only ever formed an opinion after she had formed hers, his particular role being to give effect to her desires, as well as the desires of the regulars, to which task he brought abundant resources of ingenuity.)

'Here's Mme de Crécy,' he said to his wife, 'with a request. She would love to introduce one of her friends to you, a M. Swann. What do you think?'

'Well, really, could anyone refuse anything to a perfect little dear like that? You be quiet, your opinion is not being asked for! I tell you, you are a perfect little dear!'

'Well, if you say so,' bantered Odette, adding, 'You know I'm not fishing for compliments' (the last three words she spoke in English).

'Well, all right then, bring your friend along, if he's nice!'

The 'little set' of the Verdurins had no connection with the social strata in which Swann moved; and true-blue men of fashion would not have seen the point of gaining an introduction to the Verdurins' circle while enjoying such an exalted position as his. But Swann was such a lover of women that, once he had met wellnigh every lady who belonged to the aristocracy and reached the conclusion that he had nothing more to learn from any of them,

he came to see the naturalisation certificate, the patent of nobility, as it were, bestowed upon him by the high society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain as a mere currency or letter of credit, that is as something quite devoid of value in itself but which enabled him to enjoy a temporary position of privilege in some backwater of a country-town or an undistinguished Parisian circle, while he pursued the daughter of the local squire, or of the town clerk, who had caught his roving eye. For the desire, or the love, that he felt at such times, roused in him the sort of vanity which, though he had by now outgrown it in everyday intercourse, may well have been what had originally spurred him towards the fashionable life of frittering away one's intellectual gifts in frivolous pastimes and exploiting one's artistic erudition only to advise society ladies on paintings to buy and furnishings for their town houses; and it was this vanity which made him want to dazzle any new lady friend whom he fancied with a form of glamour that was not implicit in the unadorned name of Swann. This desire was particularly potent if the new lady friend was of humble extraction. In the same way as a man of intelligence will have no fear of appearing stupid to another man of intelligence, the man with pretensions to elegance will have no fear of his elegance going unrecognized by a great lord, but by an uncouth bumpkin. Since the beginning of time, three-quarters of all the wit displayed and of all the lies told out of vanity by people who in doing so have only belittled themselves, have been designed to impress social inferiors. Swann, who could be natural and casual with a duchess, would show off for the eyes of a housemaid and cringe at the thought of being despised by her.

Unlike so many people who, out of laziness or from a resigned appreciation of the duty laid upon them by their exalted social position (to stay moored for ever at the same berth, forego until the day they die any pleasures which life brings their way from beyond the social territory within which they exist, and be eventually content to see the mediocre entertainments it offers, and its not intolerable tedium, as real pleasures, once they have become accustomed to them and realized they are all it has to offer) Swann never tried to convince himself that the women with whom he spent his days were pretty, but contrived instead to spend his days with women he knew were pretty. The latter were often women whose beauty was of a somewhat vulgar stamp, since the physical attributes unwittingly sought after by Swann were the antithesis of those which he admired in the women painted or sculptured by his favourite artists. His sensuality, which could be dampened by a soulful expression of melancholy or gravity, was aroused by women whose beauty was lustier, more robust and voluptuous.

If he was travelling and happened to meet a family which should have been unworthy of a gentleman's attention, but which numbered among its members a woman whose unfamiliar beauty charmed his eye, it would have seemed to him that to adopt an attitude of dignified reserve and deny the desire she inspired in him, to replace the pleasure he might have enjoyed with her by a different sort of pleasure, by writing to a former mistress to come and join him, would have been as callow an abdication in the face of life, as senseless a reluctance to experience untasted joys, as if, instead of looking at the new scenery all about him, he were to closet himself in his hotel room and look at postcards of Paris. The edifice of his social contacts was not a closed house, but, so that he could set it up on a new ad hoc basis wherever he found an attractive woman, was more like one of those collapsible tents that explorers have in their travelling baggage. As for anything in that edifice that was not portable or negotiable in exchange for new forms of pleasure, he would have given it away, however valuable it might have seemed to other people. Many a time, as a starving man might swap a diamond for a crust of bread, he had thrown away the high esteem in which he was held by a duchess (who might have longed for years to do him a favour but had never found the right opportunity) by asking her in a tactless telegram from the country for a recommendation, by return cable, which he could use to make the immediate acquaintance of one of her stewards whose daughter had just taken his fancy. Looking back on this sort of escapade, he would even find it amusing, for there was in him, albeit redeemed by rare instances of consideration for others, a fund of boorishness. In addition to which, he was one of those men of intelligence who, having spent their days in total idleness, seek comfort and possibly an excuse for themselves in the notion that such a state of idleness presents their intelligence with food for thought every bit as nourishing as that to be found in the arts or scholarship, and that 'Life' offers situations that are more interesting and more novellike than any novel. At any rate, so he said; and he was easily believed by the most refined men in his social circle, in particular by the Baron de Charlus, whom he enjoyed regaling with racy selections from his amorous adventures - such as the occasion in a train when he had struck up acquaintance with a woman who, having gone back with him to his house, turned out to be none other than the sister of the monarch who at that moment held the tangled threads of European politics in his grasp, on which Swann was thus afforded the most delightful source of inside information; or the other time when the complication of circumstance was such that it depended on the choice about to be made by the Sacred College whether he would succeed in sleeping with somebody's cook.

Nor was it only the brilliant company of virtuous dowagers, generals and academicians with whom he was intimately acquainted that Swann so cynically forced to act as his pimps. Every single one of his friends was accustomed to receiving periodic letters in which a recommendation or a word of introduction was begged by Swann with refinements of diplomacy which, by their persistence through a succession of different amours and pretexts, bore witness better than any flagrant faux pas of the pen to a permanent characteristic of his and to the constancy of his aims. Many

years after these events, when I began to take an interest in his character, because of certain similarities, of a completely different variety, that it had with my own. I was often told that whenever he wrote to my grandfather (who at that time, actually, was not yet my grandfather, Swann's great liaison, which was to interrupt such goings-on for a long time, only beginning about the time of my own birth) his handwriting on the envelope would be recognized and the cry would go up: 'What do you bet this is Swann asking a favour? On guard!' And my grandparents, acting either on suspicion of his motives or on the unwittingly diabolical impulse which makes one offer something only to those who have no desire for it, would turn a stone-deaf ear to any of Swann's entreaties, even to the ones which it would have been a simple matter to satisfy, such as his request to be introduced to a certain girl who dined with them on Sundays, which meant that whenever Swann broached the subject they had to pretend to have lost touch with her, although they would wonder from one week's end to the next who on earth they could invite to dinner with her and, rather than ask the one person who would have been delighted to come, often did not manage to think of anvone.

There would be times when some married couple, friends of my grandparents, after having complained for a long time that they never saw anything of Swann, would announce with a satisfied air and just possibly the aim of inspiring envy of their good fortune, that he had of late been behaving with great charm towards them and never tired of their company. My grandfather had no desire to spoil their enjoyment; but he would glance at his wife and hum:

'What mystery is this? I understand it not,'

or:

'Fleeting vision . . .'

or else:

' 'Tis best, in matters so sly,

To turn a blind eye.'

Then, several months later, if my grandfather happened to ask Swann's new-found friend: 'Well, are you and Swann still as thick as thieves?' the other person's face would fall: 'Oh, please, don't mention that man's name!'

'But I thought you were such good friends.'

Swann had been intimate in this way with a married cousin of my grandmother, turning up to dine with her and her husband almost every day of the week. Then suddenly, without sending any apology, he stopped coming. They thought he must have been taken ill, and my grandmother's cousin was about to send round to ask after his health when one day in the pantry she happened on a letter from him that had been inadvertently left inside her cook's account-book — it was Swann's announcement to the servant that he was leaving Paris and could not see her again. She had been

his mistress and when the time came for him to jilt her he had not seen fit to inform anyone else of his movements.

If, however, his current mistress happened to be a lady, or at least a woman who was not prevented from appearing with him in public by humble status or dubious reputation, then for her sake he would go back into society, but only into the restricted sphere in which she herself moved or into which he had introduced her. People would say, 'It's pointless to expect Swann to drop in tonight. It's his American girl-friend's day for the Opera, don't you know.' He would have her invited to the exclusive salons whose doors were always open to him, where he dined weekly or was a regular player of poker; each evening, the bright green glint of his eyes attenuated by the slight curl put into his ginger bristle of hair, he would select a flower for his buttonhole and go out to meet his mistress at the dinner-table of one or other of the women who belonged to his set; and at the thought of the admiration and friendliness soon to be lavished on him, in the presence of the woman he loved, by all these fashionable people for whom he could do no wrong, he could see once again the old charm of the social round to which he had become indifferent but which, now that it contained his latest love, seemed to be made of some material of priceless beauty, shot through with the cosy flickering glow of a secret flame.

However, in contrast to these major affairs, or even to his briefer dalliances, each of which had been the more or less complete fulfilment of a dream inspired by the sight of a certain face or body which Swann, quite spontaneously and without having to make any effort, had found attractive, the fact was that when he was introduced to Odette de Crécy one day at the theatre by an old friend of his who had referred to her as a lovely creature who might not be averse to his advances, managing to imply that she was more virtuous than she in fact was (so as to appear to be doing Swann a great favour by introducing him to her), she had struck Swann not as lacking in beauty but rather as having a style of beauty that left him indifferent, that gave him no pang of desire for her but actually inspired in him something verging on physical repulsion. The category of women to which she belonged will be familiar to all men, each of whom could no doubt put a different name to the individuals of his own acquaintance who have in common the fact that they are the opposite of the type which appeals to his sensuality. Her profile was too pronounced for Swann's taste, her skin too delicate, her cheekbones too prominent, her features too drawn. She had fine eyes, but they were so large that they drooped with their own bulk, tiring out the rest of her face and giving her the constant appearance of being out of sorts or in a bad mood. Some time after their introduction at the theatre, she had written to him asking to see his art collections, which fascinated her because 'although just an ignorant woman, she was fond of pretty things', and saying that she felt she would get to know him better once she had seen him 'at home' where she imagined him 'all cosy, with his cup of

tea and his books', although she did not conceal her surprise at learning he lived in the old Quai d'Orléans quarter, which she felt must be so dismal and was 'so un-chic for a man who was so very chic'. Then, after her first visit to his house, she told him as she took her leave how sorry she was to have spent such a short time in a house that she had been so glad to enter, and referred to Swann himself in a way that suggested he meant more to her than the other people she knew, making him smile at the implication of some romantic bond between their two selves. Swann was already approaching that age of disenchantment when one has learned to enjoy being in love for the sake of being in love and not to expect too much in return, when the feeling of closeness to someone else, though it may no longer be, as it was in early youth, the one essential aim of love, nevertheless remains linked to love through an association of ideas that is so strong that this feeling of closeness may even become the cause of one's love, if it arises before love. In early life, a man yearns to win the heart of the woman with whom he has fallen in love; later in life, the knowledge that he has won a woman's heart can be enough to make him fall in love with her. Thus, at an age when it would appear (since what one seeks above all in love is a subjective pleasure) that one's taste for a certain woman's beauty should motivate in large measure the love one feels for her, that same love can arise, and exist at the most carnal level, without ever having been preceded by any desire for her. At that stage of life, one has already experienced several bouts of love; it no longer goes through its spontaneous evolution, in accordance with its own fateful mysterious laws, in the presence of one's astonished and passive heart. One helps it along, tampering with its progress through memory or suggestion; one recognizes a single symptom of it, and remembers or recreates the rest. It is a melody we know by heart, imprinted in us in its entirety, and one has no need to be reminded by a woman of its opening notes — with their admiration for her beauty - in order to recall how it goes on. And if she starts in the middle of it, at the point where two hearts are feeling closer, where one begins to speak of being unable to go on existing without each other, then the tune is familiar enough for us to be able to join in with her at the right bar.

Odette de Crécy went back to Swann's house, then took to visiting him more frequently; no doubt each of these visits revived his disappointment at seeing this face, the special features of which he had slightly misremembered over the intervening days and which surprised him by being so expressive and yet, for all its youthfulness, so lacklustre; and as she sat there chatting with him he regretted that her great beauty was not of the sort he would have instinctively preferred. It must be added that Odette's face seemed thinner and more prominent of feature than it was, because the usually clear open surfaces of the forehead and the upper parts of her cheeks were hidden under the masses of hair which were popular then, bunched forward in 'frizettes', swept up into waves or cascading in loose ringlets about the ears; and as for her figure, which was pleasing and shapely, it was difficult to see it

as a coherent entity because of the fashions in vogue at that time — and despite the fact that she was one of the best dressed women in Paris — the cuirasse bodice jutting out, as though above an imaginary abdomen, then tapering down to a sudden point, and those double skirts and bustles swelling like a balloon underneath, all giving women the appearance of being assembled out of different pieces that had been badly fitted together; while the gathered ruches, the flounces and vest bodice, depending on the vagaries of the design or the texture of the different materials, followed lines which led to the bows, the froth of a lace ruff and the perpendicular fringes of jet, or else traced down the contours of the stays, but never related to the living body inside, which, depending on whether the architecture of all these frills and furbelows coincided with its own shape or departed from it, was either strait-jacketed by them or irretrievably lost from sight.

But whenever Odette had taken her leave, Swann would smile at the memory of how she had said the days would pass slowly until he asked her back again; and he remembered how she had once begged him to let it be soon, the shy worried air she had and the awed supplication in her stare as she spoke to him, which made her look so touching under the posy of artificial pansies on the front of her round white straw-hat with its black velvet strings.

'And what about you?' she had asked. 'Couldn't you come and have tea with me one day?'

He had pleaded pressure of work, a study of Vermeer of Delft (actually abandoned years before) and she had replied, 'I daresay I'd be quite useless, a puny creature like me, alongside an eminent scholar like you. It'd be like that fable of the frog and the wise men! But I really would love to learn, to acquire knowledge, to be initiated. How jolly it must be to spend your time swotting things up, with your nose always in musty old papers!' (This last she had added with the self-satisfied air of the elegant lady maintaining that she likes nothing better than getting her hands dirty doing the messy jobs about the house, like 'lending a hand in the kitchen'.) 'You'll probably tease me about this. But I've never heard of this painter chap that keeps you away from me' - she meant Vermeer - 'Is he still alive? Are there any of his things to be seen in Paris, I wonder? Because I'd like to get an idea of what it is you're fond of and work out what's going on behind that great wide brow of yours that's always so preoccupied. All those cogitations that are always going on inside that head! Just to be able to think: "Yes, that's what he must be thinking about right now!" How marvellous it would be to be able to share in your work!' He had pleaded a reluctance to form new relationships and what he called, out of flirtatious politeness, his fear of being hurt.

'What! You're afraid of forming an affection! Oh, that's funny! Here am I, looking for nothing else in life. Why, I'd give my life to find a true one!' she said in a tone of such unaffected conviction that he had been touched by it. 'You must have had your heart broken by a woman. And now you assume

they're all the same. But she can't have understood you. Because you're so different. That's what I liked about you from the beginning — I sensed straight away that you weren't like everybody else.'

'In any case, what about you yourself?' he had said. 'I know what women are like. You've probably got all sorts of things to keep you busy. I daresay you're hardly ever free.'

'What! But I've never got anything to do! I'm always free, I'll always be free for you! At any hour of the day or night, whenever it suits you, just send for me and I'll be only too glad to come. Will you promise me to? Actually, do you know what would be nice? If we got you introduced to Mme Verdurin, whose house I go to every evening! Just imagine! If we could see each other there and I could think it was partly because of me that you were there!'

As he remembered these conversations and thought about her when he was alone, no doubt what he was visualizing in his romantic reveries was merely Odette among glimpses of many other women; but if the image of Odette de Crécy were gradually to dominate these reveries (thanks to some circumstance, or perhaps even in a more haphazard way, since the circumstance that coincides with the moment when a hitherto latent state of mind becomes actual may have no bearing on that state), if his reveries were to become inseparable from the memory of her, then the imperfections of her person would lose all their former significance, as would the question of her body's being more or less to Swann's liking than some other body, since by becoming the body of the woman he loved, it would also have become the only body capable of causing him joys or sorrows.

It so happened that my grandfather had once known the family of the Verdurins (which was more than could be said about any of their current acquaintances). However, he had now lost all contact with the person he called 'young Verdurin', whom he dismissed perhaps over-hastily as someone who had fallen (albeit still with his millions) among riff-raff and untouchables. One day he received a letter from Swann, asking if he would mind giving an introduction to the Verdurins. 'On guard! On guard!' he had exclaimed. 'I might have known! Swann's been coming to it for years. Nice people to get mixed up with! For one thing, I can't do what he asks, as I am no longer acquainted with the gentleman in question. And for another, I'm sure there's some woman at the bottom of it and I make a point of having nothing to do with that sort of business. Ho, ho! We're going to have some fun, if Swann's getting in with those young Verdurins!'

And so, my grandfather having turned down the request, Swann was taken to the Verdurins' by Odette herself. On the day when Swann made his debut, the Verdurins' dinner-party consisted of the painter who was currently in their favour, Dr and Mme Cottard and the young pianist plus his aunt, who were to be joined by several other 'regulars' later in the evening.

Dr Cottard never knew what tone to adopt when replying to anyone who addressed him, uncertain as he was whether the words spoken to him had been meant as a joke or were to be taken seriously. So, just in case, he added to his every facial expression the hint of a fleeting hypothetical smile which, by its suggestion of crafty anticipation, would disarm any suspicion of naivety on his part, should it turn out that the remark just made had in fact been facetious. But since he also had to take the opposite possibility into account and dared not allow this smile to settle definitively on his features, they flickered with a perpetual uncertainty that asked the question he could not bring himself to formulate: 'Are you in earnest?' In the street, or even in the generality of life's situations, he was no surer of how to behave than he was in a drawing-room conversation, and he could be seen meeting passing carriages, random pedestrians or events with the sly smile that prevented his attitude being thought unseemly, by proving that he was perfectly aware of how incongruous his behaviour was and that he had in fact purposely chosen that attitude, by way of a joke.

However, on any point which seemed to permit of a straight question, the Doctor missed no opportunity of trying to reduce the realm of his doubts and round off his education. Hence, following the parting advice given to him by his prudent mother when he was leaving the provinces for Paris, he could never let an unfamiliar turn of phrase or proper name be uttered in his presence without seeking further information on them. On the turns of phrase, his appetite for knowledge was insatiable because he sometimes imagined them to have a more precise meaning than they actually had and longed to find out what exactly it was that people meant when they used the more common ones — the bloom of youth, blue blood, a pretty kettle of fish, the moment of truth, a lounge lizard, an open-and-shut case, to be on the horns of a dilemma, and so on — as well as to determine the precise contexts in which he might adorn his own speech with them. Lacking this conversational resource, he was apt to fall back on a set of puns which he had memorized. As for the names of strangers spoken in his hearing, he would merely repeat them in an interrogative tone, which he thought sufficient to elicit further particulars without actually appearing to ask for them.

Since he was utterly devoid of the critical faculty which he thought he exercised in all circumstances, the polite fiction of telling people to whom one is doing a favour that one is greatly obliged to them, without intending they should believe you, was a waste of effort with him, as he took everything literally. Even Mme Verdurin, for all her blindness to the real Cottard, and though she continued to think him very sharp-witted, was capable of being irritated by him if she had invited him to share a stage-box at a performance by Sarah Bernhardt and had graciously said to him when he turned up, with his smile which would hover between appearing and disappearing until somebody authoritative pronounced on the quality of the performance: 'You are a dear to have come, Doctor. Especially since I'm

sure you must have seen Sarah Bernhardt many times. And I do wonder whether we're not a little bit too near the stage?' and he replied, 'Yes, indeed, we are far too near and people are beginning to think Sarah Bernhardt's a bit of a bore. But you expressed a wish for me to come and your wish is my command. I am only too happy to do you a little favour. You're so nice and kind-hearted, what wouldn't we do for you?' To which he would add, in the forlorn hope of enlightenment, 'Sarah Bernhardt, she's the "Golden Voice", isn't she? One can often read, too, that she "sets the stage on fire". An odd expression, what?'

'You know,' said Mme Verdurin later to her husband, 'I do believe that when we run down in all modesty the presents we give to the Doctor we're barking up the wrong tree. He's a man of science, he lives in a world beyond mundane everyday concerns, he has no conception of the value of things and always relies on what we tell him.'

'Well, I didn't dare say so myself, but I had noticed it,' replied M. Verdurin. And the following New Year's Day, instead of sending him a ruby worth three thousand francs and telling him it was a mere trinket, M. Verdurin bought a synthetic stone for three hundred francs and implied that it would be difficult to find its equal anywhere.

On the day when Mme Verdurin had announced that M. Swann would be joining them that evening, the Doctor had barked in surprise, 'Swann?'; for the most inconsequential piece of news always took him off his guard, despite his unremitting belief in himself as ready for anything. Seeing that nobody was answering, he roared, 'Swann? Who on earth is Swann?' And his fit of anguish only abated when Mme Verdurin said, 'I mean that friend Odette mentioned.'

'Ah, I see! That's all right, then,' replied the Doctor in relief. The painter was delighted at having Swann in their midst, because he imagined him to be in love with Odette and he fancied himself as a match-maker. 'I just love arranging marriages,' he whispered to Dr Cottard. 'And I've already arranged quite a few — even between women!'

The Verdurins, when Odette had told them Swann was very 'chic', had foreboded a 'bore'. However, he made an excellent impression on them, one of the indirect causes of which, unknown to them, was his familiarity with elegant society. For he shared with those who have some acquaintance with society one of the superiorities they enjoy even over men of intelligence who have never ventured into the fashionable world, in that he did not see it transfigured by the longing or the revulsion it arouses in the imagination, but considered it as something utterly unimportant. The civility of such men, untouched by snobbery or by any fear of seeming obsequious, shows all the relaxed independence and bodily grace of those whose supple, well trained limbs execute the exact motions they require, without the indiscreet and clumsy assistance of the rest of the body. The elementary gymnastic grace of the man of the world, holding out a welcoming hand to the

unknown youth who has just been introduced to him, or bowing unostentatiously to the Ambassador to whom he has himself just been introduced, had become part and parcel of Swann's whole social manner without his being aware of it, so that when he was faced with people like the Verdurins and their friends, from a set well beneath his own, he displayed an instinctive warmth towards them and made up to them in a way that, they felt, no 'bore' could have done. The only momentary coolness he evinced was towards Dr Cottard, who before they had had so much as an opportunity to speak to each other was winking and smiling at him in a dubious way (Cottard called these facial contortions 'sizing somebody up') which made Swann wonder whether the Doctor had once upon a time set eyes on him in a brothel, although his visits to such places were few and far between and he had never gone in much for that sort of dissipation. Cottard's hinting at such behaviour, especially in front of Odette, to whom it might well give a low opinion of Swann, struck him as being in very poor taste and he turned a cold eye on the Doctor. But on finding out that the lady next to him was Mme Cottard, he decided that such a young married man could never have brought himself to allude to such goings-on in the presence of his wife; and he no longer read into the Doctor's suggestive glances the former unseemly meaning. The painter straightaway invited Swann to visit his studio, with Odette; and Swann thought what a pleasant fellow he was.

'Perhaps you will be deemed worthy of favours not granted to me,' Mme Verdurin said to Swann in a tone of mock mortification. 'Perhaps you will be shown the portrait of Cottard' (which she had commissioned from the artist).

'Mr Biche,' she added to the painter, continuing the clan's timehonoured joke of addressing him as 'Mister', 'make sure you catch that nice roguish look in his eye, the witty little twinkle that's always there. Remember, what I really want is his smile. What I've commissioned from you is a painting of his smile.' This statement struck her as remarkable, and so she said it again in a loud voice to be sure that it would be heard by a fair number of guests, some of whom, on an implausible pretext, she had already attracted within earshot. Swann asked to be introduced to everybody, even to an old friend of the Verdurins, a man by the name of Saniette, who, because he was so shy, simple and kind-hearted, had forfeited all the high esteem in which he had once been held because of his erudition as an archivist, his great wealth and the distinguished family to which he belonged. His voice always sounded as though he was talking with his mouth full, an impression which was touching because it suggested not so much an impediment of speech as a quality in the man's character, some vestige of the innocence of infancy that he had never outgrown. All the hard consonants which he found unpronounceable seemed like so many harsh measures he could never take. Swann's request to be introduced to M.

Saniette gave Mme Verdurin the impression that he was inverting the proper roles (to counter which, she made a point of stressing the disparity between them by phrasing her introduction thus: 'M. Swann, would you be so kind as to allow me to introduce to you our friend Saniette?'); whereas in Saniette himself it aroused a strong liking for Swann, which the Verdurins took care never to reveal to him, as they found Saniette rather irritating and had no desire to foster any friendships for him. They were, however, greatly impressed by Swann's immediate suggestion that he be introduced to the pianist's aunt. Wearing her eternal black dress - because she thought that a woman always looked well in black, and that it was the most 'distinguished' colour — she was very red about the face, as was usual when she had just had a meal. To Swann she made a respectful bow, then straightened up majestically. Being an uneducated person and fearful of making elementary grammatical faux pas, she spoke in an intentionally indistinct voice, in the belief that any malapropism which she might happen to utter would be veiled by such a haze of imprecision as to make it imperceptible, and so her speech was a garbled gravelly rattle somewhere in the throat, out of which emerged from time to time the few clear words of which she had a confident command. Swann was tempted to have a little joke about her with M. Verdurin, but his host took offence and replied, 'She is a thoroughly worthy person. I daresay she's not stunning in any respect. But I can assure you that, in private conversation, she is excellent company.'

'Oh, I have no doubt!' Swann agreed in haste. 'I only meant that she does not strike one as at all "eminent" (a word to which he gave a special emphasis) 'and, come to think of it, that's really a compliment!'

'D'you know what?' said M. Verdurin. 'This will surprise you — her writing is quite delightful. Have you ever heard her nephew play? He's excellent, wouldn't you agree, Doctor? Would you like me to ask him to play something for us, M. Swann?'

'Well, that would be a joy . . .', Swann started to say, when he was interrupted by a facetious remark from the Doctor. The fact was that the Doctor, having surmised that it was old-hat to use any solemn or high-sounding words in conversation, assumed whenever he heard a serious word being used in all seriousness (as Swann had just used 'joy') that the speaker was guilty of arrant pomposity. If it also happened that the word was to be found in what the Doctor referred to as 'an old cliché', however common it was in other contexts, he would jump to the conclusion that the statement of which he had heard the opening words was bound to be ridiculous and would ironically complete it with the well known set phrase, thus giving the impression that this was what the speaker had been intending to say, whereas it had probably never entered his head.

'A joy for ever!' he exclaimed in a mischievous tone, raising both arms sententiously. M. Verdurin could not help laughing.

'What are all those fellows laughing about over there? I say,' called Mme

Verdurin, 'you seem to be making merry in your little corner.' Then she added in a tone of mock childish chagrin, 'It's all very well for you! I don't get much fun, sitting out like this all by myself, in disgrace!'

Mme Verdurin was sitting on a high chair of waxed Scandinavian pine-wood, which had been given to her by a violinist from Sweden, and which she had kept, despite the fact that in shape it was reminiscent of a stool and was quite out of keeping with her other handsome antique furniture; the fact was she made a point of displaying the presents which her 'regulars' occasionally gave to her, so that the donors might have the pleasure of setting eyes on their whenever they dropped in. She would endeavour to persuade them to restrict themselves to short-lived gifts, such as flowers or confectionery; but in this her persuasion was of no avail and her drawing-rooms housed a motley miscellany of duplicated white elephants, an incongruous medley of offerings such as foot-warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers and ornamental Oriental vases.

From her perch, she could take a lively part in the conversation of her 'regulars' and enjoy their banter and 'repartee', although, ever since the accident that had happened to her elbow, she had given up the business of genuinely bursting out laughing, contenting herself with a pantomime of conventional mirth which meant, without effort or danger to her person, that she was splitting her sides. At the merest hint of a joke cracked by a 'regular' at the expense of a 'bore' or even a former regular who had been relegated to the ranks of the bores, she would strike despair into the heart of M. Verdurin — who for years had enjoyed the reputation of being fully as pleasant as his wife, only to find now that, by continuing to laugh properly, he was soon out of breath and outclassed by her trick of feigned non-stop hilarity — by giving her little squeal, shutting tight her bird-like eyes (already a little veiled by leucoma) and suddenly burying her face in her hands, which covered it and left no part of it visible, as though she had just managed to hide some indecent sight or avert some fatal accident, and looking for all the world as though she was trying her hardest to stifle a fit of mirth which, had she given in to it, might have caused her to collapse. Such was Mme Verdurin, bemused by the revelry of her 'regulars', tipsy with their mutual back-scratching, scandal-mongering and hero-worship, clinging to her perch like a bird whose seed has been steeped in mulled wine, and sobbing with affability.

Meanwhile, M. Verdurin, having asked Swann whether he objected to his pipe ('No standing on ceremony here, you know! All pals together!'), begged the young pianist to play for them. At which, Mme Verdurin called out, 'Oh, I say, don't be horrid to him! He's not here to be pestered. I won't have him pestered, so there!'

'But what's horrid about asking him to play?' rejoined M. Verdurin. 'M. Swann may be unfamiliar with the F sharp sonata we've discovered. He'll just play us the piano arrangement of it.'

'Oh, no! Please, not my sonata!' cried Mme Verdurin. 'I've no desire to be moved to tears and get a head cold and neuralgia out of it, like the last time! Thanks very much, but I don't want to go through all that again! Huh! It's all right for the rest of you. It's easy to see you're not the ones who'll be confined to bed for a week!'

The gathering of friends were as delighted by this little performance, which was put on whenever the pianist was about to play, as though they were witnessing it for the first time, seeing it as evidence of the brilliant originality of the 'Bossess' and her acute musical appreciation. Any guests who were standing close by would beckon to others who were sitting farther away, smoking or playing cards, to let them know that something was happening which they should not miss, and they would say to each other the word heard in the Reichstag at moments of interest: 'Listen, listen!'† And the following day, any regular who had been unable to attend was made to feel he had missed something special by being told that the performance had been even funnier than usual.

'Well, all right, then,' said M. Verdurin. 'He'll just play the andante.'

'Just the andante, I like that!' wailed Mme Verdurin. 'It's just the andante that leaves me wrung out like an old cloth! Listen to the Boss! Isn't he priceless? It's as though it was the Choral and he said, "We'll just hear the final movement," or the Meistersinger and he said, "We'll just have the overture"!'

During this exchange, the Doctor was urging Mme Verdurin to let the pianist play, not because he suspected her of shamming the emotional upsets she contracted from the music — in which he could recognize certain neurasthenic symptoms — but because he shared the habit, common to many doctors, of relaxing the strictness of their orders so as to prevent something much more important from being jeopardized by them: namely, the enjoyment of any social gathering at which they are present and in which an essential role is to be played by one of their patients, to whom their advice is that on this occasion she should ignore her chronic indigestion or attack of the flu.

'You will not be ill this time, you'll see,' he said to her, trying to hypnotize her with his gaze. 'And, if you are ill, we shall take care of you.'

'Honestly?' said Mme Verdurin, as though the promise of such a boon made surrender her only recourse. There may have been moments in her life, too, when, having so often maintained that the music would make her ill, she forgot that there was no truth in this claim and actually took on the mind and heart of an invalid. And invalids, tired out by the constant onus of keeping their attacks to a minimum by the power of their own sense of responsibility, enjoy entertaining the sporadic belief that they can go ahead and indulge themselves with what is usually bad for them, confident in the hope that without the slightest bother to themselves, they can commit

† Thus Proust, who may have misunderstood the function of English 'Hear! Hear!' (JG).

themselves to the care of a powerful guardian who, with a mere word or a pill, will be able to put them to rights again.

Odette had gone over to sit on a tapestry-covered couch, near the piano. She said to Mme Verdurin, 'You see, I've got my own little spot.'

Mme Verdurin, seeing Swann sitting by himself on a chair, urged him out of it: 'That's no place for you! Go and sit over there beside Odette. Odette, you won't mind making room for M. Swann, will you?'

Swann, trying to please, said before he sat on the couch, 'My! What nice

Beauvais tapestry!'

'Well, I'm glad you appreciate my couch,' replied Mme Verdurin. 'And I'm telling you, if you think you'll ever see another one like it, you're jolly well mistaken. They've never made another one to match this. And those little chairs are just wonderful-too. You can look at them all in a little while. Each of the bronzes repeats the subject in the design of the chair. If you like looking at that sort of thing, there's plenty of amusement in store for you here, I can tell you. I mean, even these little details in the borders! Just look at this scene of the Bear and the Grapes, with its little vine on a red background! That's detail for you, what! Wouldn't you agree they knew a thing or two in those days about design? Look at how mouth-watering that grapevine is! My husband says I don't like fruit, just because I don't eat as much of it as he does. But, you know, I'm greedier than the rest of you put together. The only thing is I've no need to actually put the fruit into my mouth. I enjoy them by sight. Now, what are you all laughing at? Ask the Doctor, he'll tell you those grapes are the only aperient I ever need! Some people swear by Fontainebleau grapes, but all I ever need is my own little dose of Beauvais! But look here, M. Swann, before you run away, you must just feel the little bronze mouldings on the chair-backs. Feel that - have you ever felt such a smooth patina? No, no, look, I mean feel them properly, with your whole hand!'

'Look out!' said the painter suggestively. 'If Mme Verdurin's going to

start fondling her mouldings we'll have no music tonight!'

'Oh, you be quiet, you naughty thing! Anyway,' she said, turning to Swann, 'we women are forbidden far less sensuous delights than that. I'm telling you, no flesh is comparable to them! In the days when M. Verdurin paid me the compliment of being jealous of me — oh, come on, at least be polite about it! Don't say you were never jealous!'

'I never said a word! Did I, Doctor? I ask you: did I say anything?'

Swann was still politely feeling the bronzes, not daring to stop so soon.

'Come along. You can caress them later. At the moment, you're the one who's going to be caressed. Your ears are going to be caressed! I'm sure you like that idea. And here's a little chap who'll take care of it!'

By the time the pianist had finished playing, Swann was feeling even better disposed towards him than towards anyone else in the room. The fact was that, the previous year, he had attended an evening party at which he

had heard a piece of music performed on piano and violin. Although his initial reaction to it was one of mere acoustic enjoyment of the quality of the sounds emitted by the instruments, there had been a fine pleasure for him in the moment when he had suddenly seen the great rippling liquid shapes of the piano-part trying to overflow and submerge the thin, dense, little guideline of the violin beneath its smooth abundant swell, that broke into waves of melody like the restless purple spell cast on the sea when moonlight modulates it into a minor key. But then, at a certain moment, though incapable of perceiving the clear outline of what had pleased him or even of putting a name to it, he was abruptly charmed by a fleeting phrase or harmony — he could not tell which — that he tried to retain as it passed and which had seemed to expand his soul, as the fragrance of certain roses, wafted on the damp evening air, has the power to dilate one's nostrils. It may have been because of his own ignorance of music that it made such a blurred impression on him, an impression that may well be the sole purely musical sort, completely self-contained, unassociated with and untranslatable into any other mode of experience. A musical impression of this kind is momentarily sine materia, so to speak. As one listens, the notes have of course already begun to fill in visible surfaces of varied dimensions, according to their pitch and volume, to sketch arabesques and convey to the mind suggestions of breadth, slenderness, stability or caprice. But these notes have already faded away before their suggestions have firmed enough to survive the competing suggestions prompted by the notes that follow or sound simultaneously. And this sort of unfocussed impression would continue to surround with its hazy flux the occasional fragmentary, barely discernible motifs that surface in it, then immediately submerge and disappear, leaving in the mind only the special pleasure they have brought, but being themselves quite inexpressible to the mind, impossible to describe, remember or put a name to - were it not for memory, which, like a builder trying to lay firm foundations among waves, constructs facsimiles of these fleeting phrases, thus enabling one to compare them to those which follow and to tell the difference between them. Thus, hardly had Swann's sensation of delight faded than his memory had improvised an immediate, temporary transcription of it, at which, though the music was continuing, he had been able to glance, so that when the same impression suddenly recurred, it was no longer quite so elusive. He could sense the extent of it, had an inkling of symmetries in its arrangement, its shape as an ideogram and its expressive quality; what he had in his mind by now was that certain something which has ceased to be pure music and has become an element of design, architecture or thought, and which enables one to remember music. On this occasion, he had caught a clear phrase of it as it rose for a few moments above the waves of sound. It had hinted instantly at special delights, the promise of which had never occurred to him until he heard it,

which he sensed he could never experience through anything else and which stirred within him some strange love for the phrase itself.

With its slow rhythm, it impelled him first in one direction, then another, then another again, always tending towards some noble, unintelligible but definite fulfilment. Then all at once, having reached a certain spot, where it would pause for a moment and from which he prepared to keep on following it, it would abruptly change course and set off at an unexpected gait, swifter and brisker, its sweet relentless melancholy luring him on towards unimagined vistas of the future. Then the little phrase disappeared and he was left yearning to glimpse it for a third time. When it did reappear, however, it spoke to him no more distinctly than before, and its keen sensuality even seemed a little blunted. But by the time he had gone back home, he craved for it: he was like a man who sees a woman passing in the street and contracts from that momentary glimpse a whole new conception of beauty which enhances the very worth of his own sensitivity, although he does not even know whether he will ever so much as set eyes again on this nameless unknown creature, with whom he has already fallen in love.

In fact, this experience of falling in love with a phrase of music seemed momentarily to promise a kind of rejuvenation in Swann. It was such a long time since he had abandoned all thought of devoting his life to any goal higher than material things, restricting his quest for fulfilment to the range of the everyday, that by now he was convinced, without ever formulating his feeling in thought, that this way of life would go on unchanged until the day he died. Indeed, feeling his own mind to be devoid of elevated ideas, he had given up believing in their existence, although, again, he could not strictly deny it. And he had come to take refuge in trivial thoughts that enabled him to ignore the real truth in things. Just as he never wondered now whether he might not have been better to shun the fashionable life, but was very clear in his mind that, once one had accepted an invitation, one was bound to turn up, and that a visiting-card had to be left for one's hostess if one did not actually call on her afterwards, so, in conversation, he was careful never to express any heart-felt opinion on any subject, but merely to pass on factual information which had its own value, of sorts, and served as a bushel under which he could hide his light. When it came to things like a recipe, the year in which a painter had been born or had died, or the titles of the man's paintings, Swann was scrupulously exact. And if it should happen that he forgot himself sufficiently to express a personal judgment on a work of art or somebody's outlook on life, he was sure to speak with perceptible irony, suggesting that his heart was not completely in what he was saying. But now, like certain invalids whose condition shows such a sudden improvement (because of a change of air, a new diet or even some mysterious, spontaneous organic development in themselves) that they find themselves entertaining the improbable prospect of belatedly leading a quite different style of life, Swann detected within himself, in the memory of that phrase he had heard

and in other sonatas he asked people to play for him in the hope of coming upon it, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he no longer believed but to which, as though this music had exercised some sort of elective influence on the inner sterility from which he suffered, he once more felt the desire, and almost believed he had the power, to devote his existence. However, he had never managed to find out who had written the work, and so had never been able to acquire a copy of it, and had eventually forgotten it. During the week after the party at which he had first heard it played, he did manage to meet a few of the other people who had been there and asked them about it; but some of them had arrived after the recital or else had left before it; some who had actually been present during the performance had gone into another room to continue a conversation; and those who had in fact sat through it had heard no more of it than the others. As for his hosts, all they knew was that it was a new work and that the musicians they had engaged for the evening had wanted to play it; but since the players had now gone off on tour Swann was never able to learn anything further about the piece. He even tried some of his musical friends, but though he could recall the special untranslatable pleasure the little phrase had given him and could actually see the design of it in his mind's eye, he was incapable of humming it over to them. Then he had stopped thinking about it.

But that night at Mme Verdurin's, only a few minutes after the young pianist had begun to play, all of a sudden, after a long high note had been held for two bars, Swann saw coming towards him, emerging from that long drawn out tone that seemed to drape the mystery of its beginnings like a curtain of sound, and recognized in the whispered secrets of its separate parts the airy fragrance of the little phrase he loved. It was so distinctive. with its unique inimitable charm, that Swann felt as though some woman whom he had admired at a distance and had despaired of ever meeting had just turned up at a house where he was himself well known and welcome. Eventually, still purposeful and suggestive, and surrounded by the complex aura of its fragrance, it disappeared, leaving only its lingering charm reflected in Swann's smile. Now, though, he could find out the identity of this beloved stranger — they told him it was the andante from the Sonata for violin and piano by Vinteuil - he possessed it and could have it in his own home whenever he pleased, so as to learn its language and solve its mystery. And when the pianist had finished, the warmth with which Swann went over and thanked him made a very favourable impression on Mme Verdurin.

'He's a little charmer, isn't he?' she said to Swann. 'He knows a thing or two about that sonata, too, the little devil! You didn't know that a mere piano could achieve that sort of result, did you? I tell you, it sounds like anything but a piano! It has the same effect on me every time; I have the

impression I'm listening to an orchestra. Actually, it's nicer than an orchestra, it's got more body.'

The young pianist bowed to her and said, with a smiling emphasis on his words that suggested they were a witticism, 'You are most kind to me.' While Mme Verdurin was saying to her husband, 'Come on, give him a glass of orangeade. He really deserves it,' Swann was telling Odette of his long unrequited love for the little phrase. When Mme Verdurin called over to her, 'Odette, it looks from here as though somebody is saying nice things to you,' Odette replied, with a simplicity of manner that Swann thought delightful, 'Yes, extremely nice.'

Swann had begun asking people about this Vinteuil and his compositions, the period of his life when he had written the sonata, and, the thing that intrigued him most, what meaning the composer might have put into the little phrase. But he found that, of all these people who professed admiration for the composer (like Mme Verdurin who had greeted Swann's statement that the sonata was a thing of real beauty with the exclamation: 'But of course it's a thing of real beauty! And let me tell you, my good man, that it's not done to admit one has never heard of the Vinteuil sonata! One's not allowed to have never heard of it!'; or the painter who had added, 'Oh, ves, it's your sublime masterwork, all right! Mind you, I daresay it's not your popular conception of the great big breath-taking masterpiece. But with artistic people, there's no doubt it makes a big hit.') not one seemed ever to have wondered about such things, and they were incapable of satisfying his curiosity. In fact, a couple of more definite comments by Swann about his favourite phrase prompted Mme Verdurin to say, 'Goodness me, isn't that funny! I'd never noticed. But then I've never been one to go splitting hairs and breaking butterflies on the wheel, you know. We don't waste our time making mountains out of molehills hereabouts. It's not our style, you see.' At which Dr Cottard gaped at her with a sedulous craving for knowledge and an artless admiration of the fluency with which she commanded her stock of clichés.

Both he and his wife, however, shared the common sense one can sometimes find even among the uneducated, which ensured that they never expressed an opinion on or pretended to admire the sort of music that, in the privacy of their own home, they agreed was as unintelligible as the paintings of 'Mr Biche'. Since the general public's conception of what constitutes charm or grace, and even their impression of the phenomena of the natural world, are derived solely from the stereotypes of conventional art-forms with which they have had a long and gradual acquaintance, and since any original artist will begin by shunning those stereotypes, Dr and Mme Cottard, sharing that general conception, could find nothing in the Vinteuil sonata or in the painter's canvasses that corresponded to their notion of harmony in music or beauty in a painting. When the pianist performed that sonata, they had the impression that he was just banging about on the

keyboard, hitting random notes that were unconnected by the patterns to which they were accustomed — which was of course the case — and that the painter, similarly, threw haphazard colours onto his canvasses. If ever they managed to identify a shape in one of these paintings, it appeared to their eyes not only clumsy and uncouth (that is to say, having none of the elegance of the school of painting whose conceptions even determined the way they perceived people in the street) but completely unrelated to reality, as though Mr Biche was unaware that shoulders must have a particular shape or that women do not have mauve hair.

The group of 'regulars' about the piano had now dispersed, whereupon the Doctor sensed this was an apt opening for him and, while Mme Verdurin was adding a last remark on the subject of the Vinteuil sonata, in a sudden fit of resolution, like an inexperienced swimmer trying to improve by jumping in at the deep end but making sure there are not too many onlookers, he burst out with: 'In that case, he's what's called a musician of the first water, what!'

As for Swann, all he could discover about the Vinteuil sonata was that on its first appearance, not long before, it had created a very favourable impression among a certain avant-garde school, but that it was still completely unknown to any wider public.

'Actually, I do happen to know someone by the name of Vinteuil,' said Swann, reminded of the music teacher of my grandmother's sisters.

'Well, perhaps it's the same person,' exclaimed Mme Verdurin.

'Oh, goodness me, no!' laughed Swann. 'If you had set eyes on the man, you wouldn't so much as entertain the idea.'

'One can entertain an angel unawares, can't one?' interposed the Doctor.

'I suppose they might just be related,' Swann went on, 'which would be something of a pity. Still, no doubt a genius is allowed to have a silly old fool for a cousin. If that turned out to be the case, I confess I would go through any torture so as to have the old fool introduce me to the person who wrote that sonata — even the torture of dealing with the aforementioned silly old fool, which must be excruciating.'

According to the painter, Vinteuil was at that very moment seriously ill and Dr Potain feared for his life.

'What?' cried Mme Verdurin. 'Do you mean to tell me there are still people who don't mind being treated by Potain?'

'Now, now, Mme Verdurin!' said Cottard in a bantering tone. 'I'll have you know you're speaking of a colleague of mine, in fact one of my mentors, forsooth!'

The painter had heard that Vinteuil was actually on the brink of insanity. He maintained that there were hints of this in certain passages of the sonata itself, a remark which struck Swann not in any way as absurd, but which disquieted him — since a piece of pure music contains none of the logical connections of thought the dislocation of which in speech denotes madness,

the idea of insanity diagnosed in a sonata seemed as incomprehensible as insanity in a dog or a horse, and yet he knew instances of these had been observed.

'Oh, don't give me that about your mentors! You know ten times as much as he does, anyway,' said Mme Verdurin to Dr Cottard, in the tone of one who has the courage of her convictions and voices them openly in front of those she knows disagree with her. 'At least you don't kill off your patients!'

'Ah, but, you see, Ma'am, he is a member of the Academy,' replied Cottard ironically. 'And if a patient prefers to die by the hand of a Prince of Science... well, it's much more fashionable to be able to say, "I'm a patient of Potain's, you know".'

'Oh, it's more fashionable, is it?' said Mme Verdurin. 'So there are fashions in illness nowadays, is that it? Well, well, I wasn't aware of that.' Then, suddenly hiding her face in her hands, she crowed, 'Oh, you! You are a character! There I was, thinking it was a serious conversation and all the time you were just leading me up the garden path!'

M. Verdurin, feeling it was a bit much to burst out laughing on so meagre a pretext, contented himself with drawing on his pipe and thinking forlornly that, when it came to sociability, he would never be a match for his wife.

As Odette was taking her leave at the end of the evening, Mme Verdurin said to her, 'Do you know, that friend of yours is very much to our taste. He is natural and quite charming in his ways. And if any other friends you want to bring along are like him, then let us meet them.'

M. Verdurin did point out that Swann had been unappreciative of the pianist's aunt, but Mme Verdurin replied, 'Oh, he probably felt a bit out of his element. I mean, you wouldn't expect him to have Cottard's easy familiarity with our way of seeing things on his very first visit, would you? Cottard's been one of our regulars for years. The first time doesn't count; it's just for sizing people up. Odette, we've arranged that he'll join us for the show at the Châtelet tomorrow. Would you mind calling for him and giving him a lift?'

'No, he doesn't want me to.'

'Well, all right, please yourself! Just so long as he doesn't renegue on us at the last minute!'

To the great surprise of Mme Verdurin, he never once renegued. Wherever they happened to be, he would join them, whether in outlying restaurants, still relatively unfrequented because it was the wrong time of year, or more often at the theatre, of which Mme Verdurin was very fond; and one night at her house, when she said in his presence that a special pass would be very helpful for getting into premières and gala occasions without queuing for seats, and that it had been a great nuisance not to have one on the day of Gambetta's funeral,† Swann, who made a point of never dropping the names of his celebrated acquaintances but only ever mentioned † Gambetta was buried in January 1883 (JG).

those who were held in low esteem, whom he felt it verged on the unseemly to conceal, and among whom, after the manner of his friends of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, he had taken to including all contacts in the sphere of officialdom, made the following suggestion: 'Don't worry, I'll look after it. You should have it in time for the new production of the *Danichevs*, as I happen to be lunching at the Elysée Palace tomorrow with the Prefect of Police.'

'What do you mean, at the Elysée?' bellowed Dr Cottard.

'Well, with M. Grévy,' said Swann, in some embarrassment at the effect produced by his statement. The painter remarked, by way of a joke at Cottard's expense, 'Do you often have turns like that?'

Under normal circumstances, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say, 'Oh, I see! Oh, well, yes, quite', and would show no further sign of excitement. On this occasion, however, Swann's words did not have the usual tranquillising effect but raised to fever pitch the Doctor's astonishment that a man who sat at the same table as himself, a man undistinguished by official functions or any sort of achievement, could actually be on visiting terms with the President of the Republic!

'What do you mean, M. Grévy? Do you know M. Grévy?' he asked Swann, with the stupid incredulous look of the sentry outside the Palace who, hearing a stranger ask to be taken to the President of the Republic and 'smelling a rat', as the newspapers say, assures the lunatic that he will be granted an immediate audience and directs him to the barracks' medical officer. To which, in an attempt to gloss over what Cottard seemed to think was a flagrant impropriety in his being acquainted with the Head of State, Swann replied, 'Well, I have some slight acquaintance with him. We have mutual friends' — he did not dare admit this referred to the Prince of Wales — 'and anyway, he's not very choosy about the people he invites, you know. It's really a bit of a bore to go to one of his luncheons. Not that they're all that lavish. Never more than eight guests at a time, actually.'

Whereupon Cottard, on the strength of this explanation by Swann, formed the opinion that an invitation to lunch with the President was a thing of such little worth that anyone at all could have one, but that no one really wanted one. And from then on, he found nothing surprising in the fact that Swann had as much right as the next man to be invited to the Elysée; he felt, if anything, rather sorry for him, for having to go to luncheon-parties which, according to the guests themselves, were a bit of a bore, and said, 'I see. Well, that's fine, then,' in the tone of a customs official whose mistrust of you evaporates once you have given him a straightforward declaration, who stamps his seal on your baggage and lets you pass without insisting you open it.

'Yes, I can well believe those official luncheon-parties must be deadly dull,' said Mme Verdurin, who viewed the President of the Republic as an especially redoubtable 'bore', in that he had at his disposal powers of attractiveness and a potential for enforcement of them which, had they been directed at her regulars, would have been capable of making them renegue. 'It's really very noble of you to go to them. I'm told he's as deaf as a post and eats with his fingers.'

'Is that so? Well, I'm sure they can't be much fun to go to,' said the Doctor with a touch of commiseration in his tone. Then, remembering Swann's mention of eight guests at a time, he asked quickly, more to fulfil his philological duty than to satisfy idle curiosity, 'Are they what are known as intimate luncheon-parties?'

It turned out that neither Swann's self-effacement nor the spitefulness of Mme Verdurin could prevail against the glamour that Cottard saw in the figure of the President of the Republic and he would inquire with great interest at each dinner-party, 'Shall we be seeing M. Swann tonight? He's a personal acquaintance of M. Grévy's. Does that mean he's what's known as a man-about-town?' He even presented Swann with an invitation-card for the annual dentistry exhibition: 'That will let you in plus anyone who's with you, but they don't let dogs in. I mention that because, you see, there have been occasions on which friends of mine were unaware of it and it upset their apple-cart a bit.'

M. Verdurin made a mental note of the unfavourable impression produced on his wife by their discovery that Swann had highly placed connections which he had kept to himself.

Whenever there was no extra-mural activity arranged for the little clan, Swann would join them at the Verdurins' house, making a point of turning up latish in the evening and, despite Odette's repeated suggestions, rarely being there for dinner.

'I could have dinner with you, just the two of us, if you would prefer,' Odette would say.

'But what about Mme Verdurin?'

'Oh, that wouldn't be a problem. I would just tell her my dress wasn't ready or that my cab was late. It's not difficult to think up that sort of thing, you know.'

'You are sweet.'

But Swann had the idea that it would be a good thing for him never to agree to see Odette on any day until after dinner and that, if she came to realize from this that there were other sorts of enjoyment which he preferred to her company, her liking for him would be slow to fade. In any case, since he very much preferred to Odette's type of beauty that of a young workinggirl, as fresh and plump as a full-blown rose, to whom he had taken a fancy, he enjoyed spending the earlier part of the evening with her, knowing he could see Odette later on. It was for these same reasons that he would never allow Odette to call for him on her way to the Verdurins'. His working-lass would stand on a certain street-corner not far from his house and wait for him until Rémi his coachman, who was looking out for her, stopped to pick

her up; and she would stay in Swann's arms until the carriage drew up outside the Verdurins' house. As he entered the drawing-room, where Mme Verdurin would point to the roses he had sent her that morning and say, 'You deserve a good scolding,' then usher him to a seat beside Odette, the pianist would be playing, just for the two of them, the little phrase by Vinteuil which served so to speak as the national anthem of their love.

The pianist would begin at the sustained tremolos of the violin part, which for a few bars are heard unaccompanied and occupy the whole foreground of the piece, before seeming suddenly to stand aside and give access, as in those paintings by Pieter de Hooch which gain added depth and distance through the narrow inset of an open doorway, to the faint far-away strains of the little phrase which came dancing in, tinged to a different colour by being seen through a hazy bloom of light, pastoral, incongruous, episodic and belonging to another world. It would pass by, in its timeless simplicity, distributing its graciousness about the room, always showing the same indescribable smile, in which by now Swann thought he could detect a touch of disenchantment. It seemed aware of how pointless was the happiness towards which it was showing the way. In its jaunty gracefulness there was a hint of something over and done with, a suggestion of the indifference that comes after regret. But this did not matter to him, since he considered the little phrase less as what it was in itself - what it might express for a composer writing it down in total ignorance of himself and Odette, or for all the people who would listen to it in centuries to come than as what it now stood for: a pledge and a memento of his love, which even for the Verdurins or the young pianist always brought to mind at the same moment Odette and himself, joined together. In fact, he had gone so far as to give in to Odette's capricious request that he abandon his plan to have some performer play the whole sonata for him, and so this passage was still the only part of it with which he was familiar. She had said, 'Why bother with the rest of it? That's our piece.' As the little phrase appeared and disappeared, so close and yet so inaccessible, he even found it painful to think that it was speaking to himself and Odette, but without knowing them personally; and he almost regretted the fact that it had its own intrinsic unchanging meaning and beauty, independent of them, in the way that a gift of jewellery or even the letters written by a loved one may make one find fault with the quality of the stones or the everydayness of the words used. because they are not exclusively composed of the essence of a fleeting relationship and one unique individual.

It often happened that he stayed so long with his working-girl before going on to the Verdurins' that the pianist had hardly time to play the little phrase before Swann realised that Odette would very soon have to go home. He would drive her to the front door of her smart little house in the Rue La Pérouse, behind the Arc de Triomphe. It may have been because of this custom, and so as not to monopolize her, that he sacrificed the less essential

pleasures of seeing her earlier in the evening and arriving with her at the Verdurins' to the enjoyment of his accepted right to leave with her, a right which he saw as much more important, since it seemed to ensure that once he had left her for the night no one else would see her, come between them or disturb the thoughts of him that remained with her.

And so she went home each night in Swann's carriage. On one of these evenings, she had just got out and Swann was saying good-night, when she turned suddenly to the little garden in front of her house and picked one of the very last chrysanthemums, which she gave to him before he left. All the way home, he held it pressed against his lips; and some days later, when the flower had withered, he stored it away with care in his desk.

At night, he never went into the house. In fact, he had only set foot in it on two occasions, for the purpose of participating in a ritual of paramount importance for Odette: 'having afternoon tea'. On each occasion, the impression of cosy mysteries he had received from the flowers and warmth that welcomed him as he went in, had been enhanced by the short, deserted, out-of-the-way streets he had just traversed (almost all of them lined by terraces of detached houses, their monotony broken unexpectedly here and there by some wretched lean-to, a squalid historical memento of the period when this part of Paris was still a place of sinister repute), the snow still lying in the front garden and on trees, the whole unkempt appearance of winter and the proximity of the natural open-air world.

A straight flight of stairs took him from the ground floor, which was above street-level (and where Odette's bedroom, on the left, overlooked a little back street running parallel to the front one), led him up between walls painted in sombre colours and festooned with Oriental draperies, strings of Turkish beads and a large Japanese lantern hanging from a fine silk cord actually a gas-lamp in disguise, so as not to deprive visitors of the latest conveniences of Western civilization — and brought him to her sittingroom and smaller boudoir. One entered these two rooms through a narrow hall, the whole side-wall of which was patterned by a gold-painted gardentrellis and flanked by a long flower-box, in which stood, as though in a green-house, a row of large chrysanthemums, still quite rare in those days, but much less impressive than the magnificent blooms that horticulturists were later to develop. The fad for these flowers, which had begun the previous year, Swann found irritating, but on setting foot in this hall he had been pleased to see the gloom of it glowing with the fragrant beams of pink, flame and white from those brief stars that light up in the grey days. Odette had welcomed him wearing a house-coat of pink silk that left her arms and throat bare. She had sat him down by her side in one of the mysterious alcoves arranged in the bays of the sitting-room and concealed by huge palm-trees standing in Chinese pot-covers or by screens stuck with photographs, fans and ribbons tied in bows. She had said, 'You're not comfortable sitting like that. Just a minute, I'll fix you properly.' And with a

conceited little laugh that suggested these attentions were inspired by thoughtfulness unique to herself, behind his head and under his feet she had fitted Japanese silk cushions which she plumped for him as though they were riches to be lavished on him regardless of their value. However, when the time came for the footman to bring in all the different lamps one by one and set them out, almost all of them inside Chinese vases, and they were burning singly or in pairs, spaced out about the room on separate tables and whatnots as though on altars, turning the gloom of that late afternoon from a winter nightfall back into a pinker, more homely but unfading sunset glow and perhaps making some lovelorn youth in the street outside pause and yearn towards the suggestive stranger whose life was revealed yet concealed by the illuminated windows, she had kept a stern eye on the servant to make sure he placed each of them in its time-honoured spot. For she believed that if any one of them was out of place, the whole effect of her sitting-room would be spoiled and the lighting would be all wrong for her portrait on its sloping easel draped with plush. So she paid fervent attention to every move made by this uncouth fellow and actually gave him a sharp dressing-down for having passed too close to a pair of ornamental flower-stands which she always made a point of dusting herself, in case they might get damaged, and which she now went over to look at, to make sure the man had not chipped them. 'Nice' was how she described the shapes of all her Oriental knickknacks, and her orchids, especially the cattleyas, which along with chrysanthemums were her favourite flowers, because they had the great merit of looking not like flowers, but as though fashioned out of silk or satin. 'See that one there. It looks as though it's been cut out of the lining of my cloak,' she said to Swann, pointing at an orchid; and with a suggestion in her tone of real esteem for a flower that was so chic, this elegant and unexpected sister given to her by Nature, which though remote from her on the scale of living creatures was a thing of delicate refinement and more deserving of being admitted to her drawing-room than many women. As she took him round and showed him flame-tongued dragons enameled on vases or embroidered on to screens, the petals of a cluster of orchids, or a dromedary in niello-worked silver, its eye-sockets set with rubies, standing on the mantelpiece beside a toad carved out of jade, she pretended to be frightened at the ferocity of the monsters or amused at their odd appearance, to be scandalized at the immodesty of the open flowers and to harbour an invincible desire to lean down and kiss the dromedary and the toad, which she called 'her poppets'. These affectations were in complete contrast with the sincerity of certain devotions which she practised, worshipping in particular Notre-Dame-de-Laghet who, when Odette was living in Nice, had cured her of a deadly disease and a golden medal of whom she wore on her person at all times, which she credited with boundless powers. Odette made Swann some tea, asking him, 'Lemon or cream?' to which, when he had said, 'Cream, please,' she added with a laugh, 'Just a soupçon!' When he

said how excellent it was, she went on, 'You see, I know what you like.' Indeed, this afternoon tea had seemed as delightful to Swann as it did to her; and, since love is always in such need of self-justification and an assurance of lasting that it seeks these in pleasures which, without it, would never have become pleasures and which cease being pleasures when love itself ceases, at seven o'clock when he had left her to go home and dress for the evening, the whole way home in his carriage he was full of irrepressible happiness at the afternoon's events and kept saving to himself, 'How pleasant it would be to have a little lady like that who could always be relied on to produce that rarity — a good cup of tea!' An hour later, he received a message from Odette and instantly recognized her large handwriting with its attempt at English formality, giving a semblance of discipline to otherwise shapeless letters in which eyes less biassed than his own might have read mental untidiness, educational deficiencies, a lack of frankness and a weak will. He had left his cigarette-case at her house — A pity it wasn't your heart you left behind - I wouldn't have let you have it back.

His second afternoon visit to her may have been more significant. Driving to her house that day, he imagined how she would be, as always when he was about to see her - in order to believe she had a pretty face, he always had to reduce her cheeks, which were often sallow and sometimes covered in little red spots, to the fresh pink area of the cheekbones, and he was saddened by this seeming proof of the inaccessibility of the Ideal and the inevitable mediocrity of happiness. He had brought an etching which she had expressed a desire to see. She was a little out of sorts; she was wearing a loose tea-gown of mauve crêpe de Chine and holding a richly embroidered material about her chest and shoulders like a cape. As she stood beside him, her long hair flowing loose down her cheeks, bending one leg in a pose faintly reminiscent of a ballerina, so as to lean forward without discomfort, tilting her head to look down at the etching with her great eyes which seemed so tired and sulky when she was dejected, Swann was suddenly taken with her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, to be seen in one of the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. He had always had this quirk of liking to find in the works of old masters not just the general features of everyday reality, but even things which seem incapable of lending themselves to generalization, such as the unique facial features of individuals known to one — thus, in the forms of a bust of Doge Loredano by Antonio Rizzo, he saw the prominent cheekbones and slanting eyebrows, the whole living image of his coachman Rémi; or in the colours of a Ghirlandaio, the nose of M. de Palancy; or in a Tintoretto portrait, Dr du Boulbon with his whiskers encroaching right on to the fleshy part of the cheek, the break in the line of his nose, his piercing eye and flushed swollen eyelids. It may have been that there lurked in Swann a lingering regret at the fact that he had restricted his existence to a round of social duties and small talk, and that he inferred the granting of some sort of gracious forgiveness to

himself by great artists from this proof that they too had once taken pleasure in the contemplation of such faces and incorporated them into their work, giving it its vital and unmistakable stamp of truth and its breath of modernity; or perhaps he had let himself be so infected by the frivolous ways of society people that he felt an urge to rejuvenate old paintings by reading into them these anachronistic references to named persons in his own circle of acquaintances. Or else, it may even have been that he had retained enough of the artistic temper for these individual features to cause him pleasure by taking on a wider applicability, whenever he noticed them, floating free, in this similarity between a much older portrait and the modern original who had not sat for it. Whatever the reason, (and possibly because the richness of impressions which he had recently been experiencing, albeit deriving from a love of music, had actually enhanced his enjoyment of painting) there was an unwonted depth to the pleasure he felt - and which was to have a lasting effect on Swann's life — at the moment when he noticed the resemblance between Odette and the Zipporah of Sandro di Mariano, who is better known nowadays, alas, under the sobriquet which suggests, rather than the real core of his work, the trite and misleading notion of it that has been popularized: Botticelli. From then on, his response to Odette's face ignored the finer or coarser texture of her cheeks and the soft pink touch of them that his lips expected to encounter if ever he should dare kiss her, and he saw in it only an enciphered pattern made of sinuous lines of elusive beauty, which his eyes decoded, tracing the intricacies of its curves, linking the sweep of the neck to the convolutions of the hair and the crescents of the eyelids, as though he was contemplating a portrait of her which made manifest and intelligible the archetype of which she was an exemplar.

He stood there looking at her, at the fragment of the fresco visible in her face and body, and from then on he was to look for that same detail in her whenever he was with her or even if he was only thinking about her; and although his fondness for the masterpiece of the Florentine was probably due to the fact that he could gaze on it in Odette, her very resemblance to it added to her own beauty and made her more precious to Swann. It troubled him to think he had hitherto misjudged the beauty of a creature who would have seemed adorable to the great Sandro, and he was flattered by the thought that the enjoyment he found in being with Odette was endorsed by his own aesthetic principles. He reflected that, by linking the thought of Odette to his ideal of happiness, he had not in fact resigned himself to making do with a second-best, as he had hitherto believed, since she was now capable of satisfying the most refined of his artistic tastes. In so doing, he to notice that, for all that, Odette was still not a woman who matched his desires, since these had invariably been a contradiction of his aesthetic preferences. The expression 'a Florentine masterpiece' was of inestimable value to him in this - like a title, it enabled him to bring Odette into an imaginary realm from which she had previously been excluded and in which

she now became invested with nobility. And whereas the strictly carnal impression he had had of her as a woman had merely revived all his ingrained misgivings about the quality of her face and body and the whole nature of her type of beauty, thus sapping his love for her, now that he could stand on the grounds of his tried and tested aesthetic values, all his doubts were abolished and his love for her was assured. In addition to this, her kiss and the right of bodily enjoyment of her, which would have seemed natural and mediocre if granted by a mere person of flawed beauty, now seemed to promise him supernatural delights if they were to come as the climax to the devout appreciation of a work of art.

Whenever he was tempted to regret the fact that for months past he had devoted all his time to being with Odette, he would remind himself that it was quite reasonable to give a great deal of one's time to an invaluable masterwork, which had been created for once in a singularly delectable and distinctive material, this unexampled specimen on which he either gazed with the humility, the spirituality and the disinterest of the artist, or gloated with the pride, the self-conceit and the sensuality of the collector.

On his desk, like a photograph of Odette, he stood a reproduction of Jethro's daughter. He would sit there, lost in admiration of the great eyes, the finely moulded structure of the face with its suggestion of a less than perfect complexion, the wonder of the wavy hair down her weary cheeks; and, adapting his previous concept of aesthetic perfection to the idea of a real woman, he translated it into physical attractions which he was overjoyed to see combined in a person whom he might come to possess. Now that he had made the acquaintance, in the flesh, of the original of Jethro's daughter, the unfocussed sympathy that draws us to a masterpiece as we look at it became transformed into a definite sensual desire for her, which took the place of the desire that the person of Odette had not originally given him. After he had gazed at length on this reproduction of a Botticelli, his thoughts would turn to his own private Botticelli, even more lovely to his eyes, and as he took hold of the picture of Zipporah and brought it closer to his face, he imagined it was Odette he was clasping to him.

He came to think up ways of preventing not only Odette from tiring of him, but, on occasion, himself from tiring of her; the feeling that Odette, now that there was no impediment to her seeing him as frequently as possible, never had much to say for herself, made him fear that the monotony, the apparently definitive routines and a certain triteness that now characterized her ways with him whenever they were together, might eventually stifle his romantic hope that the day would come when she must speak of her love for him, an expectation that had been enough to make him fall in love with her in the first place, and still sufficed to keep him in love. So, with the aim of bringing about a refreshing change in Odette's static attitudes towards him, which he felt could make him tire of her, he would dash off a letter, full of a pretence of disappointment and vexation, and have

Rémi deliver it to her before dinner. He was aware that she would be alarmed at this, that it would draw a reply from her, and he lived in the hope that her sudden fear of losing him might wring from her heart the impulsive words she had never yet uttered — a device which had, in fact, prompted the most affectionate letters he had ever received from her, such as the one she sent to him by hand one lunch-time from the Maison Dorée restaurant (it was the day of the 'Paris-Murcia Luncheon'† held in aid of the victims of the Murcian floods), beginning with the words, My Dear Charles, my hand is trembling so much that I can hardly write, and which he had locked away in the drawer where he kept her withered chrysanthemum. Or else, if she had not had time to write to him, he hoped that as soon as he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come quickly over to him and say, 'I must talk to you,' and that then his curiosity would be satisfied as he read from her expression and her words all the feelings for him which until then she had kept concealed in her own heart.

Even before reaching the Verdurins' house, at the first glimpse of their tall lamplit windows on which the shutters were never closed, he would be moved by the thought of the charming creature who would soon bloom and dazzle in that golden glow. Sometimes the shapes of guests would stand out flat and black against the light, as though on a screen, looking like the little pictures fitted onto the panels of a lampshade and separated from one another by other transparent panels. Swann would try to identify the silhouette of Odette. And as soon as he went inside, his eyes, unknown to himself, would start shining with such joy that M. Verdurin would say to the painter, 'Looks as though things are warming up, what?' For Odette's presence in the house added to it something that was lacking from all the other houses which Swann frequented: a kind of sensory network, a nervous system extending its fibrils throughout every room in the place and picking up constant tremors of excitement that it conveyed to his heart.

Through its everyday workings as a social unit, the 'little clan' automatically arranged for Swann's daily meetings with Odette and thus enabled him either to affect indifference on the subject of whether he would see her or not, or even to feign a desire not to see her at all, a desire which he was in little danger of having fulfilled, since, whatever he might have written to her earlier in the day, he was bound to be with her that evening and see her home in his carriage.

However, there came a night when the return home by carriage with Odette struck him as irksome in its inevitability and, so as to delay the moment of ariving at the Verdurins', he went as far as the Bois de Boulogne with his working-lass, eventually turning up so late that Odette, in the belief that he was not coming, had already left. On discovering that she was not there, Swann felt a sudden ache, a pang of dread at the possibility of being deprived of a pleasure the worth of which he had just realized for the very † The fête de Paris-Murcie was held on 18 December 1879 (JG).

first time, since until that moment he had always been guaranteed its enjoyment whenever he wished (a guarantee which diminishes all our pleasures and may even completely prevent us from registering their intensity).

'Did you see his face when he realized she wasn't here?' M. Verdurin asked his wife. 'If you ask me, he's hooked!'

'What face, whose face?' demanded Dr Cottard who, having been out for a brief visit to a patient, had just come back to fetch his wife and did not know who was being spoken of.

'What, didn't you bump into our sleek and graceful Swann on the way in?'

'No, no. Did Swann come, then?'

'Well, in a manner of speaking. But it was a very uneasy Swann, a very agitated Swann. You see, Odette had already left.'

'Do you mean she "owns the soft impeachment"? Or that he has "had his wicked way" with her?' asked the Doctor, cautiously testing out the meaning of these expressions.

'Of course not,' replied Mme Verdurin. 'There's nothing between them. And, between you and me, I don't mind telling you I think she's wasting a golden opportunity and making a complete fool of herself, into the bargain.'

'Now, now, now,' said M. Verdurin, 'how can you be so sure there's nothing between them? I mean, we haven't exactly been there to see for ourselves what's going on, have we?'

'If there was anything going on, I should be the first to be told!' retorted Mme Verdurin. 'I promise you, she has no little secrets from me! I've told her that since she's not with anyone else at present, she should go ahead and sleep with him. And she says she can't, although she really does fancy him, but he's so shy with her, and that just puts her off. And anyway, she says it's not that sort of love, it's the ideal-superior-being sort of thing and she doesn't want to debase her platonic feelings for him. You know the kind of thing. Anyway, I'm sure it would do her the world of good.'

'I beg to differ,' said her husband. 'The gent in question is not completely to my taste. I'd say he puts it on a bit.'

At this, Mme Verdurin froze and showed a blank expression, as though she had been turned into a statue, by which device she was able to seem not to have heard the insufferable expression 'putting it on', with its implication that a person could 'put it over on them', which would mean that person was 'better than they were'.

'Well, anyway,' M. Verdurin went on ironically, 'if there is nothing between them, I'm sure it's not because the gent in question thinks she's a paragon of maidenly virtue. Still, you never know, he does seem to think she's quite bright. I don't know whether you heard the way he blethered on at her the other night about the Vinteuil sonata. I mean, I'm fond of Odette

and all that, but you'd have to be a complete nincompoop to bother giving her lessons in aesthetic theory!'

'Oh, I say, stop being so nasty about Odette,' said Mme Verdurin, in a babyish tone. 'She's a pet.'

'Well, nobody's saying she's not a pet, my dear. And nobody's being nasty about her. We're just saying she's no genius and not quite the saintly innocent. Come to think of it,' he added to the painter, 'you're pretty pleased she's not the model of virtue, aren't you? If she was, she might not be such a pet, what!'

As Swann was crossing the landing on his way out, the butler had caught up with him — not having been about at the time of Swann's arrival he had been unable to pass on the message Odette had left with him all of an hour before, to the effect that if Swann did eventually turn up he could probably find her at Prévost's, where she might go for a cup of chocolate on the way home. Swann set off for Prévost's, but his carriage was frequently blocked by others or stopped by people crossing the street; and he would not have minded running down these unbearable nuisances if only he could have been sure that the policeman with his notebook would not delay him longer than the crossing pedestrians. He sat counting the time it was taking, adding a few seconds to each minute so as to be sure he was not cutting them short and thus giving himself too much hope of arriving in time to find Odette still there. Then, at a certain moment, like a man suffering from a fever who regains consciousness after a delirious sleep and recognizes the absurdity of the figments he has just been turning over in his dreams without realizing he was not in his right mind, Swann suddenly became aware of the strangeness of the notions he had been harbouring ever since being told at the Verdurins' that Odette had gone, and of the unwonted ache that throbbed somewhere in him, which he noticed now as though he had just woken up. For goodness sake, all this upset and anxiety just because he wouldn't see Odette until tomorrow! The very thing he had been hoping for, not an hour before, as he drove to Mme Verdurin's! Yet now, back in that same carriage, being driven to Prévost's, he could not avoid the conclusion that he had changed and that he was no longer alone, that something new was there with him, clinging to him, a part of him, something he might never be able to be rid of, something he would have to treat with tact and circumspection, as one treats a superior or copes with an illness. Despite which, his own life, now that he felt this new presence in himself, seemed somehow more interesting. It barely occurred to him that if it actually took place, this encounter with Odette at Prévost's (the anticipation of which so devastated and scorched the earth of the moments before it that he could not scratch together an idea or even a memory to give refuge and rest to his mind) would probably, like all his previous encounters with her, not amount to very much; and that as on every other evening, as soon as he was with her, glancing furtively at her changing face then quickly away, in case she should

read a hint of desire in his eyes and thus cease believing in his disinterestedness, he would be incapable of thinking about her because his mind, busy searching for excuses that could justify his not taking leave of her forthwith and could also enable him to make sure, with a show of nonchalance, of seeing her again next day at the Verdurin's, would be concentrating on ways of prolonging for the present moment and ensuring for just one more day the dissatisfactions and the torment derived from the pointless presence of a woman whom he constantly approached but never dared embrace.

She was not to be found at Prévost's and he resolved to search for her in every restaurant along the boulevards. To save time, while he was looking in some of them, he sent off his coachman Rémi (alias the Doge Loredano by Rizzo) to look in others; then, not having found Odette anywhere, he waited at a pre-arranged spot for him to return. There was no sign of the carriage and Swann stood there imagining the coming moment as one when Rémi would say, 'The lady is here, sir,' but also as its alternative when Rémi would say, 'There was no sign of the lady in any of those cafés, sir.' The end of the evening loomed before him, as a single yet double possibility, to be decided either by the discovery of Odette, which would end his anguish, or else by the forced abandonment of the search for her and his resignation to the necessity of going home for the night without having seen her.

The coach appeared, and as it pulled up in front of him, Swann said to Remi, not 'Did you find her?' but, 'Remind me to order firewood tomorrow. The stocks must be running low.' He may have felt that, if Rémi had already come across Odette in one of the cafes, where she might even now be waiting for him to come and join her, then the unhappy ending to the evening was already cancelled by this opening stage of the happy ending, and there was now no need for him to rush to meet a fulfilment that was waiting somewhere safe and sound for him, incapable of absconding again. But there was also a certain habitual inertia in his reaction - Swann was prone to a lack of emotional agility, similar to the physical sluggishness of people who, when they are obliged to avoid a collision, snatch a garment away from a naked flame or perform any such action of urgency, take their time and pause for a moment in their present position, as though to gather impetus or steady themselves. And if the coachman had interrupted to say, 'The lady is here, sir,' he might well have replied, 'Oh, yes, of course! That errand I sent you on! Well, well! Is that so?' and then might have gone on to finish what he had been saying about the firewood, with the aim of concealing from Rémi the emotional state he had been in, giving himself the time to get over his heartache and preparing himself for joy.

However, what Rémi had to say was that he had seen no sign of the lady anywhere, to which, in his capacity as a respected old family servant, he appended a word of advice: 'Looks as though you had better be off home, then, sir.' But the show of indifference that Swann had recently found so easy (even though the answer Rémi was bringing him was by then decided and totally unalterable) gave way now that Rémi was suggesting he abandon his hopes and his hunt for Odette.

'What? Quite out of the question!' he exclaimed. 'It is essential that we find the lady. It's a matter of the greatest urgency. If we don't manage to meet tonight, she will be extremely put out, not to say very hurt, because of a business matter we must discuss.'

'Well, I don't see how the lady could be hurt, sir,' said Rémi, 'seeing as how it was her that left before you arrived and said she'd be at Prévost's and she isn't even there.'

By now, lights were being turned off in restaurants and, under the trees along the boulevards, passers-by were becoming fewer, wandering in the strange gloom, barely recognizable as people. Sometimes Swann was startled by the forms of women who accosted him, murmured in his ear and asked to be taken home for the night. He anxiously examined each of these indeterminate figures as though he was wandering among the shades of the dead in the realms of darkness, looking for a lost Eurydice.

Of all the means by which love is created, of all the ways in which the contagion of this sacred evil is spread, one of the most effective is this great breath of agitation that can sweep through one's being. When that happens, the die is cast, and the person in whose company we have been taking pleasure will become the one we love. It is not even necessary that we should like such a person more than others — or even as much as others. All it requires is that one's liking for that individual becomes an exclusive thing. And this requirement is satisfied when the sudden lack of that person deprives one of the constant pleasure promised by their company, in place of which one is filled with a fretful craving for that very person, a craving which is absurd and which the laws governing this life render impossible to fulfil and difficult to cure: that senseless painful craving to possess another person.

Swann told Rémi to drive him to the few restaurants they had not yet inspected. The possibility of a happy outcome to the search was the only one he had in fact contemplated with equanimity; and now he no longer bothered to conceal his anxiety and the fact that the urgency to find her was all on his side; he even promised Rémi a bonus if they were successful, as though, by fostering in his coachman a will to succeed that would complement his own desire to find her, he could make it still possible for Odette (in case she had already gone home to bed) to be found in one of the boulevard restaurants. So he went along as far as the Maison Dorée, actually looked twice into Tortoni's and, still without seeing a trace of her, had just come out of the Café Anglais, striding wildly back to his carriage which stood waiting for him at the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens, when he collided with someone coming from the opposite direction — it was Odette.

She explained later that there had been no room left at Prévost's and so she had gone on to the Maison Dorée, had supper, sitting in one of the recesses, where he must have overlooked her, and was now walking back to her waiting cab.

His appearance was so unexpected that she had given a start of alarm. For his part, Swann had been scouring Paris not because he still thought it possible to track her down, but because the idea of giving up his quest was too cruel. But the joy which his mind had incessantly assured him would be denied him that night, now seemed all the more real; since he had had no part in its preparation by foreseeing the likely circumstances in which it might come to pass, it remained something external to him; he had no need to lend it a colouring of truthfulness from his mind, for it shone with the brilliant rays of its own truth, which beamed towards him, melted like the lingering mists of a dream the loneliness he had been dreading and allowed his blissful mood to bask, untroubled by thought, in the reassurance of its warmth and light, as a traveller who reaches the sparkling Mediterranean seaboard on a day of radiant sunshine loses a clear awareness of the countryside through which he has just passed and, instead of actively looking about, is content to let his passive eyes be dazzled by the reflections from the dense luminous blue of the water.

He joined her in the cab and told his own coachman to follow them.

In her hand she was holding a bunch of cattleyas and Swann could see that, under her lace mantilla, her hair was set with blooms of the same orchid attached to a plume of swan's feathers. Beneath the lace which draped her shoulders, she was wearing flowing black velvet, the overskirt folded back to uncover a broad triangle of undergown in white ribbed silk, and with another panel of white silk in the wide low-cut neckline, out of which grew more cattleyas. She had hardly recovered from the shock of meeting Swann when something in the street made the horse shy. Inside the cab, they were roughly jolted, she exclaimed in fright, then sat there trembling and breathless.

'It's all right,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.'

He had put his arm about her shoulders, steadying her against him: 'Now, whatever you do, you mustn't say a thing. Just nod or shake your head until you've got your breath back. Do you mind if I just fix these flowers here in your bodice? They've been knocked right out of place by that nasty jolt. I wouldn't want you to lose them, so I'll just push them back in a bit.'

Odette, unused to being treated by men with such circumspection, said with a smile, 'Don't worry. I don't mind a bit.'

Swann, disconcerted by her answer and possibly also hoping to colour his subterfuge with sincerity, or even tempted to believe what he was saying, exclaimed, 'No, no, not a word! You'll just get all out of breath again. We can manage perfectly with sign-language, I'll understand your meaning without the slightest difficulty. Now, are you sure you really don't mind?

Goodness, look at that, there's a drop of . . . it looks like pollen sprinkled on you. Would you mind if I just brushed it away with my hand? I'm not leaning too heavily on you, am I, or being too rough? I hope I'm not tickling you. It's just that I don't want to touch the velvet of your dress, in case I spoil the look of it. But it's really essential to set them straight again, or they might fall out. So if I just push them back in, like this. Now, are you quite sure this doesn't bother you? And what if I just have a little sniff of them now to see if they really have no perfume, would that upset you? I've never smelt one, do you know that? You don't mind? Honestly?'

Still smiling, she gave a slight shrug, as though to say, 'This is ridiculous! You can see perfectly well I like it!'

His other hand he held to her cheek, and she gazed at him, her eyes full of the yearning gravity of the women he thought she resembled in canvasses by the Florentine master — like theirs, her shining eyes, large and elongated, seemed to brim at the edge of her lids and be on the point of trickling down her face like two large tears. She was holding her head tilted to one side, as Botticelli's women all do, whether in the scenes from pagan antiquity or in the religious paintings. Her whole attitude, most likely a habitual one with her, which she knew was appropriate to such moments and made sure of remembering to adopt, suggested she was exerting all her strength so as to restrain the impulse of her face, which seemed drawn to Swann's by some invisible power. It was Swann himself who, for a moment, held her face away from his in both hands, before it dropped, seemingly despite her best efforts, onto his lips. In that moment, Swann had been trying to give his mind the time it needed to be fully present, to see for itself the dream it had cherished so long and to be a witness to the scene where that dream was coming true, like a godmother invited to share in the success of a child of whom she has always been very fond. He may also have been gazing at this face with the eyes of the traveller who looks with longing at a landscape he is about to leave and which he knows he will never see again, for it was a face that he was seeing for the last time — Odette as she was before he slept with her, before he had so much as kissed her.

Despite having ended the night in her bed because he had begun it with the rearrangement of her cattleyas, he was still so diffident with her that on the following evenings, either daunted by the possibility of her being upset, or reluctant to let it appear in retrospect that he had only been play-acting that first time, or else because he lacked the daring to try any more intimate a ploy than the flower-arranging (which he could always resort to again, since he had already got away with it once), he fell back on the same stratagem. If she happened to be wearing cattleyas on her dress, he would say, 'Dear me, what a pity the cattleyas don't need rearranging tonight! They haven't been knocked about like the other night, have they? Mind you, this one here does look as though it needs some attention. Can I just see if they've got any more perfume than those other ones?' Or else, if she was not wearing any of the

flowers: 'Goodness me! No cattleyas this evening! What about my little flower-arrangements?' Thus, for some time there was no change to the sequence of actions that he had followed on that first night, and the diffident explorations of her bosom by hand and mouth with which he had begun, remained the first step he would take in their subsequent love-play; and long afterwards, at a time when the flower-arranging, or rather the ritualized pantomime of flower-arranging, had long been abandoned, the expression 'do the cattlevas' lived on in their speech as a survival of that habit, now outgrown, a mere item of vocabulary which they would use, without thinking, to refer to the act of physical possession — in which, of course, one does not possess anything. And it is just possible that this special way of saving 'make love' did not mean exactly the same thing as its apparent synonyms. However blasé a man may profess to be about women, seeing in his sexual enjoyment of many different ones an identical and predictable experience, he can still discover a novel kind of pleasure if he has to deal with a woman who is (or whom he believes to be) so virtuous that he can only achieve his purpose by taking advantage of some chance circumstance in their relationship, much as Swann had done that first time by rearranging Odette's cattleyas. On that occasion, he had hoped against hope, as he touched her flowers, that what would eventually emerge from this cluster of broad purple petals would be sexual intimacy with this woman, although, as he told himself the while, Odette could have no inkling of this as long as she was deceived by his little ruse; and the pleasure he had already begun to experience, which Odette only tolerated, he thought, because she had not recognized it for what it was, seemed to him for that very reason a mode of pleasure that had never before existed — as it may have seemed to the very first man who ever enjoyed it among the flowers of the earthly paradise — a mode of pleasure that he was striving actually to create as a unique and entirely unprecedented thing; and this may have been the suggestion retained by the special name he gave to it.

Every evening from then on, when he took her home, he had to go in with her; and later, she would often come back out with him, wearing a dressing-gown, and see him right to his waiting carriage, where she would kiss him in full view of the coachman and say, 'Well, why should I care what people think?' On evenings when he stayed away from the Verdurins' salon (which sometimes happened, now that he could see her without going there) or on the less and less frequent occasions when he spent the evening in some more fashionable company, she told him to be sure of dropping in on her, at whatever time of the night, on his way home. It was springtime, a springtime of crisp, clean, icy-cold weather. He would leave a party, climb into his victoria, spread the rug about his legs and explain to the friends who were leaving at the same moment and asking him to go on somewhere else with them that he could not manage it that night as he was expected elsewhere; and then the coachman, knowing where he was to drive to, would

set the horses off at a canter. These friends were surprised at Swann's behaviour, for in fact he was a changed man. Nobody ever received a letter from him now, begging introductions to women. They no longer interested him and he was never to be found in the places frequented by them. If he was in a restaurant or staying at a country-house, his manner was the opposite of the one which, a short time before, would have been characteristic of him and had seemed bound to be part of his personality for ever. For it is undeniable that once a passion takes hold of us, it becomes something like a momentary substitute personality, which differs from our standard one and cancels out the hitherto immutable signs through which it expressed itself. In the new Swann, what was now immutable was that, wherever he was, he always made a point of going to see Odette before the end of the day. Whatever distance separated him from her he never failed to cover it, drawn to her as though down the rapid irresistible slope of life itself. Often enough there were times when, having stayed out very late at some fashionable function, he would have preferred to avoid the long detour to her house and go straight home, postponing Odette until the following day; but the very fact that in order to visit her at such untoward hours he had to put himself out and the thought that as he took his leave, friends would be saying to each other, 'He's never free these days. There must be some woman behind all this, you know, forcing him to go and see her at all hours of the day and night,' gave him the feeling that he was leading the life of men known to have an amorous intrigue with somebody, and who, by the sacrifice of their peace of mind and their own best interests to some fond private passion, are endowed with a certain inner charm. Gradually and without his being fully aware of it, the knowledge that she was at home expecting him, that she was not off somewhere with other people, that he was sure to see her before the day was out, neutralized the anguish which had racked him the night she left the Verdurins' before he got there, which, though forgotten now, lurked in him ever ready to attack again and the abatement of which was such a relief to him that the feeling he experienced might be called happiness. Indeed, it may have been thanks to that anguish that Odette had become so important to him. We are generally so indifferent towards other people that, should we come to invest one of them with an immense potential for causing us joy or pain, that person seems to belong to another world, takes on a poetical aura and transforms our whole life into such an ambience of shared pervading sentiment that we constantly sense the nearness or remoteness of that single individual. Swann found it impossible to contemplate calmly what Odette might mean to him in years to come. At times on those fine cold nights, sitting in his victoria and seeing the brilliant moon shedding its light in these unfrequented midnight streets, he would ponder on another face, glowing with faint pink like the face of the moon, which had appeared one day to his mind and ever since had been bathing the world in the mysterious light in which he now saw it. If he

reached her house after the time when she sent her servants to bed, rather than ring straight away at the gate of her little front garden, he would go round the back, where her ground-floor bedroom window shone out, the only one still lit in the row of identical back windows in adjoining houses, all overlooking the little street. There he would knock on her window; at his signal she would reply in like manner before going through to let him in by the front door. Standing open on the piano he would usually find the music of one or other of her favourite pieces, such as The Waltz of the Roses or Tagliafico's ballad Poor Fool (which she had expressly directed in her will was to be played at her funeral service); but instead of any of these, he would ask her to play for him the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata, despite the fact that her piano-playing was lamentable — for it can happen that the most moving impression one ever derives from a certain work is the one created by incompetent fingers striking wrong notes on an out-of-tune piano. This little phrase continued to be linked in Swann's mind to his love for Odette. He was well aware that this love of his was something that bore no relation whatsoever to the outside world, to anything that anybody else could observe and verify; and he realized that Odette's qualities were not such as to justify the value he put upon the time he spent with her. Frequently, when he was under the undisputed influence of objectively reasoning intelligence, he would feel the desire to stop sacrificing so many intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But then he had only to hear the little phrase and the proportions of his inner self were rearranged to make the necessary room for it, there being a space reserved in him for the intense pleasure of it, which, likewise, had no reference to any object outside himself, but which, instead of being a purely personal pleasure such as he experienced through love, he could not help feeling was itself a reality of greater worth than the most concrete of things. The little phrase roused in him this yearning for an unwonted charm to his life, but did not bring him anything precise with which to requite it. As a result, the areas of Swann's inner self in which the little phrase had erased his concern for material things or even certain humane interests shared by all men, had been left blank and in these empty spaces he was free to inscribe the name Odette. Also, the little phrase made up for his feeling that Odette's affection for him was a little short-winded or left something to be desired, filling it out with its own mysterious essence. Swann's face, as he listened to the phrase, looked as though he was absorbing an anaesthetic which enabled him to breathe more freely and deeply. Indeed, the pleasure he derived from music, which was soon to become an addiction, did resemble at such moments the enjoyment he would have found in testing perfumes, in making contact with a world which, because we are not made for it, strikes us as shapeless because our eyes can never see it, and meaningless because our intellect can never grasp it, a world to which we can only ever have access through a single one of our senses. To Swann (whose eyes, for all their subtle appreciation of painting,

and whose mind, for all its acuteness in observation of social behaviour. were incurably blighted by the sterility of his life) it was a profound relief and a mysterious renewal of self to feel as though he was being transformed into some blind creature quite alien to mankind and devoid of reasoning power, something fantastic akin to a unicorn or some mythical chimera capable of experiencing the world only through its sense of hearing. And as he persisted in plumbing the depths of the phrase for meaning beyond the range of his intelligence, he found that there was an uncanny delight in divesting his innermost spirit of all assistance to be derived from the mind. and in letting it feel its way unaided along strange conduits into the dark filter of sound. He was beginning to realize that in the gentle depths of that phrase there were hints of pain and possibly even of some secret unrequited torment, but he knew also that he was not at risk from them. It whispered that love is fragile, but his own love was staunch and sound, so what did he care? He toyed with the sadness of it as it wafted over him, but enjoyed it like a caress which only intensified and sweetened the fond assurance of his own happiness. He would make Odette play it over and over to him, ten times, twenty times, insisting that she keep on kissing him the while. Kisses beget kisses and, when love has just begun, they come so freely, so naturally, to the lips, they are so frequent and so quick, that one could as easily count wildflowers in a meadow in the month of May as one could the kisses one shares in a single hour. Odette would make as if to stop playing and say, 'Look, how do you think I can go on playing if you won't leave me alone? I can't do two things at once. So make up your mind what you want me to do, play you the phrase or sit here spooning?' He would take offence at this; but she would burst out laughing and cover him with kisses. Or else, if she sulked at him, he saw a face straight out of Botticelli's Life of Moses, imagined it in its proper setting and posed her head at the required tilt; then, once he had painted her in quattrocento distemper on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, he would be so carried away by the thought of her as a living body — the thought that she was still there beside him on the piano-stool, all present and ready to be kissed and taken to bed — that he would fall upon his Botticelli virgin, with wild eyes and jaws wide open as though to eat her up, and pinch her cheeks. Later, sitting in the victoria, on his way home, having gone back to kiss her once more and fix for memory some detail of her features or the smell of her, he would bless Odette for granting him these daily meetings with her, which he felt could not cause her any great pleasure but would, he knew, rescue him from the threat of jealousy, by abolishing opportunities for him to suffer ever again from the malady of that night when he had missed her at the Verdurins', and thus help him to get through (unscathed by any more of those dire attacks, the first of which, so painful, would be the last) to the end of this strange phase of his life, made up of almost enchanted hours, like those he spent driving through the moonlit streets of Paris. During those homeward drives, noticing that the moon was now in a very

different position, almost on the horizon, he would think that his love for Odette was also subject to immutable natural laws, and wondered whether this phase of his life would last much longer, whether the day might not come quite soon when the dear face that shone on him now would have declined and receded to the rim of the horizon and all its charm would be on the wane. For since he had fallen in love with her, Swann saw a certain charm in everything about him, as he had once in adolescence, in the years when he had fancied himself as an artist — except that it was a charm of a different kind, and now it was Odette who lent it to all things. He sensed the return of the inspiriting idealism of his younger days, which he had frittered away in a life of frivolity, but it was coloured and shaped by one special person; and during the long hours that he was now quietly glad to spend at home alone, nursing his convalescent spirit, he gradually became his old self, although belonging to somebody else.

He only ever went to her house at night, and was as ignorant of how she spent her days as he was about her past life; he did not even have that initial little fact which enables us to imagine something we do not know and thus fosters in us the desire to find it out. So he never wondered what she might be up to or what sort of life she had led before getting to know him. He would just smile to himself at the passing thought of a time some years before, when he had not yet made her acquaintance and a friend had referred to some woman (who, if his memory served him correctly, could only have been Odette) as a whore, a kept woman, one of those women whom, in his inexperience of their world, he still saw as creatures of ingrained undiluted depravity, a character given to them by the imagination of certain novelists and dying hard. But he would remind himself that to make a fair assessment of an individual, all one has to do at times is believe the exact opposite of the public reputation enjoyed by that person, and he would then compare this imagined character with the character of Odette, who was so kind and straightforward and idealistic, and so wellnigh incapable of telling a lie that once (when he had asked her to send the Verdurins a note saying she was indisposed, so that he could have dinner with her, and then the following day Mme Verdurin had asked her if she was feeling better) he had seen her blush and stammer, showing despite herself in the expression on her face all the distress and torment she felt at having to lie, and suggesting, by the downcast eyes and the doleful tones with which she ventured further fictitious details on her supposed indisposition, that she was begging forgiveness for her false words.

However, there were days, admittedly few and far between, when she came to visit him during the afternoon and interrupted his musings or his work on the study of Vermeer, which he had recently taken up again. A servant would come and report that Mme de Crécy was waiting in the little sitting-room and he would go to her. When he opened the door and she caught sight of him, he would see the soft pink of her face take on a smile that

changed the shape of her mouth, the look in her eyes, the structure of her cheeks. Later, after she had left, it would be this smile that he remembered - or else the smile on her face the previous day, or another variety of the same smile when she had met him some other time, or perhaps the one she had smiled that first night in the cab when he asked whether she minded his re-arranging her cattleyas; and since he knew nothing about the life she led the rest of the time, in his mind it had come to resemble, with its plain empty background, those sheets of studies by Watteau on which one sees, drawn in three chalks all over the buff paper, facing this way and that, and superimposed on each other, an inextricable tangle of smiles. There were times, however, when a small corner of that life of Odette's, which Swann always imagined empty even though his mind knew perfectly well it could not be, would be sketched in by a friend who, having a fair idea that they were in love, would never have dreamed of saying anything to Swann about her other than some banality, such as that he had happened to see her that very morning, walking up the Rue Abbattucci, wearing a little cape trimmed with skunk and a Rembrandt hat, and with a bunch of violets at her breast. Swann was profoundly disturbed by this thumb-nail sketch, because it forced him to acknowledge that he was not the be-all and end-all of Odette's existence; he longed to find out who it was she had aimed to please by wearing those things, which he had never seen on her; and he promised himself that he would ask her where she had been going that morning, as though the whole featureless life of his mistress, which had seemed nonexistent because it was invisible to him, now consisted of one single thing apart from all those smiles she gave to him - her walking up a street in a Rembrandt hat with a bunch of violets on her dress.

Except when he asked her to play him the little phrase by Vinteuil instead of the Waltz of the Roses, Swann never tried to make her play pieces which were more to his taste than to hers; nor did he make any attempt to improve her bad taste, whether in literature or music. He was well aware that she was not intelligent. When she told him how much she would love to hear him talk about the great poets, she had imagined herself listening to couplets in the heroic Romantic vein of the Vicomte de Borelli, only perhaps a bit more moving. On Vermeer of Delft, she asked Swann if the painter had been unlucky in love, whether he had been inspired by a woman, and when Swann told her that nobody knew, she had lost all interest in the man. She would say: 'It's all very well, all that poetry and stuff. Everything would be just fine if it was all true and poets really believed the things they say. But those sort of people are often just as selfish as anyone else. I know what I'm talking about - you see, there was this friend of mine who was in love with some poet chap. In his poetry it was all love and heaven and the stars. But she was well and truly diddled, I can tell you! He went through a cool three hundred thousand francs of hers!' If Swann tried to make her understand something about beauty in art or how to appreciate poetry and painting, she

would soon lose interest and say, 'Oh! I never imagined it was like that.' He would realize that this had come as an acute disappointment to her; and so he preferred to tell a lie and say that that wasn't the real point, that so far he had only touched on trivia, that he hadn't the time right now to go into things any more deeply, that there were other matters of interest in the subject. 'Other matters?' she would demand. 'Well, what other matters? Let's hear about them!' But he would say no more about it, knowing that it would all seem dull and insignificant to her, different from what she had expected, not as exciting or as touching, and fearing that this disillusionment with art might lead to disillusionment with love.

As a matter of fact, she now thought Swann's mind was less impressive than she would have expected. 'You're always so cool and collected,' she would say. 'I can't fathom you.' She was much more taken with his carelessness with money, his pleasant ways with all and sundry, his tact. For although many a greater man than Swann, a thinker or an artist, can be recognised as such and the superiority of his intellect can impress itself upon other people, they may not show this in any admiration of his ideas, which may well remain beyond their grasp, but in their respect for his kindness. Indeed, it was respect that Odette felt for Swann's position in society, although she did not wish him to take any steps to have her admitted to a similar position. She may well have suspected that any such steps were bound to fail; or perhaps she feared that a mention of her name by Swann might give rise to dubious revelations about her past. For whatever reason, she had made him promise never to speak of her to others. Her motive for not frequenting polite society, she had told him, was a quarrel she had once been involved in with a friend, who to get her own back on Odette had spread slanders about her. Swann objected, 'Yes, but presumably this friend didn't know everybody in society?' To which she would reply, 'Even so, things like that always spread. You know what people are like, they think there's no smoke without fire.' Although Swann could not make head or tail of this business, he did know that people generally accepted the validity of statements such as: 'No smoke without fire,' or 'You know what people are like'; and he assumed there must be real situations to which they could apply. Perhaps what Odette was talking about was one of those real situations? He pondered on this, but not for very long, being prone to the mental inertia that had afflicted his father before him whenever he tried to solve a difficult problem. Moreover, it was quite possible that Odette had no great desire to be admitted to the polite society of which she seemed so apprehensive, since it was too remote from her own familiar circles for her to be able to have any clear conception of it. In fact, although in some things she had retained true simplicity (one of the friendships she still kept up, for example, was with an obscure retired dressmaker, and almost every day Odette would climb her steep, gloomy, foul-smelling staircase) she still hankered after sophistication; the only thing was that her conception of

what it was differed from fashionable society's conception of it. To fashionable people, what is fashionable is a certain something that emanates from a restricted number of people, radiating outward from them, gradually losing power the farther it travels from the centre of their intimate circle, but reaching quite far out among their friends, or the friends of their friends, whose names constitute a kind of closed list. This something exists in the minds of fashionable people; and in matters of this sort they have at their command a veritable erudition from which they distil a particular instinctive type of taste, or tact - which was why Swann, for instance, could read in a newspaper the names of those present at a banquet and, without needing to draw consciously on his fund of information concerning society, instantly identify the degree of fashionableness of the function, just as a literary person, on reading a single sentence, can accurately appreciate the worth of an author. But Odette was one of those persons (much more numerous than is generally believed in society itself, and to be found in all classes) who are unaware of any of this and have totally different notions of the world of the fashionable; and all these notions, whatever forms they may adopt in the various groups to which such persons belong, whether it was the mode of sophistication revered by Odette or the one to which Mme Cottard aspired, have in common the belief that this world is open and accessible to all people. And it is true to say that the real world of fashionable people is in fact open and accessible to all, albeit after a certain delay. Odette would say of someone, 'He only goes to the really smart places.' And if Swann asked her what she meant by that, she would reply with a scathing edge to her voice, 'What do you think I mean, for heaven's sake! The smart places! If you don't know what the smart places are, at your age, I give up! I mean, down the Avenue de l'Impératrice on Sunday mornings, or round the Lake at five o'clock, or the Eden Theatre every Thursday, or on Fridays at the Circus or the balls . . .'

'Yes, but which balls do you mean?'

'Oh, for goodness sake! The balls that are held in Paris! The sophisticated ones! I mean, take that chap Herbinger, you know the fellow I mean, the one who works for that stockjobber? Oh, you must know him! He's one of the leading lights in the whole of Paris. That tall fair-haired young chap who's such a snob, you know, with his flower in his buttonhole, and his hair parted down the back and always wearing those pale-coloured overcoats? You always see him about with that old scarecrow, taking her to first nights and things. Anyway, he held a ball the other night and everyone who's anyone in Paris was at it. Oh, I wouldn't have minded going, I can tell you! But you had to show your invite at the door and I couldn't get hold of one. Actually, it's probably just as well I couldn't go, because it was a right shambles. I'd probably not have seen a thing. It's just it would be nice to be able to say you'd been to Herbinger's ball, that's all. And you know what I'm like when it comes to swank! But I don't mind betting that if there's a hundred girls

boasting they were there, there would be at least half of them who weren't anywhere near it! But what I don't understand is that a man like you, a real toff, didn't go to it.'

Swann did nothing to make her alter her notion of what was smart; believing that his own conception of it was endowed with no more authority than hers, that it was just as foolish and unimportant a thing, he saw no point in informing her of it, with the result that months after the beginning of their liaison the only interest she took in any of the people he mixed with was that through them he could obtain for her enclosure-passes at race-meetings, and tickets for horse-shows and first-nights. She was in favour of his cultivating such useful connections, although she did feel there was nothing very smart about these people, having once caught sight of the Marquise de Villeparisis in the street, wearing a black woollen dress and a bonnet tied under her chin: 'But, darling, she looks like an usherette or an old char! So that's what a marquise looks like! Well, I'm no marquise, but I wouldn't be seen out in a get-up like that for love nor money!'

Nor could she comprehend that Swann should live in the house on the Quai d'Orléans; although she kept it to herself, she thought it was beneath him. She saw herself as something of a fancier of antiques and would speak in a rapt and knowing manner of how she loved nothing better than to spend her days 'browsing about', looking for 'odds and ends' or 'period' things. Despite a dogged reluctance to answer questions or 'have a tab kept' on how she spent her time during the day (almost as if this was a point of honour with her or as if she was practising some old family precept) she did once happen to mention to Swann a girl-friend whom she had visited and whose house was completely in 'period' style. Which period it was, Swann never managed to get out of her, although she gave some thought to it for a moment and then replied, 'It was sort of mediaeval.' By which she meant that the rooms contained wood panelling. Some time after that, she mentioned this girl-friend again and added, in the tentative tone and with the arch manner one adopts for dropping the name of someone who was one's fellow dinner-guest the previous evening, of whom one had never heard until then, but whom one's hosts seemed to look on as so famous that one hopes the significance of the name will not be lost on one's listener, 'And she's got an ... eighteenth-century dining-room!' Personally, she thought the house was 'awful', quite bare and with an unfinished appearance; it made women look 'awful' too, and the style would never catch on. There was a third occasion on which she mentioned the girl-friend, this time to show Swann the name and address of the man who had designed the dining-room, whom she would like to bring to her own house, if she could ever afford it, to see whether he might not be able to design one for her, not one like her friend's, of course, but the kind she dreamed of having (but which unfortunately the dimensions of her little house could never accommodate), with tall dressers, Renaissance furniture and massive open fireplaces like the ones in the château at Blois. On this occasion, she forgot herself and let slip her opinion of his house on the Quai d'Orléans — Swann having criticized her friend, not for fancying the Louis XVI style (for, as he said, even though it's unheard of these days, it does have a certain charm) but for fancying bogus replicas of it. Odette's fund of middle-class respect for the done thing proved stronger than her good-time girl's attitude of happy-go-lucky dilettantism, and she blurted out, 'Well, you wouldn't expect her to live among rickety chairs and threadbare carpets like you, would you?'

In her estimation, those who enjoyed 'browsing about', who liked reading poetry, who shunned self-seeking or indulged in dreams of love and honour, were an elite who existed on a higher plane than the rest of mankind. Not that there was any need for anyone actually to have such tastes — it sufficed to boast about them, like the man she met at a dinner-party one night, who told her he just loved to ferret about in old second-hand shops, getting his fingers dirty, that he would never be appreciated in such a mercenary period as this, not being self-interested enough, that he really belonged to another age, and of whom she said to Swann: 'Ooh, he's a heart-warming person! Ever so sensitive! I had no idea!' And she conceived there and then a profound feeling of friendship for the man. On the other hand, people who, like Swann, genuinely had those likes and dislikes but did not talk about them, left her cold. She could not, of course, deny that Swann was indifferent to money, but she would add sulkily, 'True, but he's different'; and the readiest responses of her imagination were not to the actual practice of disinterestedness but to the vocabulary of it.

Swann, because of the feeling that he must often fall short of her desires and dreams, at least tried to make sure that she was happy with him and made a point of never questioning the vulgarity of her opinions or contradicting the poor taste she showed in everything, as these were parts of her that he loved as much as anything else, if not more so, since they struck him as so many particular features through which the essence of Odette was made manifest to him. Thus, when she was in high spirits at the prospect of a visit to the operetta La Reine Topaze, or if she showed in a stubborn frown her anxiety not to miss the flower-show or even just tea-time, with toast and muffins, at the English-style tea-shop in the Rue Royale (a function which she thought no woman worthy of a reputation of elegance could afford to miss) Swann felt the delight one feels at the artless antics of a child or the sight of a portrait that is so lifelike it seems on the point of opening its mouth and talking, and was so overcome by the sight of his mistress's soul appearing through her facial features that his lips were irresistibly drawn to kiss it: 'So, little Odette wants to be taken to the flower-show, does she? She wants to show herself off, does she? Well, then, we'll just have to take her, I suppose, her wish being our command.' As Swann was rather short-sighted, he wore glasses (albeit reluctantly) for working at home and a monocle, which he felt detracted less from his appearance, for social occasions. The

first time she saw him with one in his eye, she was beside herself with delight, exclaiming, 'There are no two ways about it, I think that really sets off a man! Oh, you do look swell! You look a proper toff,' then adding with a tough of regret, 'All you need now is a title.' He was happy that Odette was like that, just as if he had been in love with a Breton lass he would have been overjoyed to see her wearing regional head-gear and hear her say she believed in ghosts. Hitherto, like many men whose aesthetic taste flourishes quite independently of their sensuality, there had been a strange discrepancy between the satisfactions he accorded to each of these aspects of his personality; he had been able to enjoy the most refined artistic pleasures in the company of the most uncultured women, sitting with a young housemaid in a private stage-box at a decadent play he very much wanted to see or taking her to an exhibition of Impressionist paintings, fully convinced that no educated lady of fashion would have been capable of appreciating such things any better and certainly could not have sat there keeping quiet so prettily. Now, however, since he had fallen in love with Odette, it was so sweet to feel at one with her and share every emotion, that he endeavoured to enjoy whatever she enjoyed; and the pleasure he derived not only from imitating her habits but also from adopting her opinions, was all the greater because, having no roots in his own mind, they reminded him only of his love for her, which was, of course, the reason why he had taken them up in the first place. He went to see Serge Panine† more than once, he kept an eye open for opportunities to go and see Olivier Métra; conducting, all for the joy of being initiated into every single one of Odette's purposes, of feeling that he shared equally in all her pleasures. This charming quality of bringing him closer to her, to be found in the places and things which she liked, seemed to him more captivating in its mystery than did the fascination intrinsic to many other things and places which, though of greater beauty, did not remind him of Odette. Also, since he had let the intellectual certainties of his youth fall into disrepair and since, unknown to himself, they had been undermined by the scepticism he had picked up in fashionable society, he thought (or at least he had thought so for such a long time that he went on saying it) that the objects of our preferences have no absolute value in themselves, that they all depend on the period one lives in or the class one belongs to, that they are tantamount to fashions and that the most vulgar of them are every bit as valuable as the ones which are held to be the most refined. Since he considered that Odette's eagerness to get tickets for the opening-day of an exhibition of paintings was no more inherently absurd than the pleasure he himself used to derive from lunching in the rooms of the Prince of Wales, similarly he did not think the admiration she

[†] Serge Panine: best-selling novel by Georges Ohnet, published in 1881 and later dramatized; considered by the well read to be beyond the pale of good taste (JG).

[‡] Composer-conductor of light music (including Odette's Waltz of the Roses); a Mantovani of the late Victorian period (JG).

professed for Monte Carlo or the Rigi any more ridiculous than his own preference for Holland, which she imagined must be an ugly place, and Versailles, which she thought very dreary. So he stopped going to such places and enjoyed the thought that he was doing this for her sake, that he wanted to feel things and love things only if she felt and loved them too.

In the same way as he loved all things associated with Odette (for they constituted the set of conditions governing where and how he could be with her) he loved the company of the Verdurins. To be at their house, counted among the blessed members of the 'little group', was what gave him his deepest satisfactions, because amid all the entertainments, the dinners and musical performances, the games and fancy-dress supper parties, the outings to the country and the theatre, and even the occasional 'gala evenings' held for the benefit of 'bores', there was always the presence of Odette, a glimpse of Odette, conversation with Odette, the priceless boon of Odette granted him by the Verdurins' standing invitation; and he tried to see real points of worth in the little group, fancying that, from choice, he would go on being part of it for ever. In fact, though he did not dare tell himself (in case he might disbelieve it) that he would go on loving Odette for ever, what he was doing by means of his supposition that he would continue to frequent the Verdurins and their circle for ever (a premise which, a priori, met with fewer objections of principle from his mind) was enabling himself to visualize a future in which he went on seeing Odette each evening which may not have amounted to the same thing as imagining he would love her for ever, but for the time being, while he did love her, the idea that there would never come a day when he might not set eyes on her was all he asked. 'They really are charming people,' he thought. 'That's the life for me! They're more intelligent and more artistic than in high society! And Mme Verdurin, despite one or two ever so slightly outlandish attitudes, is a genuine lover of art and music! Such heart-felt enjoyment of the works themselves, and such eagerness to encourage the artists! Mind you, her idea of high society is just a bit unreliable — but, for goodness sake, the ideas society people have about the artistic world are even more inaccurate! Perhaps I have no great appetite for intellectual conversation, because I must say I get on famously with Cottard, although he does make those silly puns. And as for the painter, he may be obnoxious and pretentious when he's showing off, but he has undoubtedly one of the best minds I've ever come across. The main thing, though, is the free and easy feeling you have in their house, you do as you please, no constraints, no standing on ceremony. Just think of the daily expenditure of good humour that those drawingrooms witness! In the future, very occasionally, I may absent myself and briefly go elsewhere, but from now on, really, that's the place for me, that's where I shall feel most at home and enjoy life best!'

Since the qualities which he saw as intrinsic to the Verdurins were mere reflections of the pleasures enjoyed in their house by his love for Odette, as

these pleasures became more important to him, more intense and vital, so did the apparent qualities of his hosts. And since there were times when Mme Verdurin gave Swann the only thing that could count as happiness for him - like the evening when, because Odette had chatted with one of the men for a longer time than with any of the others, he had been feeling forlorn and peeved and was reluctant to ask her straight out whether she was going to leave with him, until Mme Verdurin brought tranquillity and joy to his heart by saving, unprompted, 'Odette, you'll be seeing M. Swann home, no doubt'; or that other time when he had been uneasily wondering, now that summer was coming, whether Odette might not be thinking of going away somewhere without him, thus preventing him from seeing her as usual every day, and Mme Verdurin had said she would invite them both to spend the whole of the holiday season with her in the country - Swann, letting gratitude and self-interest seep unnoticed into his mind and colour his ideas, had no hesitation in pronouncing Mme Verdurin the soul of highmindedness. If one of his former fellow-pupils at the Louvre school of fine art spoke to him of eminent or charming people, he would reply, 'Give me the Verdurins any day!' Then, in a tone of pomposity that was new to him, he would follow this up with: 'They are magnanimous people and, when all's said and done, the only really important quality, the only thing that really distinguishes a person in this world, is magnanimity. You see, old chap, there are only two categories of people: the magnanimous ones and the rest. And at my age one must make up one's mind once for all, be clear about those whom one will like and those whom one will disdain, then, so as to make up for all the time one has wasted with the latter, make no bones about sticking to the people one likes and spending the rest of one's days with them. So, there you are!' he added (with the little thrill that one feels when, even without being clearly aware of it, one says something not because it is true but because one enjoys saying it and listens to one's own voice as though it was someone else's), 'the die is cast, I have opted for magnanimity and henceforth I shall surround myself only with the magnanimous! You ask whether Mme Verdurin is really intelligent. I can assure you she has shown signs of a genuine nobility of spirit and greatness of heart that would be totally and utterly inconceivable without a corresponding intellectual scope. One cannot deny she has a profound grasp of all the arts. But, in fact, that may not be her most admirable quality. For I can think of unobtrusive little instances of rare kindness and considerateness, little things she has done for my sake, thoughtful actions full of tactful concern for one's welfare which are quite sublime in someone who hasn't lost the common touch, don't you know, and which bear witness to a greater depth of understanding of life than you'll find in all the philosophers put together!'

Yet he might have reflected that there were former friends of his family every bit as straightforward as the Verdurins, or men he had known in earlier years who were just as fond of the arts, other people with broad minds and kind hearts, for whom, now that he had opted for magnanimity, the arts and straightforwardness, he had no time at all. But then they did not know Odette; and had they known her, they would have made no effort to bring Swann and her together each day.

It is likely, therefore, that in the whole Verdurin circle there was not one 'regular' who was as fond of them, or at least believed he was as fond of them, as Swann. Yet, when M. Verdurin had said that Swann was 'not completely to his taste', he was not only expressing his own feeling but reading the mind of his wife as well. Swann's affection for Odette was doubtless too exclusive, and he had omitted to make of Mme Verdurin his daily counsellor and confidante; no doubt, too, the very discretion with which he availed himself of the Verdurins' hospitality worked against him, as he would frequently stay away for a reason of which they had no inkling but which they assumed to be his desire to accept an invitation from some 'bore'; and as well as these factors, another that must have contributed to their disgruntlement was that, despite all his precautions to conceal it from them, they had gradually discovered something of the eminent position he enjoyed in society. For all that, the real source of their displeasure lay elsewhere — the fact was, they had sensed somewhere in him, almost from the outset, an impregnable area that he kept to himself, in which he continued tacitly to maintain that the Princesse de Sagan was not a hairraising old scarecrow and that Cottard's jokes were not funny; and though he never once dropped his apparent cordiality with them or tried to question a single one of their articles of faith, there was the flagrant impossibility of ever imposing them upon him and wholly converting him to them, the like of which they had never encountered in anyone else. They could even have forgiven him for mixing with 'bores' - to whom, in his heart of hearts, he actually preferred by far the Verdurins and the little clan - if only he had been willing to set a good example and abjure them in the presence of the regulars. But this was a defection to which, as they well knew, Swann would never stoop.

But what a difference there was between Swann and a new 'recruit', whom Odette, on the strength of a very slight acquaintance with him, had asked them to invite, and from whom they hoped for great things — the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that Forcheville was actually Saniette's brother-in-law, a discovery that flabbergasted the regulars: the old archivist's ways were so humble that they had assumed he occupied a less exalted position in society than their own and did not expect to be told that he came from a wealthy and relatively aristocratic background). Doubtless Forcheville was a dyed-in-the-wool snob, unlike Swann; and, unlike Swann, he would never have thought of the Verdurins' circle as being more important and attractive than any other. But he had none of that innate delicacy of feeling that prevented Swann from subscribing to the more outrageous howlers committed by Mme Verdurin when criticizing people

he knew. And when it came to the coarse and boastful blarney of the painter, or the brainless banter of Cottard, Swann, because he liked both men, found facile excuses for them, although he could pluck up neither the courage nor the hypocrisy to applaud them, whereas Forcheville existed on an intellectual plane which enabled him to be ecstatically impressed by the former, albeit without understanding a word, and to revel sincerely in the latter. As luck would have it, the very first dinner-party that Forcheville attended at the Verdurins' made these differences glaringly obvious, underscoring his qualities and bringing about the downfall of Swann.

Apart from the 'regulars', this dinner was also attended by a professor from the Sorbonne, Brichot by name; he had made the acquaintance of M. and Mme Verdurin at a spa and, if his university functions and scholarly work had not left him little free time, would have been glad to be a frequent guest at their house. For he was gifted with that obsessive and irrational curiosity towards real life which, when laced with a dash of scepticism towards the object of one's studies, produces in any of the learned professions the type of intelligent man who, whether he is the doctor who has no faith in medicine or the classics master who does not believe in using Latin unseens, enjoys a reputation for broadmindedness, brilliance and even outstanding originality. At Mme Verdurin's dinner-table, he made a point of drawing parallels with the most up-to-date events when he talked of history and philosophy, partly because he believed such subjects to be a mere preparation for real life and fancied he would be able to observe in practice among the Verdurins' guests things that he had only ever read about, but possibly also because, having unconsciously retained the respect for certain subjects drummed into him in youth, he was under the impression that to take liberties with these subjects was to lay aside donnishness, whereas it only struck him as taking liberties for the very reason that he was still a don.

As dinner began, Forcheville, sitting at the right hand of Mme Verdurin, who for the benefit of the new 'recruit' had chosen her dress with the utmost care, said to her, 'I say, Ma'am, dashed striking white dress, what!' At which, the Doctor, who could not take his eyes off M. de Forcheville, consumed by curiosity at seeing at close quarters what he termed a 'De', and who had been looking for a way to attract his attention and strike up a conversation, seized on the word 'white' and retorted, without even looking up, 'Blanche?† Blanche of Castille?' Then, still without moving his head, he smiled his furtive unsure glances to left and right. While Swann's face, vainly contorting itself into an attempt at a smile, showed how witless he thought this play on words, Forcheville's showed not only that he appreciated the subtlety of Cottard's wit but also that he was a man of the

[†] Cottard's play on blanche (= white) and the name of Saint Louis's mother coms to me impossible to translate (JG).

world who knew how to moderate his mirth, which had already pleasantly impressed Mme Verdurin by its spontaneity.

'What can you do with a man of science who behaves like that?' she asked Forcheville. 'It's impossible to have two minutes' serious conversation with him.' She added, turning towards the Doctor, 'Do you crack jokes like that at your clinic? It must be a pretty jolly place, in that case! I can see I shall have to have myself sent there as a patient!'

'If I may make so bold, the good Doctor seems to be referring to that old scold Blanche of Castille. Is that not the case, Ma'am?' asked Brichot of Mme Verdurin, who closed her eyes, swooned with hilarity and buried her face in her hands, emitting muffled squeals. Brichot added, 'Goodness me, I have no desire, Ma'am, to offend any souls of loyalist sympathies, if there should be any about this board, sub rosa. . . And I do accept that our own delightful Republic after the Athenian manner — oh, yes, I do assure you! - could well be excused for harking back to the aforementioned Plantagenet obscurant as the original strong-arm police boss.' M. Verdurin having ventured a demurral, Brichot went on, articulating each syllable clearly in his fine resonant voice, 'Oh, I do assure you, mine host, I do assure you. The Chronicle of Saint-Denis, a source of unimpeachable reliability, leaves no room for doubt on that score. A proletariat hell-bent on the secularization of society could do no better than choose as its patron the mother of the saint — whom, by the way, she led a dog's life, as is well attested by an old dog like the Abbot Suger and others of the same Saint Bernard breed. People got more than they bargained for from that little lady, I can tell you!'

'Who is that gentleman?' Forcheville asked Mme Verdurin. 'He sounds like a real genius.'

'What! Haven't you met our celebrated Brichot? Why, he's a household name throughout Europe!'

'Oh, I see, it's Bréchot!' exclaimed Forcheville, mishearing. 'Well, I never!' He added, goggling at the great man, 'It is interesting to dine with a man in the public eye! I say, Ma'am, you certainly do a chap a favour, inviting him along with guests of such calibre! Never a dull moment in this

'Well, you see, the main thing is,' replied his modest hostess, 'that they feel they can relax here. They say whatever they please and the conversation is just non-stop repartee. I mean, Brichot at the moment is quite off form. But I've seen him, under this very roof, in quite dazzling form, giving a performance to bring the house down! Whereas, when he's at a party in somebody else's house, he's the dullest man imaginable! He won't speak unless he's spoken to! In fact, he's just plain boring.'

'Is that so?' said Forcheville in astonishment.

The group among whom Swann had spent his youth would have considered Brichot's brand of wit to be painfully stupid (although it can be

nuite compatible with genuine intelligence). For all that, the professor had a mind that was lively and well stocked and could well have been the envy of many fashionable people whose wit Swann admired. However, Swann had so thoroughly acquired the likes and dislikes of these society people, at least in matters relating to the routines and rituals of fashionable life, including the one which would appear to have most relevance to intelligence, namely, conversation, that the humour of Brichot was bound to strike him as coarse. vulgar, indigestible and pedantic. Also, used as he was to the politeness of people of good breeding, he was put out by the brusque parade-ground tone with which the militaristic don addressed all and sundry. But the main reason for Swann's attitude may have been that he had lost some of his indulgence towards Mme Verdurin, on seeing how eager she was to make much of this Forcheville person whom Odette had had the odd idea to bring along as her guest. Odette herself, on her arrival, had asked Swann with a hint of embarrassment in her manner, 'Well, what do you think of my guest?' To which, Swann, realising for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for years, was quite a handsome man and might be attractive to a woman, had replied, 'He's obscene!' It was not that Swann felt any jealousy towards Odette and Forcheville, but he was not feeling quite as happy as usual; and when Brichot, having launched into the story of Blanche of Castille's mother 'who lived in sin for years with Henry Plantagenet before he made an honest woman of her', tried to include Swann in his act by saying, 'Isn't that so, M. Swann?' in the sergeant-majorish voice one uses to make oneself understood by a peasant or to bolster the courage of a pusillanimous private, Swann spoiled Brichot's effect and infuriated his hostess by begging forgiveness for his scant interest in Blanche of Castille, but there was something he really wanted to ask the painter. That same afternoon, the painter had been to an exhibition of works by an artist, a recently deceased friend of Mme Verdurin's as it happened, and Swann, who respected the painter's judgment, wanted to have his opinion on whether this latest collection showed anything more substantial than the breath-taking technical virtuosity of the man's earlier works.

'From that point of view,' said Swann, 'it was quite remarkable. But it didn't seem to be art that was, you know, all that "elevated", 'he added with a smile.

'Elevated to the level of an institution!' interjected Cottard, raising his arms with mock gravity, and the whole company roared with laughter.

'Didn't I tell you?' said Mme Verdurin to Forcheville. 'You can't keep a straight face when he's about! Whenever you least expect it, out he comes with one of his witticisms!' At the same time she noticed that Swann was the only one present who had not managed to raise a laugh. For one thing, Swann was not too pleased that Cottard should make fun of him in front of Forcheville. And then the painter, rather than give him a proper answer to his enquiry (which he would most likely have done if they had been by

think you should eat up, and my husband should too. I say, there, bring this

themselves) took the opportunity to show off and impress the other guests with a burst of eloquence on the skill of the late artist: 'I went right up to them to see what they were made of. I put my nose right into it. And blow me down, I couldn't for the life of me say whether it was made of glue, or rubies, or soap, or leaven, or sunshine, or shit!'

'And one makes twelve!' shouted the Doctor, but too late for anyone to understand his allusion.

'It looks as though it's not made of anything special,' the painter continued, 'but there's no way you can discover the knack of it, any more than you can by looking at *The Night Watch* or *The Lady-Governors*. Yet in technique it's streets ahead of your Rembrandt or your Frans Hals. It's got everything, I tell you, everything!'

Then, after the manner of a singer who having reached his very highest note continues to sing falsetto, very softly, he went on in a mirthful murmur, as though the paintings were so magnificent as to be ludicrous: 'They smell nice, they go to your head, they take your breath away, they give you the shivers, and you still haven't a clue how it's done! The man was a witch-doctor, a confidence-trickster, a worker of miracles!' He bubbled with laughter: 'It shouldn't be allowed, I tell you!' Then, pausing for effect, raising his head, trying to sing the words like the final harmony of a basso profundo aria, he added, 'And it's all so damned pukka!'

Except when he had said 'streets ahead of your Rembrandt' (a sacrilege that had drawn a gasp of protest from Mme Verdurin, who was of the opinion that *The Night Watch*, along with the *Winged Victory* and Beethoven's *Ninth*, was the greatest masterpiece ever created) and the word 'shit', which Forcheville, glancing quickly about the table to see whether it was acceptable, had greeted with a strait-laced but conciliatory smile, every one of the guests, apart from Swann, had been gazing at the painter, overcome with admiration.

'Isn't he funny when he rhapsodizes like that!' exclaimed Mme Verdurin at the end of the painter's performance. She was delighted that her dinner-party should turn out to be so full of interest on the very night when M. de Forcheville was there for the first time. 'Anyway,' she said to her husband, 'what are you sitting there like that for, with your mouth wide open like the village idiot? You know perfectly well that a good talker he is! Anyone would think,' she went on, turning to the painter, 'he had never heard you before. You should have seen him while you were speaking, he was swallowing every single word! And tomorrow, you'll see, he'll trot out everything you said without missing one word of it!'

'But I'm telling you fair and square!' replied the painter, revelling in this limelight. 'You seem to think I'm spinning you a yarn, trying to bamboozle you. Come and see for yourself if you think I'm talking through my hat! I bet you a pound to a penny you'll come out rhapsodizing more than me!' 'But nobody thinks you're talking through your hat, dear man. We just

gentleman another helping of sole. His first one has gone cold, as you can see. We are not in any tearing hurry, you know. The way you're serving anyone would think the house was on fire! No, don't bring the salad in yet!'

Mme Cottard was modest, a woman of few words, but she was quite capable of self-assurance if she hit on something worth saying in a moment of inspiration. She could tell it would be well received, which boosted her confidence, and when she ventured to open her mouth and say it, it was not so much for the purpose of showing off as in the hope of furthering her husband's prospects in his career. Which was why she took up Mme Verdurin's mention of salad, murmuring to Odette, 'Not Japanese salad, I trust?' Then, in delight and embarrassment at being so up-to-the-minute and daring as to make a veiled but unmistakable allusion to the latest resounding theatrical success of Dumas,† she gave her charming girlish laugh, which though subdued was so spontaneous that it took her quite a few moments to control it.

'What's that lady's name?' asked Forcheville. 'She's a real wit.'

'Actually, it's not Japanese salad! But you can all have some of that, too, if you come to dinner next Friday!'

'You'll think I'm a thorough provincial, M. Swann,' said Mme Cottard. 'But I must confess I haven't been to see this Francillon that everybody's talking so much about. The Doctor has already been — in fact, I remember he said he had the great pleasure of spending the evening in your company - and I didn't really think we could justify his booking two more seats just so that he could take me to see it too. Although, mind you, at the Comédie Française, you're always assured of a nice night's entertainment, aren't you? And the actors are always so good. But since we have some very nice friends' (Mme Cottard hardly ever let a person's name pass her lips, preferring, because it was more distinguished, to say 'friends of ours' or 'a lady of my acquaintance', in an affected tone and with the self-important suggestion that she was choosy about whose name she spoke) 'who often get boxes and have the nice idea of inviting us along to any new production that's worth while, I'm bound to see Francillon sooner or later and have the chance to form an opinion on it. Although, I must admit I do feel something of a fool these days, because that wretched Japanese salad is naturally the only thing anyone talks about in all the salons that I frequent.' Then, noticing that Swann did not seem as concerned as she would have expected by an issue of such burning urgency, she added, 'Actually, people are beginning to tire of it a little now. Although, one must agree that it can lead to quite entertaining situations. There's this lady of my acquaintance who is very bright, but very pretty as well, and popular and very much sought after, and she claims to have had the aforementioned Japanese salad made in her own kitchen, using all the ingredients mentioned by Dumas fils in the play! And she invited a † The play, Francillon, dates from 1887 (JG).

few friends in to try it. Now, unfortunately, I wasn't one of the lucky ones. But she told us about it the other day, her at-home day it was, and according to her, it was awful! My, how we laughed! Although, mind you, it was funnier the way she told it,' she apologized, noting that Swann was unmoved to mirth, the reason for which she supposed to be that perhaps he had not enjoyed Francillon: 'In any case, I'm probably in for a disappointment. I'm sure it can't be as good as Serge Panine, which Mme de Crécy worships! Now there's a play with some real substance to it, giving one real food for thought! I mean, whoever heard of giving a recipe for a salad on the stage of the Comédie-Française! Whereas Serge Panine, well it's not in the same class, is it? I mean, it's like anything produced by Georges Ohnet, it's always so well written. Perhaps you know his Maître de Forges? Now, I wouldn't be at all surprised if that was really a better play than Serge Panine.'

'You must excuse me,' said Swann with a touch of irony, 'but I confess that I have an equal lack of admiration for both of those masterpieces.'

'Is that so? Why, what don't you like about them? Is your mind quite set against them? Or perhaps you think they're a bit sad? You know, what I always say is there's no point in arguing about novels and plays. Because we've all got our own ideas about them and you may absolutely hate something I just love!'

At this point she was interrupted by Forcheville who had turned to address Swann. While Mme Cottard was holding forth about Francillon, Forcheville had been expressing to Mme Verdurin his admiration for what he termed the painter's little 'peroration'. He said to Mme Verdurin when the painter had concluded, 'The gentleman is gifted with a fluency of delivery and a memory the like of which I have rarely come across. Dash it all, I shouldn't mind having half as much! What a first-rate preacher he would make! I think one can say that, along with M. Bréchot here, you have two performers of equal virtuosity. In fact, when it comes to a command of the language, I'm not sure the other gentleman doesn't pip the professor at the post. He sounds more natural, he seems to strain less after effect. Although, mind you, he does slip in here and there a rather realistic detail, what! Still, that's the fashion nowadays, isn't it? Yes, it's a long time since I've heard anyone chewing the fat like that, as we used to say in the Army. Actually, there was one of my fellow-officers that this gentleman puts me in mind of. He was capable of rattling on for hours on any subject under the sun — take this wine-glass, for instance. Well, no, actually, not on a wineglass exactly, that's too silly. But, say, on the battle of Waterloo or anything at all. And he would slip in all sorts of things that would never have occurred to you. Come to think of it, old Swann there was in my regiment. He must have known the chap.'

'Do you and M. Swann see much of each other?' asked Mme Verdurin. 'Oh, no,' replied M. de Forcheville. Then, aiming to please Swann, and thus ingratiate himself with Odette, he took what he saw as a fine

opportunity to flatter him by mentioning his highly placed connections, affecting the air of a man-of-the-world and the tone of cordial disparagement which would avoid any suggestion that he was congratulating Swann on some untoward achievement: 'I say, Swann old chap, isn't that so? I never see you these days. Well, I mean, what's a chap to do about it? The bounder's for ever running round with the La Trémoilles, the Des Laumes, all that crowd!' This imputation was especially false since, for the past year, Swann had hardly frequented any house other than the Verdurins'. However, a disapproving silence was the only way in which the host and hostess ever greeted the names of people unknown to them. M. Verdurin, dreading the painful effect that the names of such 'bores' must have had on his wife, being flung at her tactlessly like that under the very eyes of all the 'regulars', cast a furtive glance at her, full of worry and sympathy. But he saw that, in her resolve to take no note of, to be not in the slightest affected by this news which had just been communicated to her, to be not merely dumb but stone deaf towards it as well (as we pretend to be when a friend who has failed us tries to slip an excuse into the conversation, which, if we were to be seen to listen to it without objection, we might give the impression of accepting, or when the prohibited name of some scoundrel is spoken in our presence), Mme Verdurin had instantaneously rid her face of any sign of life or movement, so that her silence should not look like approval but like the stony unknowing silence of inanimate things — her protruding forehead had become a mere figure modelled in the round, impervious to the name of these La Trémoilles with whom Swann was for ever running round; her nose, puckered in a slight frown, showed the curve of a nostril that seemed to have been sculptured from life. Her very mouth seemed about to speak, through its parted lips. She had been turned into a moulding, a plaster mask, a clay model for a statue, one of those busts in the Industrial Exhibition in front of which visitors would be bound to pause in admiration of the way the sculptor, while expressing the inalienable dignity of the Verdurins (different from the La Trémoilles and the Des Laumes but every bit as good as them or any other 'bore' on the face of the earth!) had somehow managed to imprint into the whiteness and rigidity of the stone an almost papal majesty. Then at last the marble came back to life and was heard to say that people must be easy to please if they frequented that sort of person — the wife was never sober and the husband was such an ignoramus that he said 'collidor' instead of 'corridor'.

'I wouldn't let that lot in here for love nor money,' Mme Verdurin concluded, shooting an imperious glance in the direction of Swann.

Presumably she did not expect him to be so submissive as to imitate the pious simplicity of the pianist's aunt, who had chimed in with: 'I should think not! The thing that amazes me, though, is that there's still people about who'll speak to them! If it was me, I'd be too afraid — I mean, you could really do yourself a bad turn with people like them!' But he might at

least have replied like Forcheville, 'Well, dash it all, she is a Duchess! There are still plenty of people who are impressed by that sort of thing, you know,' to which Mme Verdurin retorted, 'And much good may it do them!' However, Swann merely laughed in a way that suggested he could not take seriously such a gross inaccuracy. M. Verdurin, still casting glances of furtive anxiety at his wife, was saddened to see in her manner signs that she was tormented by the rage of a Grand Inquisitor thwarted in his efforts to stamp out heresy; and in the hope of bringing Swann to a proper recantation (since having the courage of one's convictions always makes one appear petty and cowardly to those who do not share them) he addressed him forthrightly: 'You can speak your mind quite openly with us, you know. Nobody here will run and tell tales about you.'

Swann replied, 'Oh, I assure you my attitude has nothing to do with any fear of the Duchess — if you're referring to the La Trémoïlles, that is. You may rest assured that everybody enjoys going to her functions. I can't pretend that there's any "profundity" to her' (he pronounced profundity as though it was a ludicrous word, his speech having retained traces of mental habits which, in this brief period of self-renewal, discovering the joys of music and sometimes expressing vigorous opinions, he had begun to lose) 'but, in all sincerity, she is a woman of intelligence and her husband is a genuinely cultured man. They make a charming couple.'

The result of this was that Mme Verdurin, realising how the complete orthodoxy of her little sect could be sabotaged by this one intractable heretic, lost her temper with this impenitent who refused to see the pain inflicted on her by his words, and exclaimed with heartfelt abandon, 'Well, you are quite at liberty to believe that if you so desire. But at least do not say so to us.'

'It all depends on what you mean by intelligence, though,' said Forcheville, feeling it was about time he did some showing off. 'I mean, what's your conception of intelligence, Swann?'

'Ooh, just listen!' cried Odette. 'I'm always begging him to talk to me about important subjects like that and he never wants to!'

'Of course I -,' Swann tried to object.

'Oh, tell that to the marines!' Odette bantered.

'Marine acid!' interjected Cottard.

Forcheville tried again: 'Yes, but in your estimation, is intelligence just a matter of having the gift of the gab? Has it to do with the way some people ingratiate themselves with people?'

'Hurry up and finish what's on your plate! They're waiting to take it away!' snapped Mme Verdurin to Saniette, who had been sitting there, lost in thought and neglecting his dinner. Then, perhaps out of contrition at her ungraciousness, she added, 'Look, don't worry, you've got plenty of time. I'm just thinking of the others, that's all, because it holds up the next course.'

'In Fénelon, the gentle anarchist,' announced Brichot, brashly emphasizing every syllable, 'one finds a most intriguing definition of intelligence.'

'Listen! Listen!' said Mme Verdurin to Forcheville and the Doctor: 'He's about to tell us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. How interesting! It's not often one has the chance to learn a thing like that.'

Brichot was waiting for Swann to offer his own definition. However, Swann did not offer anything, thus spoiling the fine bout of intellectual sparring with which Mme Verdurin had been hoping to regale Forcheville.

'I might have known!' sulked Odette. 'He's like that with me all the time. It's nice to know I'm not the only one he thinks is incapable of grasping

these things.'

'I wonder,' Brichot enunciated with vigour, 'whether these De la Trémouailles whom Mme Verdurin has presented in such an unfavourable light, are or are not the descendants of the ones with whom that fine old snob Mme de Sévigné said she was glad to be acquainted, because it made a good impression on her peasants? Of course, the Marquise had another reason for saying that, which to her mind must have been a better one, as she was a scrivener to the marrow and good copy was always her prime consideration. And in that daily newspaper that she kept sending to her daughter, the foreign correspondent, so to speak, was Mme de la Trémouaille, who was very highly connected through marriage and hence extremely knowledgeable.'

'Well, no, actually,' hazarded Mme Verdurin, 'I don't really think it's the

same family.'

Saniette, having hurriedly handed over his plate, though it was still halffull, to the butler, had been sitting quietly as though thinking something over. Now he broke his silence and, with a laugh, started to talk about a dinner-party at which La Trémoille had been one of his fellow-guests, the point of his story being that the Duke was unaware that the name 'George Sand' was in fact the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who found Saniette a likeable person, felt he could not let this pass and started to demonstrate to him in some detail that it was inconceivable that a man as genuinely cultured as the Duke could have been unaware of any such thing; but he suddenly stopped talking, having just realised that Saniette did not need his demonstration and knew as well as he did that the tale was bogus, for the simple reason that he had just thought it up there and then. The good man lived in a state of constant mortification at being thought such a bore by the Verdurins; and knowing that at this particular dinner he had been duller than ever, he had been eager to participate in the entertaining of the company before the evening was over. However, in the face of Swann's information, he capitulated so suddenly, looked so crestfallen at the misfiring of his little scheme, and his reply ('My mistake, my mistake! Anyhow, there's no crime in being wrong, is there?') was such an abject appeal to Swann not to go on with a needless refutation, that Swann wished he could confirm that Saniette's anecdote was the Duke to a T. It occurred to the Doctor, who had been listening to the exchange, that this was the right moment to quote Se non è vero, but he was unsure of the wording and afraid of uttering a howler.

When dinner was over, Forcheville joined the Doctor, saying to him, 'Mme Verdurin must have been quite a good-looker once upon a time. Also, she's a woman who can make conversation, and as far as I'm concerned that's the main thing. Obviously, she's not as young as she was. But Mme de Crécy, now, there's a little lady who seems very clever. By Jove, yes, she's got her wits about her, that one! We're discussing Mme de Crécy,' he added to M. Verdurin, who was approaching, smoking his pipe, 'I fancy her figure must be . . . '

'Yes, I wouldn't mind having my boots under her bed!' blurted Cottard, who for some moments had been waiting for Forcheville to pause, on tenterhooks in case the subject of the conversation changed and made it pointless for him to slip in his little witticism, which he trotted out now with the strained spontaneity and excessive self-confidence of one trying to conceal the stage-fright and stiltedness of a recitation. Forcheville appreciated the joke and greeted it with amusement. M. Verdurin also started to laugh with gusto, having recently hit on a symbolic laughter-substitute that was different from his wife's invention but every bit as simple and unambiguous - hardly had his head and shoulders made the initial movement of a man about to burst out laughing, when he had to start a fit of coughing instead, as though his mirth had been so unbridled that he had inadvertently inhaled a lungful of smoke from his pipe. And since he left it clenched between his teeth he was able to keep up as long as possible his pantomime of strangled hilarity, with the result that he and Mme Verdurin (who was standing close by, listening to one of the painter's tales, closing her eyes and making ready to hide her face in her hands) resembled a pair of theatre masks designed to give different representations of merriment.

M. Verdurin did well to keep his pipe in place, as Cottard chose this moment to leave the room, murmuring to his host as he went, 'I must just go and see a man about a dog,' a quip he had only recently picked up, which he used whenever he was going to the same place and which on this occasion set M. Verdurin off on another bout of coughing and spluttering.

'Dear me!' said Mme Verdurin, handing round liqueurs. 'You really should take your pipe out of your mouth, you know. You'll choke if you try to contain your laughter like that.'

'What a charming husband you have, Ma'am,' Forcheville called to Mme Cottard. 'He's the life and soul of the party! Oh, thank you so much, Ma'am! An old campaigner will never say no to a dram, begad!'

'M. de Forcheville thinks Odette is just charming,' said M. Verdurin to his spouse.

'Well, if it comes to that, she would like to come to lunch with you one day. We shall arrange it — but not a word to Swann about it! He's a bit of

wet blanket, you know. And you can still come to dinner, of course. We hope to see a lot of you. With the fine weather coming on now, we'll often be having dinner out of doors. Have you any objection to little dinner-parties out in the Bois? No? Oh, good, it will be nice! I say, you there! Why aren't you doing your job?' she called to the young pianist, so as to display for the benefit of a recruit as imposing as Forcheville, not only how witty she was but also how despotically she wielded her power over her 'regulars'.

'M. de Forcheville has been talking about you behind your back, my dear,' said Mme Cottard to her husband as he came back in.

At which, Cottard, reminded of Forcheville's noble lineage which had preoccupied him intermittently since the beginning of the evening, said to the Count, 'One of my patients at the moment is a Baroness, the Baroness Putbus, to be precise. The Putbuses went on the Crusades, if I'm not mistaken. They own a lake in Pomerania ten times the size of the Place de la Concorde. She's got rheumatoid arthritis. Charming woman. I believe she's a friend of Mme Verdurin's, actually.'

Shortly afterwards, this little exchange enabled Forcheville to round off his favourable judgment on the Doctor, when he came across Mme Cottard again: 'Well, he's such an interesting man! One can see he's in the know. By jingo, these medical men, they're so knowledgeable about the world!'

'I'm just going to rattle out the little phrase from the sonata for M. Swann,' announced the pianist.

'Ho, ho!' said Forcheville, trying to be smart, 'he's going to rattle out a sonattle!'

But Dr Cottard, to whom this was an unheard of play on words, failed to see the point of it and assumed that Forcheville did not know how to pronounce the word. He went over to him and set about correcting him in a tone of self-righteous, impatient jubilation: 'You shouldn't say *sonattle*, you know. The word is "sonata".'

Forcheville explained his joke and the Doctor turned red.

'Quite a neat pun, wouldn't you say, Doctor?'

'Oh, it's as old as the hills, that one,' replied Cottard.

Then they had to be quiet — for under the quivering trills of the violin part and sheltered from a distance of two octaves by their persistent shimmering, the little phrase (like the tiny figure of a girl glimpsed two hundred feet lower down a mountain valley, through the steep motionless stream of a waterfall) had just made its distant graceful appearance, protected by the constant cascades of the transparent veil of sound. And Swann, in the secrecy of his heart, appealed to it as to a confidente of his love for Odette, a best friend who ought to whisper to her to pay no attention to this Forcheville person.

'My! You're late!' said Mme Verdurin to a regular whom she had invited to drop in at the very end of the evening. 'You missed our Brichot giving a star-turn tonight! He's gone now, but he was magnificent! Wouldn't you agree, M. Swann? I believe this was your first encounter with him.' (This, by way of pointing out to him that he had her to thank for the privilege). 'Wasn't our Brichot just delightful?'

Swann gave her a polite little bow.

'What? Didn't you think he was interesting?' Mme Verdurin demanded.

'On the contrary, Ma'am, extremely interesting,' countered Swann. 'I was delighted. Mind you, he's just a little too daunting and jolly, to my way of thinking. I should prefer a less peremptory manner now and then, and a touch of mildness. But one can certainly see that he knows a lot and he seems a pretty decent sort of a fellow.'

It was very late when the guests left. Cottard, as soon as he was alone with his wife, said, 'I've rarely seen Mme Verdurin in such fine form as tonight.' Forcheville, offering the painter a lift home, asked, 'This Mme Verdurin of yours, what is she exactly? A retired strumpet, or something?'

Odette was sorry to see Forcheville disappear, and though she dared not decline Swann's suggestion that she leave with him, she was in a bad temper all the way home in his carriage. When they reached her house and he asked if he was to come in with her, she gave an impatient shrug and said, 'Oh, I suppose so!'

When everybody had left, Mme Verdurin said to her husband, 'Did you notice the stupid way Swann laughed when we mentioned Mme La Trémoïlle?' She herself had noticed that both Swann and Forcheville had sometimes dropped the 'De' in front of La Trémoïlle. Convinced as she was that they only did this to show how unimpressed they were by titles, she had tried to follow suit, but had failed to grasp which form of words to use so as to express this anti-aristocratic contempt. Thus, her ingrained bad grammar being stronger than her militant Republicanism, she continued to talk about 'the De La Trémoilles'. Or rather, using the abbreviation by means of which music-hall songsters and caricaturists in their captions almost eliminate the 'De', she referred to them as 'the D'La Trémoïlles'. However, she made up for this mistake by making another one each time she said 'Madame La Trémoîlle'. 'The Duchess, as Swann puts it,' she commented scornfully, with a smile that showed she was quoting and not using in any personal way such an absurd and simple-minded appellation. 'I must say I thought he made an utter fool of himself.'

Her husband replied, 'There's nothing open about him. He's a sly customer, if you ask me. You can never get a straight word out of him. Jiggery-pokery, hanky-panky, that's all you can expect from him. And when you compare him with a man like Forcheville! Well, now, there's a straight talker for you! Take him or leave him, he doesn't mind. Unlike the other fellow and his pussy-footing about! Of course, Odette made no bones about how much she preferred the new boy, and I can't say I blame her. Besides, what does Swann mean by it, coming the man-of-the-world with us, pretending to be all matey with Dukes and Duchesses? At least this other

chap has his title! The Comte de Forcheville — that really means something, you know!' He delivered this last pronouncement in the knowing tone of the connoisseur, as though he was quite familiar with the history of the ancestral domain of the Forchevilles and could give an authoritative and accurate assessment of its degree of nobility.

'I'll have you know,' said Mme Verdurin, 'that he saw fit to make certain scurrilous and really rather ludicrous insinuations about Brichot. Naturally, once he realised Brichot was one of us, it struck him as a way of getting at you and me and sneering at our dinner-parties. He's the hail-fellow-well-met variety who stabs you in the back as soon as he steps outside your front door.'

'Yes, well, that's just what I mean,' replied M. Verdurin. 'He's the original failure, isn't he, the petty-minded individual who's green with envy for anything that's a cut above himself.'

As a matter of fact, there was not one of their regulars who was less malicious than Swann. However, they all took the precaution of sprinkling their spite with familiar banter, joviality and a touch of fellow-feeling; whereas Swann's slightest reservation, expressed without conventional fictions, to which he refused to stoop, such as, 'Far be it from me to cast aspersions,' struck them as treachery of the worst kind. Just as there are original writers whose slightest transgressions give great offence, all because they have not pandered to public taste by offering the usual commonplaces, so Swann fell foul of M. Verdurin. As with them, it was because of an unconventional use of language that Swann's intentions were viewed with suspicion and hostility.

However, at this stage, Swann was still unaware of the downfall that threatened him in the Verdurins' circle; he continued to see their foibles through the indulgent lens of his love.

More often than not, his meetings with Odette were confined to the evenings; but during the day, although he was reluctant to turn up at her house in case he gave her cause to tire of him, he would have liked to be constantly in her thoughts at least and was for ever on the look-out for a chance to bring himself to her attention, in ways which would give her pleasure. If he was taken with the sight of a shrub outside a florist's or a fine stone in a jeweller's display-case, he would decide on an impulse to send it to Odette, imagining the pleasure it had given him being experienced by her and thus increasing her affection for him, and would have it delivered to her house in the Rue La Pérouse forthwith, so as not to delay the moment when he would enjoy an instant's intimacy with her because she was in the act of receiving something from him. He was especially anxious for her to receive it before going out for the evening, so that when he saw her later at the Verdurins', her gratitude might guarantee him a more affectionate meeting with her; or, one never knew, if the shopkeeper was expeditious enough, there was even the chance that she might have time to thank him before dinner, either by sending him a note or by giving him the unexpected bonus of an actual visit from her. Just as he had once tested Odette's nature for resentment and umbrage, so now he tested it for gratitude, hoping to lay bare undiscovered areas of sentiment which she had hitherto kept to herself.

She frequently had money troubles and would beg him for assistance to meet urgent debts. This made him happy, as did anything that could give Odette a strong impression of how influential he was and how useful he could be to her. No doubt, if it had been suggested in the early stages of his liaison with her that 'The thing she likes about you is the position you enjoy', or now that, 'She only loves you for your money', he would have disbelieved it, although he would not have been greatly put out by the idea that people imagined her attachment to him, and the union between them, were based on something as strong as snobbery or money. Even if he had suspected it was true, he might not have been too upset by the discovery that Odette's love for him was built on a surer foundation than any mere attraction or the personal qualities she might see in him - namely, on self-interest, which could stave off for ever the day when she might otherwise have been tempted to stop seeing him. In the mean time, by heaping gifts upon her and doing her favours, he could shirk the arduous business of making her love him for himself alone and rely instead on attractions extraneous to his person and his mind. And, as though he was a wealthy collector of emotional experiences, the more money he actually spent on these delights of love, of living only for love (delights which struck him at times as non-existent), the more he valued them — in the way that the holidaymaker is unsure whether the sights and sounds of the sea-side are really enjoyable, until he spends a hundred francs per day on the hotel room which enables him to appreciate them and convinces him at the same time of the disinterested refinement of

One day, reminded by thoughts such as these of an occasion when someone had spoken of Odette as a 'kept woman', he had amused himself (not for the first time) by comparing the weird personification conjured up by that expression 'the kept woman' - a glittering amalgam of outlandish diabolical elements, ornamented here and there, like some creation by Gustave Moreau, with intertwinings of poisoned blooms and precious gems - to his Odette, on whose features he had seen evidence of feelings such as sympathy for misfortune, indignation at injustice or gratitude for a service rendered, replicas of expressions he had often read in the face of his own mother or on the faces of friends; his Odette whose talk so frequently referred to the most familiar things, like his collections, his own bedroom, his old manservant, or even the bank-manager who looked after his affairs - at which point, the thought of the bank reminded him that he should drop in there soon to pick up some cash. For if he was to help out Odette less generously this month than he had last month (when he had given her five thousand francs), and if he did not buy her the diamond necklace she

wanted, not only would he jeopardize her continuing gratitude and admiration for his open-handedness, which made him feel so happy, but he might even give her grounds for believing that, as the tokens of his love appeared to be diminishing, his feeling for her was also on the wane. This made him suddenly wonder whether what he was doing might not amount to 'keeping' her (for all the world as though the concept of 'keeping' a woman could be derived not from mysterious, corrupt elements but from the most intimate everyday substance of his own life, such as that homely thousand-franc note, accidentally torn then stuck together again, which his manservant, after paying the monthly accounts and the rent, had locked in the old desk drawer from where Swann had later taken it so as to send it. along with four more, to Odette) and whether the expression 'a kept woman', which had seemed so irreconcilable with Odette as she really was, might not after all fit her, at least since he himself had made her acquaintance - for he did not entertain for a moment the idea that she might ever have accepted money from any man before him. This train of thought he was unable to follow any further, as at that moment he suffered an attack of his congenital, intermittent and providential discontinuity of mind, switching off all mental light on the subject just as instantaneously as, a few years later, after the spread of electric lighting, one could cut off the power-supply to a whole house. His thoughts groped about in the dark for a moment; he took off his glasses, gave them a wipe, rubbed a hand over his eyes, and did not see any light until he found himself faced with a completely different idea - namely, that he must try to send Odette six or seven thousand francs this month instead of five, because it would be such a pleasant surprise for her.

In the evenings, if he did not stay at home until it was time to go and meet Odette at the Verdurins', or rather at one of the summer restaurants they were now frequenting, either in the Bois or more usually at Saint-Cloud, he would go out to dinner at one or other of the fashionable houses which he had once haunted so often. He had no desire to lose touch with people who might just possibly prove useful to Odette at some time in the future, one never knew, and thanks to whom he frequently managed even now to cause her pleasure. Moreover, from his long acquaintance with the world of fashion and luxurious living he had acquired not only his contempt for that world but also his addiction to it; and by the time he had come to see the most unprepossessing houses as being on exactly the same plane as the most palatial, his sensitivity was so conditioned to the latter that he would have felt uncomfortable in the former. The undistinguished people who held a little dance in their fifth-floor flat ('D' staircase, left landing) could never have suspected that the esteem in which he held them was identical to that in which he held the Princess of Parma, whose soirées were the most magnificent in Paris; for all that, he did not really feel he was attending a proper social occasion as he sat with husbands and fathers in the hostess's bedroom, and the sight of wash-hand stands draped with towels or beds transformed into cloakrooms, their quilts heaped with overcoats and hats, gave him the sensation of stifling deprivation that people who have been used to electricity for the past twenty years may experience on smelling a smoky oil-lamp or a guttering candle.

On evenings when he was dining out, he would order the carriage for half past seven. As he dressed, his mind would be full of Odette, and in this way he never felt alone, since the constant thought of her gave to the time spent without her the same special charm as to the time spent with her. Even when he got into the carriage, he felt as though the thought of Odette had jumped inside with him and settled on his lap like an inseparable pet which he would keep with him during dinner, unknown to the other guests. He caressed it, warmed himself against it, and as he put the sprig of columbine into his buttonhole, he felt listless for a moment and enjoyed a little shudder that ran through his neck and twitched his nose, and which he had never felt before. For some time past, especially since Odette had introduced Forcheville to the Verdurins, Swann had been feeling forlorn and off-colour and would have dearly loved to go to the country for a period of peace and quiet. But while Odette stayed in Paris he could not have plucked up the courage to leave for a single day. The air had turned warmer; the weather was spring at its most balmy. And all the time, as he made his way through the city built of stone to closet himself in stuffy drawing-rooms, he could see in his mind's eye the grounds of a house he owned just outside Combray, where, by four in the afternoon, thanks to the breeze that blew from the meadows at Méséglise, if you walked down almost as far as the asparagus beds, you could enjoy the evening coolness sitting in the arbour or by the pond ringed with irises and forget-me-nots, and where, if he dined in the open air, the table was surrounded by currant-bushes and roses, intertwined by his gardener.

Once dinner was over, if the appointment with Odette in the Bois or at Saint-Cloud was for an early hour, he would dash off so soon (especially if it looked like rain, in which case the Verdurins and their 'regulars' might have gone) that on one occasion the Princesse des Laumes, after a late dinner at her house which Swann had left without waiting for coffee so as to join the Verdurins on the Island in the Bois, exclaimed, 'Well, I must say! If Swann was thirty years older and had bladder trouble, one wouldn't mind his dashing off like that! But I really think he's going a bit too far!'

He persuaded himself that, though he was unable to go and enjoy the springtime at Combray, at least there would be some of it to savour on the Ile des Cygnes or at Saint-Cloud. But since he was incapable of focussing his mind on anything other than Odette, when he thought back to the evenings spent there he could never remember whether he had so much as caught a breath of the scent of new leaves or whether the moon had been shining. As he arrived, he would be welcomed by the little phrase from the sonata, being played out in the garden on a piano belonging to the restaurant. If there was

no piano out in the grounds, the Verdurins would go to great trouble to have one brought down from the dining-room or from one of the upper rooms. Not that Swann was back in their favour, far from it — it was just that the prospect of organizing some ingenious recreation for somebody, even somebody whom they disliked, brought out in them transient responses of hearty congeniality, which lasted as long as the time it took to make the necessary arrangements. Swann would tell himself this was yet another unique spring evening that was slipping away, and would force himself to notice the trees and the sky. But the disquiet he felt in the presence of Odette, as well as the touch of feverish uneasiness that he had had for some time, deprived him of the peace of mind and the feeling of well-being which are essential to any receptivity to nature.

One evening at dinner with the Verdurins, when Swann said that the following day he would be going to the annual dinner of his Old Comrades' Association, Odette leaned across and said quite openly in front of Forcheville, who was by now a fully-fledged 'regular', in front of the painter, and Cottard, and everyone, 'Yes, I know you've got your dinner to go to. That means I'll not see you until later, at my house. But make sure you don't come too late.'

Although Swann had never been really upset by the fact that Odette was friendly with one or other of the regulars, he was filled with a profound sense of bliss on hearing her allude in front of everyone, with such shameless simplicity, to their nightly meetings, the privileged situation he enjoyed at her house and the preference for his own person that she thus implied. It had, of course, frequently occurred to Swann that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman; and there should have been nothing very flattering in hearing proclaimed to all and sundry the high esteem in which he was held by a person who was so inferior to him. However, ever since he had realised that to many men Odette was a creature of great beauty and desirability, the fascination they saw in her body had created in him an aching need to subdue and possess every last corner of her heart. And he had come to set immense store by the times he spent at her house each night, when he would sit her on his knee, listen to what she thought of this and that, and count the only blessings that he now valued in life. So when dinner was over, he took her aside for a moment and made a point of thanking her with great feeling, in an attempt to show her (by the gradations in the intensity of the gratitude which he manifested) the whole range of satisfactions that she could give him, the most urgent of which was her power to safeguard him against attacks of jealousy for as long as his love endured and made him vulnerable to them.

The following night, when he left his dinner, it was pouring with rain and, since he had come out in his open carriage, a friend offered him a lift home in his brougham. Since Odette had suggested he drop in and he had taken this to mean she was not expecting anybody else, he would gladly have gone

straight home to bed, with his mind and heart at peace, rather than drive across Paris in the rain. But it was just possible that if she had grounds for thinking he might not really mind, once in a while, being unable to be with her at the end of each and every day, she might not reserve that time for him on the very night when he had an acute desire to spend it with her.

It was after eleven by the time he reached her house. When he apologised for being unable to come any earlier, she complained that it was very late and that the thundery weather had made her feel headachy and out of sorts. She took him in, with the warning that he could stay half an hour but no longer, and must be out of the house by midnight. She soon felt tired and expressed a desire to go to sleep.

'So we're not to have a little cattleya tonight?' he asked. 'Dear me, and here I was looking forward to a nice little cattleya.' She replied, with a hint of sulky agitation in her manner, 'No, of course not, dearest! No cattleyas tonight. You can see I'm not very well, can't you?'

'Well, it might buck you up a bit, you know. But if your mind's made up, we'll not labour the point.'

She asked him to turn off the lights on his way out; he drew the bedcurtains and went home. But some time after he had reached his house, it suddenly crossed his mind that Odette might really have been expecting somebody else, that she might just have made a show of tiredness and that her only reason for asking him to put out the lamps was that she wanted him to believe she was going to sleep — whereas, as soon as he had driven off, she might have got up, lit the lamps again and opened her door to the man who was going to spend the night with her! He looked at his watch: about an hour and a half since he had left her. He went back out and took a cab to a spot very close to Odette's house — a little street, at right angles to the one that ran behind her house, which he took sometimes so as to knock on her bedroom window, his signal to tell her he had arrived and she should let him in. When he got out of the cab, the whole district was dark and deserted. He walked the few steps round to the other street and came out almost opposite the house. From a solitary window, set among the unlit row of them stretching away down the dim street where all other lights had been extinguished for hours, seeped a golden glow, a mysterious essence pressed by the shutters from an illuminated room; the same glow which had warmed his heart on so many other nights and told him as soon as he caught sight of it from a distance, 'She's in there waiting for you,' but which now tortured him with the message, 'She's in there with the man she was expecting.' Wanting to find out who this person could be, he sidled along the wall to the window. But the sloping slats of the shutters prevented him from seeing anything inside the room; and all he could hear in the silence and the darkness was a muffled murmur of voices in conversation.

It was agonizing to see that glow and know that in its golden atmosphere, behind this window-frame, the hateful invisible couple were moving about,

to hear the vague murmur of voices that revealed the presence of the man who had arrived after he himself had left, the perfidy of Odette and the happiness she was enjoying with this person. Yet at the same time he was glad to have come back — in losing some of its imprecision, the torment that had goaded him out into the night had also lost some of its cutting edge; for now Odette's other life, which had stabbed him at home with that sudden hapless suspicion of her, was within his grasp, spotlit by this lamp, imprisoned all unawares inside this room, and all he had to do, when he felt like it, was go in there and capture it. Or rather, what he was going to do was knock on the shutter, as he frequently did when coming to see her late at night. In that way, Odette would at least learn that he had found them out, seen her light and eavesdropped on their conversation; while he himself, who had so recently pictured her scoffing at his gullibility with this other man, was now the one to see them believing in an illusion of security, deceivers who were in fact deceived by him, because although they believed he was far away, he was here, with his mind already made up to bang on the shutters. The feeling he had at that moment verged on the agreeable; it amounted to something more than relief from doubt or the fading of a pain and came closer to a positive intellectual pleasure. Whereas being in love with Odette had given back to things, whenever the thought of her shone upon them, some of the gladsome significance he had once seen in them, what his jealousy had now reawakened in him was a different faculty that had lain fallow since his studious younger days — his passion for truth. Only, now, it was a passion for a truth which, like that other significance, lay somewhere between himself and his mistress and took its light only from her; an idiosyncratic form of truth whose sole object was of incalculable value and seemed almost disinterested in its beauty - knowledge of the actions of Odette, of the people she knew, of her plans for the future and of her past. At other periods of his life, the trite daily doings of any other person had always struck Swann as being devoid of interest; if anyone happened to retail this sort of information to him, he felt it to be worthless and insignificant, and while he lent an ear to it, it penetrated only the shallowest and most vulgar layer of his attention. It was at such moments, in fact, that he was most acutely conscious of his own paltriness. But during that strange phase of love (when things in their trivial individuality can take on such apparent profundity of meaning) this new gnawing curiosity about a woman and her most trifling activities was the very same appetite as he had satisfied in previous years with the study of History. And all the tactics which he would hitherto have been ashamed to use, such as eavesdropping today, and for all he knew wheedling information out of unconcerned witnesses tomorrow, bribing servants, listening at keyholes, seemed to him now to be on a par with the deciphering of documents, comparing records and interpreting the evidence of monuments, as methods of scientific research which had genuine intellectual worth and were admirably suited to the discovery of truth.

Then, as he stood there, about to knock on the shutters, shame, albeit momentary, was what he did feel, at the realization that Odette would know he had harboured suspicions about her and had come back to keep an eye on her house. Odette had mentioned often enough how she abhorred jealous lovers, the type of man who spies on one. What he was about to do was very ill-advised; once he had done it, she was bound to hate him, whereas at this very moment, while he stayed his hand, perhaps she still loved him, even as she was being unfaithful to him. He was struck by the way one will sacrifice the possibility of real happiness to the impatience of a less lasting satisfaction. His urge to find out the truth over-ruled his caution; it even seemed to be a nobler thing. He knew that the incontrovertible reality of certain circumstances that he would have given his life to establish accurately lay unrevealed but legible behind those slats of light, as surely as certain facts may be concealed by the cover of a priceless ancient manuscript, which, for all its intrinsic interest to the scholar who consults it, also moves him with the golden richness of the illuminations which decorate it. There was a heady joy in the prospect of learning the truth he longed for from this unique, short-lived, precious evidence, made of such warm glowing translucent material. Besides, the advantage which he felt he had over the pair of them (which he so acutely needed to feel) was possibly not just that he knew, but that he could show them he knew. So he stood on tiptoe and knocked on the shutter. His knock having been ignored, he banged harder, and the voices stopped. Then a man's voice asked, 'Who's there?' and Swann, thinking of the men-friends of Odette, tried to identify which of them it sounded like. But he was not sure that he recognized the voice and knocked a third time. The window was opened, then the shutters. He had gone too far to draw back; so, in the hope of appearing not too miserable, jealous and inquisitive, and since the cat was now well and truly out of the bag, he just called out to her in a nonchalant cheery way, 'Sorry for disturbing you! I just happened to be passing, I saw your light and I wondered if you were feeling any better!'

Before his eyes stood two old gentlemen, one of whom held a lamp in his hand. Then he noted the room — it was completely unfamiliar to him! Being in the habit of recognizing Odette's window, whenever he came to see her late at night, by the fact that it would always be the only one showing a light in the whole long row of identical windows, he had made the mistake of knocking at the window of the house next door. Apologizing, he walked away and had himself driven back home, glad that he had managed to allay his curiosity without damaging the love he shared with Odette, and that after such a long period of feigning semi-indifference towards her he had not displayed his jealousy and thus given clear proof of loving her too much, the consequence of which, between lovers, is that the other is absolved thenceforward from ever loving enough.

He never once spoke to Odette of the blunder he had made that night; and

it was never in his mind. But occasionally, with a careless step of thought, he would trip over the unseen memory of it, which would push it farther into him and cause him a deep stab of pain. It was as though it was bodily pain, too, in that his mind could do nothing to lessen it - although bodily pain, by being independent of the mind, is at least capable of being focussed on by the mind, which can register a diminution of the pain or a momentary respite from it. But with that other mode of pain, the mind actually created it anew merely by remembering it. Trying not to think of it was just another way of thinking of it and continuing to feel it. Even when he forgot the pain, talking with a group of friends, all at once something that one of them said would make him wince and pale, like a wounded man who has been carelessly jostled. On leaving Odette, he would be happy, his mind at rest, and he would recall all the loving smiles she had bestowed on him, all the scornful ones with which she had dismissed the mention of certain other men; how heavy her head had been as she tilted it on its axis to bring it down, almost against her will, to his lips, exactly as she had done that first time in the carriage; the melting ache in the eyes she turned to him as she lay in his arms and the cosy way she nestled her head against her shoulder, as though she was shivering. But instantly his jealousy, like the inseparable shadow of his love for her, would show him the exact counterpart of a new smile she had given him that very night, but scoffing at Swann now and full of tenderness for someone else, or of the angle of the bent head as it swooned for different lips, or of all the proofs of her love given to some other man. All the sensual memories of her that he took away with him resembled so many sketches or mock-ups done by a designer, enabling Swann to picture variants of the lustful or languishing postures which she might adopt with other lovers. He came to regret any pleasure that he enjoyed with her, any unpractised caress whose stealthy thrill he was unwise enough to reveal to her or any new glimpse of beauty he saw in her, since he knew that these very delights would immediately turn into untried forms of torment for himself.

This torment became even more excruciating whenever Swann happened to remember a certain expression which he had noticed flit across Odette's features for the first time a few days previously. It had happened at the Verdurins', after dinner. Forcheville had perhaps sensed that Saniette, his own brother-in-law, was not in his hosts' good books and had decided to victimize him and thus ingratiate himself at Saniette's expense; or perhaps he took umbrage at something tactless said by Saniette, the offensiveness of which was lost on other people present, ignorant as they were of what unintended aspersion it might have contained; or perhaps he had even been biding his time, looking for an opportunity to disgrace and have banished from the house somebody who had no illusions about him and who, as he well knew, was a man of such high standards in matters of behaviour that Forcheville felt uncomfortable at times just being in the same room with him. Whatever the reason, he replied to Saniette's thoughtless remark with

such coarseness, assaulted him with such a battery of insults (growing more violent in his rantings, the more Saniette begged him in alarm and pain to desist) that finally the poor man asked Mme Verdurin whether he should remain there or leave the house and, receiving no reply from her, made a hesitant stammering exit, his eyes bright with tears. This scene Odette had watched without expression; but as soon as the door closed behind Saniette, she had as it were demeaned her usual expression by several degrees, putting herself on the same plane of craven turpitude as Forcheville and spangling her eyes with a sly smile of congratulation for his boldness and ironic commiseration for his victim; and the glance of complicity in foul play that she cast at Forcheville so unmistakably implied, 'Well! That was an execution, if ever I saw one! Did you see how down in the mouth he looked? The tears were tripping him,' that Forcheville, when his eyes met hers, suddenly lost all the anger or the pretence of anger with which he was still fuming, smiled back at her and said, 'Well, if he had been a bit nicer he could have stayed here. A good dressing-down never did anyone any harm.'

One day† Swann had gone out in the middle of the afternoon to pay a call on a friend and, finding that the person in question was out, had decided to go round to see Odette; for though he never went to see her at that time of day, he knew she was always at home then, having a rest or attending to her correspondence before tea-time, and he enjoyed the prospect of just sitting with her for a while. The concierge said he was pretty sure she was in; and when Swann rang, he thought he heard a noise, something like footsteps, from inside the house, but nobody came to the door. In anxiety and irritation, he walked round to the little street at the back of the house and approached Odette's bedroom window. The curtains prevented him from seeing a thing inside the room, so he banged hard on the window and called to her. Nobody appeared. He realised that neighbours were beginning to look at him and walked away, telling himself that he could easily have been mistaken when he fancied he heard footsteps. But the thought of it nagged at his mind and he could concentrate on nothing else. An hour later he went back to the house. She was there. She told him that she had in fact been in the first time he had come, but she had been asleep; his ring at the bell had wakened her, she had realised it must be Swann and had run out to look for him, but he had already gone. As for the knocking on her window, she had heard that all right. In this statement, Swann immediately recognized one of those fragments of fact that liars in danger of being caught out feel they should include in their concoction of falsehood, in the belief that this shows their regard for truth and in the hope of giving to their falsehood the semblance and colour of truth. Of course, if Odette ever did something that she wanted nobody to know about, she took care to secrete it deep down in

her mind. But then, finding herself confronted with the person to whom she intended to lie, she was beset by confusion, her ideas short-circuited, her faculties of invention and reasoning were paralysed, and knowing that something or other had to be said, all she could find in her vacant mind was the very thing she had meant to conceal, but which, because it was true, was the only thing that had not faded away. So she would borrow a particle of that factual detail, which in itself had no special significance, taking comfort from the knowledge that her particle was verifiable and therefore did not entail the same dangers as a fictitious detail. 'At least that bit of it's true,' she would think, 'at least that bit of it's taken care of. He can check if he likes and he'll find it's quite true, so at least there's no danger of being found out on that score.' But she was wrong; it was this very detail that gave her away. She did not realise that her particle of truth had edges which could only be perfectly aligned with the corresponding broken edges of the true facts from which she had arbitrarily detached it; and that, try as she might to fit her particle into other circumstances of her own invention, the gaps left between the true and the false details, and the areas where the edges overlapped, would inevitably make it plain that her particle of truth did not belong.

Swann said to himself: 'She admits that she heard me ring, then knock on the window, that she surmised it was me and that she wanted to see me. Which doesn't tally with the fact that nobody came to the door.' However, he did not draw her attention to this discrepancy, believing that, if he left her to her own devices, Odette might just trump up some story which would give him an inkling of what the truth was. She went on talking while he, in a rapture of pain and devotion, listened without once interrupting her, absorbing these words she uttered, in which he could almost detect something that she was concealing behind them as she spoke: an indistinct suggestion of shape, like the imprecise form of a god showing through a sacred veil, the vague blurred contour of an infinitely precious reality that would remain for ever inaccessible to him — namely, what she had been up to at three o'clock that afternoon, when he called — a truth which he would never possess except in these untruths, these divine but illegible relics, since it only existed now inside the clandestine memory of this creature who could gloat on it without appreciating its worth but would never reveal it to him. It had, of course, occurred to Swann more than once that in themselves the daily doings of Odette had no power of fascination and that no universal inevitability decreed that her relationships with other men were bound to infect every living soul with this same morbid sadness, strong enough to drive one to a suicidal fever. At such times, he had recognized that this fascination and sadness actually resided in himself, that he harboured them like a disease and that when this disease had run its course, the actions of Odette, any kisses she might have given to anyone, would become as harmless as those of any other woman. Even so, the knowledge that the agonizing curiosity which he focussed on them had its cause and origin

⁺ The germ of this scene can be found in Manon Lescaut (1731) by the Abbé Prévost (JG).

solely within himself was not enough to make him see anything irrational in investing it with significance and trying to move heaven and earth to satisfy it. For Swann was now reaching an age at which one outgrows the philosophies of youth — a change in his outlook that was encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of the period and of the group of people with whom he had spent so much of his time (the Princesse des Laumes and her set), who held that only those who doubted everything could be credited with any intelligence and that the only undeniable reality was to be found in the fancies and preferences of the individual - and he now held the positivistic philosophy, almost medical in nature, of the type of man who does not direct his inner aspirations towards external things but tries instead to salvage from his former years a stable residue of habits and passions which he can consider to be his permanent fund of characteristics; and who from then on will arrange his whole life into a pattern expressly designed to give priority to these characteristics in his scale of fulfilments. Swann prudently looked forward to a continuation of the pain he suffered from not knowing what Odette had been doing, in the same way as he knew that, if the weather should turn damp and inclement, he could count on his eczema getting worse; in budgeting his expenditure, he mentally marked off a sizeable proportion to be spent finding out what Odette did each day, without which information he knew he would be unhappy, just as he reserved in advance other sums to be spent indulging some of his other tastes from which he knew he could expect enjoyment -- or rather had once expected enjoyment, in the days before falling in love - such as art-collecting or good food.

As he made to take his leave of Odette and go home, she asked him to stay a while longer, refusing to take no for an answer and even holding him back by the arm when he tried to open the door to go out. He paid no special attention to this, for among the countless gestures, exchanges and minute incidents that make up a conversation, our blind suspicions, haphazardly groping for a hidden truth, are bound to overlook those which conceal it and to fasten on those which conceal nothing. She was saying, 'What a pity that when you come and see me for a change in the afternoon, I don't even get the chance to be with you!' He was well aware that the degree of love she had for him did not tally with such effusive regret at having missed an opportunity of being with him; still, she was so kind and anxious to please him, and so often dejected when she had incurred his displeasure, that it struck him as quite understandable that she should be sorry for having deprived him of the pleasure of an hour spent together, a pleasure that was so great, not for her, but for him. Yet it was an event of so little moment that he eventually became surprised at how forlorn her manner continued to be. Looking like that, her face reminded him more than ever of the women in the works of the painter of the Primavera. She had the depressed, grief-stricken expression that seems to mean they are burdened with some unbearable affliction, merely because they are letting the Infant Jesus play with a pomegranate or

watching Moses pour water into a trough. He had seen this expression of profound sorrow on her face once before, but had forgotten when it was. Then suddenly it came back to him - it was when Odette had told Mme Verdurin a lie, the day following the dinner from which she had absented herself on the excuse of being unwell, but for the real purpose of seeing Swann. Surely, even if she had been the most scrupulously truthful of women, she could not have suffered much in the way of pangs of conscience at having told such a harmless fib. However, the lies she more usually told were less innocent and had the purpose of thwarting the discovery of things which could embroil her in all sorts of dreadful difficulties with one or other of the people she knew. So when she lied, she would feel panic-stricken, defenceless, plagued by doubts, and would be close to bursting into tears from sheer exhaustion, like a child who has not had a good night's sleep. Besides, she knew her lies were more often than not gross betrayals of the man to whom she told them and on whose mercy she might have to rely if they misfired. So, faced with the man in question, she was full of humility and the consciousness of her own guilt. And then, whenever she had occasion to tell a white lie, through an association of feelings and memory, she would feel faint and put upon, as though from overwork, and apologetic at having to do a bad turn.

What was the sad falsehood she was now telling him, that gave her such a heart-broken expression and the plaintive voice that sounded as though it was about to break down from exhaustion or beg for mercy? It suddenly crossed his mind that, whatever it was, she was not just trying to keep from him the truth about what had really been going on earlier, but also the truth about something of much more immediate import, possibly even something that had not yet come to pass, but which might come to pass soon and be capable of lightening his present darkness. At that very instant, he heard a bell ring. Odette's voice spoke on without a pause, but her words had become a grieving moan and her regret at having missed Swann earlier that afternoon by not getting to the door in time had turned into inconsolable distress.

They heard the front door being closed, then the sounds of a carriage, as though somebody was leaving — somebody whom Swann was presumably not meant to meet on his way out and who had just been told Odette was not at home. At the realization that, merely by turning up to see her at an unusual hour, he had disturbed all kinds of things which she wished to keep from him, Swann felt disheartened almost to the point of desolation. But since he loved her and was in the habit of directing every single one of his thoughts towards her, instead of feeling sorry for himself, it was Odette on whom he took pity, murmuring, 'Darling, don't worry.'

When he finally left, she took a handful of letters from the table and asked him if he would mind posting them for her. He took them; but when he got home he realised he still had the letters in his pocket. Going back to the post

office, he took them out and glanced at the address on each one before posting it. They were all for different tradesmen — except one, addressed to Forcheville. He stood there with it in his hand and thought: If I saw what was in this, I'd know what she calls him, the way she speaks to him, whether there's anything between them. In fact, if I don't look inside this envelope, I may actually be doing Odette a great disservice. It's the only way to scotch a suspicion which may well be grossly insulting to her. Or which at the very least is bound to hurt her. And if I let this letter go without looking at it, there will never be another chance to clear her of that suspicion.

When he left the post office, he went straight home, but the last letter was back in his pocket. Not daring to open it, he lit a candle and held the envelope close to the flame. To begin with, he could not make out anything. But the paper of the envelope was fine and by pressing it against the stiff card which it enclosed, he managed to decipher through it the last words of Odette's message — it was a very polite formality, so cold and impersonal, in fact, that it made him think: If it was Forcheville looking at a letter addressed to me, instead of me looking at one addressed to him, her words would have been much more suggestive in their tenderness! He held the card still, inside the envelope which was much larger than it, then pushed it this way and that with his thumb, so as to bring first one line of the message, then another, under the part of the envelope which was not of double thickness and through which he could read the words. But he still had great difficulty in deciphering them. Not that it really mattered now, though, as he could read enough of the message to know it referred to some trivial incident which had nothing whatever to do with any love affair - it mentioned something or other about an uncle of Odette's. He could make out that there was a line beginning It was just as well I, but what it had been just as well she did he could not see, until suddenly one of the words which he had previously been unable to distinguish became clear to him and, with it, the meaning of the whole sentence: It was just as well I opened the door — it was my uncle. Opened the door! That meant Forcheville had been there when he rang and she had made him leave, hence the noise Swann had

So then he read the whole letter. At the end of it, she apologised for having bundled him out like that and told him he had forgotten his cigarette-case—the very same sentence, in fact, that she had once written to Swann, after one of his first visits to her house. To Swann, though, she had added, I wish it had been your heart you left behind—I wouldn't have let you have it back. Whereas, she had written nothing of the kind to Forcheville, or any allusion that could be taken to mean there was something going on between them. Actually, when you thought about it, if anyone was being deceived in this business, it was Forcheville rather than himself, since Odette was having the man believe that the visitor had been her uncle! Which meant that the man she really cared about was himself, since she had put the other fellow off for

his sake. Yes, but if there really was nothing going on between Odette and Forcheville, why hadn't she opened the door right away? If there had been nothing underhand going on at that moment, why should she now say It was just as well I opened the door - it was my uncle? And if she hadn't been doing anything wrong, what on earth must Forcheville have thought when she didn't open the door? Swann sat there, bewildered, forlorn, yet happy, gazing at this envelope which Odette had unhesitatingly entrusted to him. showing what unshakable confidence she had in his integrity, but which in its transparency had become a window onto a tiny part of Odette's life, giving him a glimpse of a secret little episode which he would have believed it quite impossible to have, as though he had cut a narrow luminous section out of the unknown. Then his jealousy began to thrive on it, as though endowed with an independent selfish existence, as though it was greedy for any form of sustenance, even feeding on Swann himself. This incident gave it a sure supply of nourishment and from then on Swann would be able to worry every day about who might have visited Odette at five o'clock,† and devote all his energies to discovering where Forcheville was at that time. For Swann's tender feelings for Odette retained the character which they had acquired at the outset from his ignorance of how Odette spent her days and the mental laziness that prevented his imagination from filling out that ignorance. To begin with, he was not jealous of the whole life she led without him, but only of the isolated moments when some circumstance, possibly even misconstrued by him, had led him to the assumption that Odette might have been unfaithful to him. His jealousy, like an octopus securing its prey first with one tentacle, then with a second, then a third, battened first on the hour of five p.m., then on another time, and another.

Swann, however, could not invent his own suffering; it was only the memory, the perpetuation, of sufferings with which he had been afflicted by the world outside. And in the world outside, everything afflicted him with suffering. He decided to remove Odette from the proximity of Forcheville and took her to the Riviera for a few days. But he suspected every man in the hotel of fancying her; and he suspected her of fancying them, too. So, although he had once been the type who enjoyed making new acquaintances when travelling, and who had always been a good mixer, Swann now became unsociable and avoided the company of other men as though it was too unbearably hurtful. After all, could he have been anything but a misanthrope, since to his eyes every man was a potential lover for Odette? In this way, jealousy wrought greater changes in Swann's character than the blithe sensuality of his previous enjoyment of Odette, profoundly altering even the outward signs of that character as they appeared to other people.

A month after the episode of the letter addressed to Forcheville, Swann went to a dinner being held by the Verdurins in the Bois de Boulogne. At the

[†] Thus Proust, although he refers to this time also as d trois heures (see p.221) and d six heures in a later volume (JG).

end, as people were getting ready to leave, he noticed that Mme Verdurin was engaging in little conversations with groups of guests and overheard what sounded like a reminder to the pianist about an outing the following day to Chatou, to which Swann had not been invited.

The Verdurins had only mentioned it in a murmur and in very vague terms, but then the painter, without thinking, exclaimed, 'We must be sure to have no lights on. Then he can play the Moonlight sonata in the dark so that we can see better!'

Mme Verdurin, seeing that Swann was well within earshot, adopted the demeanour in which the conflicting desires to urge silence on a speaker and to appear all uninvolved for the benefit of a listener cancel one another into a stare of expressionless intensity, hiding the accomplice's impassive hint of connivance under the guileless smiles of the innocent and, as inevitably happens with those who notice a faux pas, instantly advertising the fact that one has been committed, if not to the person who has made it, at least to the person who may be offended by it. Odette suddenly looked like a woman prostrated by overwhelming troubles and about to give up the unequal and exhausting struggle against the harshness of existence, and Swann counted the anxious minutes he would have to live through until they could leave this restaurant and start the drive back to her house, during which he would be able to get some explanation of all this from her, make sure either that she gave up the idea of going to Chatou the next day or else got him invited too, and then, lying in her arms, exorcize this anguish that now possessed him.

The carriages were brought round and Mme Verdurin said to Swann, 'Well, cheerio! We'll be seeing you,' endeavouring to prevent him, by the cordiality in her eyes and the intent focus of her smile, from realizing that what she had just said was not what she could have been relied upon previously to say, namely, 'Well, we'll see you at Chatou tomorrow, shall we?' or, 'Don't forget, we're expecting you at our house the day after tomorrow!'

M. and Mme Verdurin were giving Forcheville a lift. Swann's carriage had drawn up right behind theirs and he stood waiting for them to move off so as to hand Odette in.

'Odette, you're coming with us,' said Mme Verdurin. 'We've kept a little place for you here beside M. de Forcheville.'

'All right,' replied Odette.

'But I thought you were coming home with me!' exclaimed Swann, laying aside all pretence now and saying what must be said; the carriage-door was open, it was a matter of seconds and, in the state he was in, he could not possibly leave without her.

'But Mme Verdurin has invited me to . . .'

'For goodness sake!' said Mme Verdurin. 'You can surely go home without her for once. We've let you have her to yourself often enough!'

'Yes, but, there's something very urgent that I've got to tell her.' 'Well, why not write it to her?'

'Goodbye,' said Odette, and held out her hand.

He managed to force a smile, but looked utterly shattered.

'Did you see the way that man Swann thinks he can treat us?' Mme Verdurin asked her husband, once they were back home. 'I thought he was going to bite my head off, just because we offered Odette a lift! The cheek of the man! I mean, why doesn't he say straight out that he thinks we're running a brothel? It's a mystery to me why Odette puts up with behaviour like that. His whole manner seems to say: Odette, you belong to me! I'll have a word in her ear about him. I trust she'll take my point.' Then, a moment later, she exploded with, 'No, but, I mean! The dirty beast!' using unwittingly the same words as a peasant watching the last struggles of some harmless creature which he is putting to death, and possibly acting on the same obscure impulse of self-justification as Françoise at Combray when her chicken refused to die.

When the Verdurins' carriage had moved off and Swann's had come up to take its place, his coachman looked closely at him and asked if he was feeling ill or whether there had been some accident.

Swann, preferring to walk, sent his carriage away empty and set off home through the Bois on foot. He talked to himself as he went, out loud, in the same tone of slight affectation as he had previously used to rehearse the joys of belonging to the little clan and to laud the magnanimous Verdurins. But, just as Odette's words, smiles and kisses, if reserved for somebody other than himself, seemed as hateful as they had once seemed sweet, so the Verdurin salon, which only recently had been a place of fine amusement, enjoying admirable artistic taste and actually pervaded with an atmosphere of moral nobility, now that Odette was going to be able to be there and flirt the evenings away with some other man, appeared to him in all its abject stupidity, its contemptible tomfoolery and turpitude.

In rank disgust, he pictured the outing to Chatou: 'For one thing, what a place to go to - Chatou! Like a gaggle of grocers on their day off! How unspeakably middle-class they are, the lot of them! People like that can't be real - they must have come out of a play by Labiche!'

No doubt the Cottard pair would be there, and Brichot too, perhaps: 'God! How grotesque they are! All those paltry people living in one another's pockets all the time! They would all be heart-broken, for goodness sake, if they couldn't look forward to seeing each other again tomorrow — at Chatou, of all places!' The painter would be there, too - oh, God, the painter and his match-making! He might invite Forcheville to visit his studio with Odette! And he could see Odette setting off for a day in the country, over-dressed for such an outing, 'Because her tastes are so vulgar! And of course, the dear girl is such a little fool!'

He could hear the witticisms of Mme Verdurin when dinner was over, the

like of which had always amused him because, whichever 'bore' it was at whose expense they were being made, he could see Odette laughing at them, laughing with him, not only sharing his mirth but being at one with him. But now he suspected that they might try to make Odette laugh at him. 'What an obscene sense of humour they have!' he said, contorting his mouth with such violent revulsion that he actually felt the muscular effort of his grimace in a movement of his neck against his shirt-collar. 'How on earth could any creature made in the image of God find anything to laugh at in such emetic attempts at wit? Anyone with even a moderately responsive sense of smell would be bound to turn away in horror and hold their nose, unless they wanted to be overcome by such nauseating fumes! It's quite unbelievable that there are human beings in this world who are incapable of realizing that if they so much as smile at the misfortune of a fellow creature who has held out a trusting hand to them, they are lowering themselves to the level of slime and that even with the best will in the world it will be impossible to lift them out of it! The element in which I exist is at an altitude of so many miles above the primeval quagmire where unclean backbiters of their sort sit gabbling and wallowing that I know I'll never be soiled by the filthy wit of any Verdurin female!' he exclaimed, with a toss of the head and a proud swagger of the shoulders. 'God knows I have made a sincere effort to rescue Odette from that atmosphere and raise her to a finer, more wholesome plane. But there is a limit to a man's patience, and mine has reached that limit,' he went on, as though this crusade to rescue Odette from an atmosphere of ignoble sarcasm dated from longer ago than the last few minutes and as though he had not just embarked upon it because the sarcasm in question could be directed at himself and might have the aim of separating her from him.

He could visualize the pianist sitting down to play the Moonlight and the alarmed faces Mme Verdurin would put on at the imminence of the havoc about to be wrought on her nerves by Beethoven: 'Imbecile of a woman! Liar! And it has the gall to profess a love of Art!' He could see her saying to Odette, after cleverly slipping in a few words in praise of Forcheville, as she had so often done for himself, 'You'd better move up and make a little space beside you for M. de Forcheville,' which made him burst out, 'And in the dark, too! Ah, the woman's a pimp! A procuress!' Having hit on the word 'pimp', he also applied it to the music that would cast its hushed spell on them, give them a tender moment to share, make them gaze into each other's eyes and hold hands in the dark. He found he agreed with Plato's and Bossuet's disapproval of the arts and wished for the good old days when people were brought up with a stern respect for morality.

In fact, the life led by the Verdurin clan, which he had so often held to be 'real life', now struck him as the worst type of life imaginable, and the little clan itself as a gang of undesirables: 'Really and truly, they are the lowest of the low in the social scale. They are in Dante's innermost circle — I'm sure

he had the Verdurins in mind when he wrote it! And when you come to think of it, people in real society, for all their faults, nevertheless belong to a different species from a rabble of hooligans like them, and they show just how sensible they are by refusing to have anything to do with them! They wouldn't touch them with a barge-pole! What instinctive foresight there is in the Faubourg Saint-Germain's motto Noli me tangere!' Although he had long since left the Bois and its avenues behind him and had almost reached home, he had not yet got over his pain or exhausted the lyricism of insincerity drawn in all its ever-increasing intoxication from the fraudulent intonations and delusive ring of his own voice, which went on declaiming in the empty dark: 'I mean, society people have their short-comings, all right, and I'm the first to admit it. But when all's said and done, they are the sort of people with whom certain things are just out of the question. I can think of a fashionable lady who was far from perfect, but who possessed a fund of tact and a feeling for what one did and did not do which would have made her utterly incapable, under any circumstances, of anything resembling foul play and which shows the gulf separating her and her likes from a harpy like that Verdurin female! And the ghastly name the woman's got! Verdurin! That's the finishing touch! That really suits them! They really take the biscuit! Thank God, I don't have to degrade myself any longer to the level of scurrilous, grubby, grovelling scum like that!'

But, just as the virtues he had lately seen in the Verdurins (even if they had genuinely possessed them but had done nothing to foster his love for Odette) would have been incapable of moving Swann to raptures about their magnanimous natures - raptures which could only have been inspired in him by the influence of Odette working through other people - similarly, the immorality he now saw in them (even if they had actually been guilty of it but had not excluded him from their invitation to Odette and Forcheville) would also have been insufficient to move him to wrath and abomination of their 'scurrility'. In this, his voice was probably more perceptive than he was, since it could only bring itself to utter these words of revulsion at the Verdurins' circle and heartfelt happiness at being free of it in an affected tone of voice that made them sound as though designed to relieve anger rather than to express thoughts. Indeed, his thoughts, while he was railing and ranting, must have been unobtrusively busying themselves with a totally different matter, for as soon as he reached his house and closed the street-gate behind him, he clapped a hand to his brow, re-opened the gate and went back out, exclaiming in his normal voice, 'I do believe I've hit on a way of wangling an invitation to Chatou tomorrow!'

However, his way of wangling an invitation must not have worked, for he was not invited. Dr Cottard (who had been called away to attend a patient in the country, had not seen the Verdurins for several days and had missed the outing to Chatou) said as he sat down to their table on the following day, 'I say, aren't we having the pleasure of M. Swann's company tonight? He's

what you'd call a bosom friend of . . .'

'I should think not, indeed!' retorted Mme Verdurin. "The very idea! The man's a bore, a boor and a fool!"

From then on, the drawing-room that had brought Swann and Odette together became an obstacle to their meetings. She no longer said, as she had in the early stages of their love, 'In any case, we'll see each other tomorrow evening — there's a dinner at the Verdurins'; what she did say was, 'We can't see each other tomorrow evening — there's a dinner at the Verdurins'.' Or else she had arranged with the Verdurins to go to A Night with Cleopatra at the Opéra-Comique, and Swann, looking into her eyes, could see clearly how alarmed she was in case he should beg her not to go, an expression which, a short time before, he would have impulsively kissed away but which now infuriated him. 'Mind you,' he thought, 'it's not anger I feel at her desire to scrabble about on the dunghill of music like that. It's sorrow, that's all, and for her, not for myself. Sorrow at the realization that in more than six months of daily contact with me, she hasn't experienced sufficient personal growth to recognize unaided that someone like Victor Massé is beneath her. And especially because she hasn't yet acquired the ability to recognize that there are times when a person with a modicum of fellowfeeling must be prepared to forfeit a pleasure with a good grace, because someone asks them to as a favour. She should be able to say, I won't go, if only because it's the intelligent thing to do, since her answer may decide once for all what qualities of spirit people will credit her with.' And having convinced himself that his real reason for wanting Odette to spend that evening with him instead of going to the Opéra-Comique was, wholly and solely, to enable him to have a higher opinion of her spiritual worth, he expounded the same arguments to her, with just as much insincerity as he had already expounded them to himself, if not a shade more of it, since he now had the additional motive of playing on her vanity.

'I swear to you,' he assured her, a few minutes before she was due to leave for the theatre, 'that though I'm asking you to stay at home, if I was selfish I would wish for nothing better than that you should refuse. Because I've got dozens of things I must do this evening and if you were to tell me now all of a sudden that you're not going after all I'd be in all sorts of bother, I can tell you. But my own occupations and pleasures are not the only thing in the world — I must think of you as well. The day may come when I lose all

contact with you, and then you might have the right to reproach me with having failed to warn you, before it was too late, that I was about to jump to one of those unfair conclusions that do so much damage to the feelings of love. Now, mark my words, A Night with Cleopatra - ye Gods, what a title! - has got nothing whatever to do with this. The only thing that's really at issue here is whether you are the shabby, contemptible sort of creature. utterly lacking in charm or spiritual values, who can't bring herself to put her own pleasure after somebody else's. And if that's what you are, how can anyone love you? Because if you are, then you're not even so much as a person, you're not a distinct entity of character, albeit with imperfections but at least amenable to improvement. All you are is an amorphous fluid that runs down the first slope it finds. You're a fish, devoid of memory or the power of reflexion, and no matter how long you spend in your aquarium, you'll just go on bumping your face against the glass a hundred times a day because you keep thinking it's water. Do you realize that your reply to my request will mean, not necessarily that I'll stop loving you there and then, but that you will certainly be less attractive to me, because I'll recognize from it that you're not a full person, that you are in fact at the beck and call of every passing fancy and incapable of rising above any of them? Now, of course, I would have preferred to ask you, as an inconsequential favour, not go to A Night with Cleopatra (since you force me to defile my lips with the ghastly name!), in the hope that you might nevertheless still go to it. However, since I've decided to attach this importance to your answer and draw these inferences from it, I thought it was fairer of me to let you know.'

For a few moments, Odette had been showing signs of being upset and perplexed. What she took from this tirade of Swann's, if not its meaning, was the feeling that it must belong in the common category of the Lover's Harangue and the Scene of Recrimination and Entreaty; and her familiarity with the ways of men enabled her to pay no attention to the actual detail of what they said on these occasions, sure in the knowledge that they would not read her such lectures if they were not in love with her, and that since they were in love with her there was no point in complying with their requests, as they would only be more in love with her if she ignored them. In fact, she could have gone on listening to Swann's outburst with perfect equanimity, had she not noticed that the time was getting on and that if he did not stop talking soon he would, as she told him with a smile that was fond, confused and stubborn, 'just make her miss the overture!'

On other occasions, he told her that if there was one thing that would do more than anything else to make him stop loving her it was that she was such a liar. 'Just look at it from the point of view of your own attractiveness as a woman,' he would say. 'Can't you see how unattractive you make yourself by stooping to lies? Just think — if you make a clean breast of it, you wipe the slate clean! I must say you're not nearly as clever as I used to think!' But it was pointless for Swann to demonstrate to her all the good reasons why

she should give up telling lies. His reasons might well have undermined some general and consistent system of lying, if Odette had been following any such system; but the fact was she had none. All she did, if she wanted to make sure that Swann would be unaware of something she had done, was to say not a word to him about it. For Odette, lying was an ad hoc expedient; and the only reason which ever determined whether she should have recourse to this expedient or else tell the truth, was also an ad hoc eventuality: the greater or lesser likelihood that Swann might find out she had not been telling the truth.

Physically, she was going through a bad phase: she was putting on weight and her doleful suggestive charm, her expressions of dreamy, wistful surprise, seemed to have faded with the first bloom of youth. So it was at the very time when Swann found her much less pretty than before that she had become so dear to him. He would gaze long and hard at her, trying to recapture the charm he had once seen in her, but could never find it. Nevertheless, the knowledge that inside this new chrysalis the former Odette was still living, just as wilful and shifty, elusive and wily as ever, was enough to make Swann pursue her with the same passion as before. Or else he would sit looking at photographs of her taken two years previously, remembering how captivating she had been; and at the thought of the present trouble and distress she was causing him, he drew some comfort from the memory.

When the Verdurins took her on outings to Chatou or Meulan or Saint-Germain-en-Laye, they would often decide there and then, if it was summertime, to stay the night and not go back to Paris until the following day. On these occasions, Mme Verdurin would have to conjure away the scruples of the pianist, whose aunt would be expecting him back in Paris that night: 'She'll be delighted to be rid of you for one day. What would she have to worry about, since she knows you're in safe hands? Anyway, you can blame the whole thing on me.'

However, if she did not succeed in allaying his misgivings, her husband would be despatched into the highways and byways to locate a telegraph office or somebody willing to take a message, having first inquired of the other 'regulars' whether any of them wished to send word to somebody. Odette would say no thank you, she had no message to send to anyone, as she had told Swann once and for all that if she was to send him a telegram in front of everybody this would compromise her in the eyes of the Verdurins. There were times when she was away for days on end, when the Verdurins invited her to go to Dreux to see the tombs of the house of Orléans, or to Compiègne, on the recommendation of the painter, to admire the woodlands at sunset, from where they sometimes went on to look at the château of Pierrefonds. Swann would say to himself, 'To think that she could go and see real buildings any day of the week with me! I studied architecture for ten years, I'm for ever being asked to take people of very high standing to

Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud, which I would do for her at the drop of a hat, but instead off she goes with obscene pigs like that to gape in admiration first at the excreta of Louis-Philippe, then at those of Viollet-le-Duc! There can't be anything very artistic about people who do that, if you ask me! Nor does one need a very sensitive nose to realise you don't decide to spend your holidays in the latrines so as to be closer to the smell of shit!'

Then, after she had left on the outing to Dreux or Pierrefonds (forbidding him, to his chagrin, to turn up as though just by chance at their destination. saying it would be 'a disgraceful exhibition') Swann would immerse himself in the volume that contains the most romantic love-story of all — the railway timetable. In it, he found the means of being with her, wherever she was, that afternoon or evening — or that very morning! And not only the means but a hint of permission as well. After all, the timetable and the trains it announced were not there for the use of stray dogs, were they? If people took the trouble to inform the world at large in black and white that there was a train for Pierrefonds leaving Paris at 8 a.m. and arriving at 10 a.m., it followed that to go by train to Pierrefonds was a perfectly legitimate thing for anyone to do and that to seek Odette's approval for such a journey was quite superfluous; and obviously it was also a journey that could be motivated by something quite different from the desire to meet Odette, since there were enough people who were complete strangers to her making the trip every day for it to be worth the railway company's while to heat the boilers of their steam-engines!

The fact of the matter was that she had no right to prevent him from going to Pierrefonds if he felt like it! And, now that he thought about it, he did feel like it! Not only that, but even if he hadn't known Odette, he would definitely have gone there. He had felt the desire for ages to get a clearer idea of Viollet-le-Duc's restorations. And now that it was such a lovely day, he was possessed by a veritable craving to go on an excursion to the forest of Compiègne.

It was really a great pity that Odette had put out of bounds the only place he felt like visiting today. Today! If he ignored her prohibition and went there, he might see her this very day! But, whereas some chance acquaintance who happened to turn up at Pierrefonds that day would have been greeted with the delighted exclamation, 'Fancy bumping into you here!' and an invitation to go and see her at the hotel where she and the Verdurins were putting up, if it was Swann who just happened to bump into her, she would be angry with him and tell herself she was being followed everywhere, she would fall a little more out of love with him and might even turn and walk away in a fit of temper as soon as she set eyes on him. And when she came back to Paris she would complain, 'So I'm not even allowed to take a trip now, is that it?'; whereas, if the truth were told, he was the one who was not allowed to take a trip!

It had crossed his mind that a good way of going to Compiègne and

Pierrefonds, without making it appear that his real reason was to see Odette, was to have himself invited down by a friend of his, the Marquis de Forestelle, who owned a château in those parts. The Marquis, on being told of Swann's intended visit but not of the motive behind it, was overjoyed, while somewhat amazed that Swann, whom he had been inviting to come down on and off over the past fifteen years, had at last decided to come and see the house, and (though Swann preferred, he said, not to spend much time there) was at least looking forward to spending a few days with him, touring the surrounding districts. Swann could picture how it would be at M. de Forestelle's; even before he caught sight of Odette, or even if he did not manage to see her, what happiness it would be to explore that place where, in his delicious ignorance of her exact whereabouts at any given moment, he would sense at every turn the thrilling possibility of her sudden appearance: perhaps it would happen in the courtyard of the château of Pierrefonds itself, glowing for him with beauty because she was his reason for being there; or in one or other of the streets of the village, which seemed now such a romantic little spot; or along any one of the forest paths, tinged by the misty pink of some endless sunset — and in the random ubiquity of his expectations, his happy, restless, divided heart sought and nestled with Odette in countless simultaneous and alternative nooks. He must be sure to say to M. de Forestelle, 'We'll have to be careful not to bump into Odette and the Verdurins. I've just heard they'll be at Pierrefonds this very day. It would be a pity if one couldn't leave Paris now and again without tripping over people one can see there any day of the week, what?' And his friend would be mystified by the way Swann changed his plans a dozen times a day, reconnoitring the dining-room of every hotel in the town of Compiègne but declining to eat in any one of those which showed no trace of the Verdurins' party, while actually appearing to be seeking what he claimed to be trying to avoid, then avoiding it as soon as he found it; for if they should happen to come upon the little Verdurin group he would make a point of ostentatiously keeping away from them, happy in the knowledge that he had set eyes on Odette, that she too had seen him and, in particular, that she had seen him ignoring her. But then he realised that Odette was bound to know perfectly well that she was his only reason for being there. And when M. de Forestelle arrived to collect him and drive him down to the country, Swann said, 'Look, old chap, it's a great pity, but I can't possibly go down to Pierrefonds today. You see, Odette's there at the moment.' None the less Swann was cheered and consoled by the feeling that if he was the sole member of the human race who was prohibited from going to Pierrefonds that day it was for the simple reason that he meant something more to Odette than any other person — that he was her lover, in fact, and that the exception made for his sake to the universal human right known as freedom of movement merely represented one of the modes of the bondage that his love amounted to and that was so dear to him. Undoubtedly, it would be far better not to

run the risk of a tiff with Odette, but to be patient and wait until she came back to Paris. He spent hours poring over a map of the forest of Compiègne as though it was the map of Tendret and surrounded himself with photographs of the château of Pierrefonds. On the first day when it was just possible she might have returned to Paris, he opened his timetable again and worked out from it which train she must be on; then, in case she was coming back in the evening, he checked the times of the later ones as well. He stayed at home all that day so as not to miss any message she might send, then sat up late just in case she might have returned to town by the very last train and decided to come round and pay him a surprise midnight visit. And, sure enough, he could hear a ring at the carriage gate! He felt there was an unconscionable delay in opening it, wanted to waken the concierge, leaned out of his window to call to Odette if it turned out to be her, knowing full well that, despite the strict instructions he had issued and the fact that he had gone downstairs in person several times to repeat them, it was perfectly possible that she would be told he was not at home. It was only a servant coming home late. He noticed the incessant stream of carriages that passed the house and that he had never been aware of before. He listened to each of them as it came within earshot, drew level with the house then went past without stopping, to deliver elsewhere a message that was not for him. He lay awake all night, waiting - pointlessly, since the Verdurins had come home earlier than expected and Odette had actually been back in Paris since noon. It had not occurred to her to let Swann know of her return and, finding herself at a loose end, she had gone out to the theatre in the evening, unaccompanied. She had long since gone home to bed and was now sound

In fact, she had never given him so much as a thought. Such moments, when she forgot Swann's very existence, were more useful to her, more effective in binding him to her than any conscious wiles with which she might seek to attract him. For at such times Swann lived in that state of painful agitation which had already been potent enough to create his love for her on the night when he had missed her at the Verdurins' and spent hours hunting for her high and low. Unlike myself as a child at Combray, he did not even have happiness to enjoy during the day, that blessed relief from pangs which will not return until nightfall. Swann spent his days without Odette, although there were times when he thought that letting such a pretty person out all by herself in Paris was as reckless a thing to do as leaving a jewel-case overflowing with precious stones in the middle of the road. At this thought, he would focus a furious stare on all the men who passed him in the street, as though they were robbers to a man. But his imagination could not retain their formless collective features; nor could his jealousy feed on them. They served only to exhaust and exasperate his † La Carte du (or de) Tendre, an allegorical map of the landscapes of love, appeared in Clélie

thoughts; at which, like a man who, having worn himself out grappling with problems such as the reality of the exterior world or the soul's immortality, offers his weary mind the respite of a leap of faith, he would shield his eyes with his hand and cry out, 'Oh, God in Heaven!' But the thought of the absent Odette, by virtue of the constant sadness he felt at having to do the simplest things without her - eating breakfast, opening his mail, leaving the house, going to bed — was inextricably entangled in his everyday life, like those initials of Philibert the Fair that Margaret of Austria, because of her mourning for him, intertwined with her own throughout the church at Brou. Some days, instead of lunching at home, he went to a restaurant not far away which he had once frequented because of the excellence of its cooking, but which now attracted him for one of those mystical and ludicrous reasons that are supposed to be romantic — the fact was that the place, which exists to this day, bore the same name as the street where Odette lived: Lapérouse. Sometimes, if she had been away from Paris for a short period, it would not occur to her for several days to let him know of her return. And then she would tell him quite straightforwardly, without even bothering now to take the precaution of covering her lies with a fragment borrowed from the truth, that she had only got back that very minute by the morning train. This statement was, of course, untrue. That is, in Odette's own mind, it was untrue, and lacked all substance, since it was devoid of what it would have had if it had been true - some basis in her memory of her arrival at the station. In fact, at the very moment when she uttered it, she was prevented from having a proper mental picture of the truth it purported to tell by the contradictory image of what she really had been doing at the moment when she said she was getting off the train. In the mind of Swann, however, there was no such obstacle to her words and they hardened into a truth that was so indelible and indubitable that if a friend happened to mention having come up by the same train without setting eyes on Odette, Swann concluded it was the friend who was mistaken about the day or the particular train, since his version did not tally with hers. Odette's version would only have struck him as untrue if he had half-expected it to be. And for him to believe she was lying, a preliminary suspicion was a necessary condition. However, it was also a sufficient one, and it could give a suspect aura to every word she uttered. If he heard her mention a man's name, it was bound to be one of her lovers — a conclusion which, once jumped to, cast a shadow of misery over the following weeks. On one occasion, he went so far as to contact a private investigation agency (to find out the address of the man in question, and whether his plans for the immediate future included a trip away from Paris which might enable Swann to breathe more freely) which eventually informed him that it was the name of one of Odette's uncles, who had been dead for twenty years.

Although she did not usually allow him to be seen about with her, on the excuse that people would talk, it happened now and again that he found

himself attending some function - at Forcheville's house or the painter's, or perhaps a charity ball held at one of the Ministries - at which Odette was also a guest. He had thus an opportunity of seeing her, but did not dare stay, in case she might take offence at his seeming to be spying on pleasures which she enjoyed with other people and which, as he made his lonely way home and anxiously got ready for bed (like myself at Combray, several years later, on evenings when he came to dine with us), seemed boundless and inexhaustible because he did not know how they would end. There were even one or two of these evenings when he experienced the sort of happiness which (if it had not been so violently affected by the recoil from the instantaneous cessation of anxiety) one might be tempted to call a tranquil happiness, since it consisted of a lull of feeling - for instance, he might have looked in for a while at a party given by the painter and would be just about to make his exit; behind him he would be leaving an Odette who had suddenly changed into a dazzling stranger surrounded by men to whom her glances and mirth, no longer directed at himself, seemed to hint at delights soon to be enjoyed with her, there or elsewhere (perhaps at the Arts Ball, a prospect that sent a shudder down his spine in case she went on there afterwards), and the thought of these mysterious delights caused him sharper pangs of jealousy than the thought of her actually in bed with someone else, because he found them much more difficult to imagine. He would be on the point of going through the studio door when he heard her call his name and speak the words which cancelled the dreaded sequel to the party, transformed it retrospectively into something that could not harm him, showed him Odette's return home later that night as a thing which was no longer unimaginable and hideous but familiar and soothing, fitting beside him in his carriage like a part of his daily life, and even divested Odette herself of her gaudy gaiety, which turned out to have been only a momentary disguise adopted, not for the purpose of enjoying mysterious pleasures, but for its own sake, and that she was already tired of - 'I say, would you mind awfully staying for another five minutes? I mean, I'm going soon and you could take me home.'

There had even been a night when Forcheville himself had asked for a lift with them and, as the carriage drew up outside Odette's front door, had requested her permission to come inside — but she had replied, with a gesture towards Swann, 'Well now, that depends on this gentleman, you see. You'd better ask him. Well, look, you can come in for a little while if you like, but you mustn't stay long. Because I'm telling you, he likes to have me all to himself for a cosy little chat, and he's not very keen on having visitors when he's here. Oh, if you only knew him as well as I know him! Isn't that right? Nobody knows you as well as I do, do they, my love?' (The 'my love' being added, as was her wont, in English.)

Swann, who revelled in hearing her express her fondness and partiality for him in front of Forcheville, was perhaps even more touched at being scolded or criticised by her when the other man was there. When she said, 'I suppose you haven't bothered to reply to that invitation to dinner next Sunday from those friends of yours. By all means, don't go if you don't feel like it. But you could at least do the polite thing,' or else: 'Look, have you left that essay of yours on Vermeer here so you can work on it a bit tomorrow? You are a lazybones! But I'll make sure you do some work, you'll see,' her words proved that she was keeping herself informed about his social contacts and his artistic hobby and that he and she did in fact have a life in common. And as she spoke these words, she accompanied them with a smile in which he read her assurance that she belonged to nobody but himself.

At moments such as this, while she prepared a drink of orangeade for them, all at once the horrific shifting figments that his imagination had made of Odette faded into the charming figure that stood before Swann, as the monstrous shadowy shapes of some small object, projected across a wall by the beam of light from an unfocussed reflector, can be reduced and resolved into the single outline of the thing itself. He would have a sudden illumination of suspicion that this moment spent at Odette's, sitting with her in the lamplight, was not an artificial moment, specially trumped up for his benefit, tricked out with stage-props and imitation fruit and designed to mask the dreadful delightful thing that he thought about all the time without ever being able to see it clearly: an hour in the real life of Odette, the life she led when he was somewhere else - perhaps this really was a genuine moment of her life? Perhaps, even if he had been absent, she would still have offered Forcheville that same armchair in which he was now sitting and poured him a glass, not of some unknown potion, but just this very orangeade! Perhaps the world where Odette lived was not after all that other world of supernatural horrors in which he so often saw her and which might only exist inside his own imagination, but was simply the real everyday world, with no special essence of sadness to secrete, and comprising not only this table at which he could sit and write the following day and that drink that he would soon be able to taste, but also all these other objects set about the room that he gazed on with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude. For though these things had delivered him from the world of his imagination by absorbing it into themselves, they were now the richer for it. a standing palpable proof of it and a source of fascination to his mind; as he looked at them, they took on the solidity and relief of reality and calmed his panicky heart. Oh, if only fate could make it possible for him and Odette to share the same place of living, so that when he was at her house he would be at home, if only when he asked the butler what was for lunch today he could be told the menu Odette had drawn up, if only whenever Odette felt like taking a morning stroll along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne his duty as a good husband might oblige him to accompany her, whether he wanted to or not, and carry her coat if she felt too warm, if only he could find himself obliged, when she felt like spending a casual evening at home, to stay in with

her after dinner and do whatever she was in the mood to do! If only it could have been like that, Swann knew that all the trivia in his present life that contained such sadness could have gone on being the same trite things but, by belonging to Odette's life as well to his own, every last familiar one of them — like that lamp, or this drink of orangeade, or this armchair, all of them so imbued by his yearnings, the tangible translations of so much desire — would somehow have acquired a kind of fond inexhaustible mellowness and an unfathomable density!

Nevertheless, in all his sadness, he had an inkling that what he was vearning for was a mode of tranquillity and peace which would have provided an unfavourable atmosphere for his love. He sensed well enough that when in time Odette had ceased to be the creature she now was, somebody who was for ever absent, to be missed and imagined, when his feelings for her had become an affectionate form of gratitude instead of the mysterious undercurrents that stirred in him as he listened to the little phrase from the sonata, and when a normal relationship between them had abolished his fits of grief and madness, the actions that made up Odette's life would possess very little intrinsic interest — as, in fact, he had already suspected on more than one occasion, like that day when he had read the Forcheville letter through the envelope. At such times, contemplating his malady as objectively as though he had just inoculated himself with it so as to study its effects, he would accept that, once he had got over it, Odette's doings would be a matter of utter indifference to him. Even so, in his morbid condition, such a cure for his malady struck him as an outcome to be dreaded as much as death; and it would have been, of course, the death of everything that he then was.

After the calm recuperation of such evenings with Odette, Swann's suspicions about her would abate. He blessed the thought of her; and the following morning, as soon as he got up, he would arrange for a gift of the finest jewellery to be delivered to her, her recent benevolence to him having roused either his gratitude or a desire for it to continue or else just a burst of adoration for her that he could not contain.

But there were other times when the pain would come back, when he convinced himself that she must be Forcheville's mistress and that, on the night before the outing to Chatou from which he was excluded (when the pair of them, Odette and Forcheville, had been sitting side by side in the Verdurins' landau at the Bois and had seen Swann beg her in vain to come home in his carriage, with the look of despair that even his coachman had noticed, then set off on foot, lonely and crushed) she had probably drawn Forcheville's attention to him and murmured, with the very same nasty surreptitious gleam in her lowered eyes as he had seen in them when Forcheville had banished Saniette from the Verdurins' house, 'Ooh! Temper, temper!'

At those moments, Swann hated her and would rage to himself: 'Look at

me! Fool that I am! I'm the one that pays the piper, yet they call the tune! She'd better watch out, though! She'd better not overstep the mark or I might just stop forking out! Come to think of it, we may as well put a temporary stop, right now, to the little extras. To think that only yesterday when she said she wouldn't mind going to Bayreuth for the season, I was stupid enough to suggest I could rent one of the King of Bavaria's nice castles in the vicinity for the two of us! And she didn't seem a bit pleased, either! She hasn't even bothered to say yes or no to the idea! I do hope she turns it down! Good God, the thought of sitting through a fortnight of Wagner with someone like her, who couldn't tell a Valkyrie from a bar of soap, is hair-raising!' And since his hatred had as much need as his love to be expressed and acted upon, he enjoyed conjuring up more and more hideous figments in his imagination; thanks to the spurious acts of treachery with which he credited Odette, he could then detest her even more and, should they turn out to be true (which he tried hard to convince himself they were), thus have an opportunity of punishing her and working off on her some of his growing fury. He went so far as to imagine that he was about to receive a letter from her, asking for the money to rent the castle near Bayreuth and telling him it was out of the question for him to go there with her, as she had promised to invite Forcheville and the Verdurins. How dearly he wished she would dare write him such a letter! In his joy at refusing her request, he drafted in his mind a ruthless reply to it, enjoying the hunt for the right words and actually speaking them out loud, as though he had really received such a letter.

The very next day, he did receive it. It said that the Verdurins and their friends had expressed a desire to attend the Wagner season and that, if he would only let her have the money, she could at last enjoy the pleasure of being their hostess after having been their guest on so many previous occasions. Swann himself was not mentioned, but it was hinted that his presence would be incompatible with the others'.

This now gave him the joyous opportunity of sending her his implacable reply, every word of which he had selected just the day before, without really believing it would ever serve any purpose. Even so, he knew perfectly well that, whether she used her own money or got the sum elsewhere, she would still be able to rent something at Bayreuth, given the strength of her desire to go there — with her ear that was incapable of telling Bach from Clapisson! However, the scale of the life she could afford to lead there would be reduced. At least by refusing to send her a few thousand-franc notes, he had ruled out the possibility of her throwing the sort of intimate supperparties, night after night in that castle, where she might just succumb to the temptation — which it was still possible she had not yet succumbed to — to fall into the arms of Forcheville. In any case, he wasn't the one who was going to foot the bill for her bloody journey! If only he could do something to prevent it from taking place! If only she could sprain an ankle just before

it was time to go, or if the coachman driving her to the station would only agree (the man must have his price!) to take her to some out-of-the-way place where she could be kept locked up for a while and where Swann could gloat upon the faithless woman with the eyes highlighted by a smile of complicity for Forcheville that Odette had become in these past forty-eight hours.

This image of her never lasted very long; after a few days, the sly gleam would fade from her eye and the picture of a hateful Odette murmuring to Forcheville, 'Temper! Temper!' would begin to lose its impact and its clear outlines. It was gradually replaced by the gentle glow of another face — the Odette who also smiled at Forcheville, but whose smile was now full of tenderness for Swann as she said, 'Don't stay too long, because this gentleman here doesn't like me having visitors when he's with me. Oh, if you only knew him the way I know him!' It was the same smile as the one she bestowed on Swann to thank him for showing the considerateness which she valued so highly in him or for responding to her request for advice when she found herself in the serious sort of predicament in which she would turn to him rather than to anyone else.

He would start to wonder how on earth he could have brought himself to write such a heartless letter to that second Odette, who must have hitherto believed him incapable of doing any such thing — it must have toppled him from the unique pedestal of special esteem on which, because of his qualities of kindness and reliability, she had once placed him! No doubt he would now forfeit some of her fondness, since those were the very qualities which she loved in him and could see neither in Forcheville nor in any other man. They were the reason why Odette so often treated him with indulgence — indulgence which, if he was suffering an attack of his jealousy, he looked on as worthless (as it was not a sign of desire and bespoke affection rather than real love for him) but in which he came to see greater importance as his suspicions spontaneously waned, often under the influence of a moment's enjoyment of a book on art or a conversation with a friend, and weakened his passion's demands for reciprocity from her.

When Odette, after this kind of oscillation, had taken up once again her natural position in Swann's heart, from which his jealousy had briefly dislodged her, and where all her charm was manifest, Swann imagined her once more full of fondness for him, her eyes brimming with acquiescence, and looking so pretty in this pose that he could not help pouting a kiss at her, as though she was really there in person to receive it; and this captivating expression of loving kindness on her face caused him as keen a pang of gratitude towards her as though she had actually been there to show it herself, as though it was not just his own imagination that had invented a glimpse of it so as to offer a gratification to his desire for her.

How he must have broken her heart! He could find plenty of good reasons for his erstwhile resentment at her, but none of them would have sufficed to make him feel it if he had not been so much in love with her. In the past, had he not harboured deeper grudges against other women? Despite which, now that his anger at them had died with his love for them, would he not be glad to do any of them a favour? If the day ever dawned when he reached a similar state of indifference towards Odette, he would realise then that it was only his jealousy which had made him see something unforgivably abhorrent in her simple and quite understandable wish to take the opportunity that had arisen to return the Verdurins' hospitality and make believe for a change that she was the lady of the house — a wish, when you came to think of it, that showed nothing more than the charming childish streak in her nature, as well as her undeniable thoughtfulness where other people were concerned!

He now found himself at the opposite pole from both his love and his jealousy, back at the standpoint which, out of something like intellectual integrity and a desire not to overlook any of the various probabilities, he would occasionally adopt in an attempt to form some estimate of Odette as though she was not the woman he loved, as though she was just a woman like any other and as though her life, once she was out of his sight, was not some alien thing, like a plot being hatched against him somewhere in secret. After all, why should he believe that she was going to run off to Bayreuth and enjoy, with Forcheville or anyone else, heady unheard-of delights that she had never enjoyed with himself and that were concocted from start to finish by his own jealousy? If Forcheville should think of him at all, whether in Bayreuth or in Paris, it could only be in the knowledge that Swann was a man who occupied a place of immense importance in Odette's life, a man who took precedence over himself if ever they met at her house. And if it was true that Odette and Forcheville were exulting at going away together, despite and without Swann, it must be his own fault, because he had made that pointless attempt to thwart her plans for going to Bayreuth; whereas if he had only given his approval to those plans, which after all were quite above-board, he could have made it seem she was going on his own advice, she might have felt she was there at his behest or even as though she was his tenant, and the pleasure she felt at being able to offer her hospitality to people who had so often offered her theirs would have turned into gratitude towards himself. Besides, if he sent her the money she needed, encouraged her to go on her trip to Bayreuth and tried to help her enjoy it, instead of letting her leave Paris without seeing him to patch up their tiff, she was bound to come to him, beaming with glad gratitude, and he would have the happiness for which there was no substitute and which he had now gone without for almost a whole week: setting eyes on her. For whenever Swann could bear to picture Odette without revulsion, whenever he dwelt on her indulgent smile and as soon as his jealousy stopped contaminating his love with the longing to keep her away from all other men, his feelings for her became once again, more than anything else, a liking for the sensations to be enjoyed in her person, the pleasure to be derived from that special way she had of raising her eyes, shaping a smile or colouring her voice with a certain tone, all of which he either admired as though she was on show or focussed on as though she was a phenomenon to be studied. This pleasure, which was unlike any other, had eventually created in him a need for her, a craving which could be satisfied only by Odette, either by her presence or by a letter from her, and which was almost as disinterested, artistic and persistent as the other craving that marked this new period of Swann's life, when the sterile pessimism of earlier years had been succeeded by a sort of supercharged spiritual existence, an unexpected enrichment of the mind and heart as to the origins of which he was none the wiser than a chronic invalid who suddenly starts to improve and put on weight, and who seems briefly to be on the road to a complete recovery — the other craving, which like his need for Odette had grown in him divorced from concrete reality, being his need to hear and understand music.

In this way, the chemistry of his own malady, having previously made a by-product of jealousy from the substance of his love, was now turning that same substance back into tenderness and pity for Odette. She had once more become his sweet, enchanting Odette. He was full of remorse at having treated her badly, longed for her to come to him and wished that, before she did, he could prepare some great pleasure for her, so as to see gratitude mould her expression into the shape of a smile.

As for Odette at such times, sure in the knowledge that he would come running back to her in a few days as loving and abject as ever, begging her to make things up between them, she soon lost any reluctance to incur his displeasure or even his exasperation, and when it suited her she was capable of denying him the favours he most coveted. She may have been unaware of how sincerely he had meant what he said during this coolness between them, when he had refused to send her the money and threatened to look out for an opportunity of doing her a bad turn. She may also have been unaware of how sincere he was at other times, if not towards her, at least towards himself, when, with the purpose of putting their relationship on a better footing and showing Odette that he was quite capable of living without her and was toying with the idea of breaking with her once for all, he decided to stay away from her for a while.

Swann sometimes took this decision after a period of a few days during which Odette had given him no fresh cause for anxiety; he knew his meetings with her in the next few days might well bring him little enough true happiness, not to say the likelihood of actual unhappiness which would abolish his present peace of mind, and so he would send her a note saying he was extremely busy and would be unable to see her on any of the days when they had agreed to meet. But then a letter from Odette, which had crossed with his to her, suggested they postpone one of these arranged meetings. He would instantly begin to wonder why she was suggesting this and all his

suspicions and anguish revived. In his new state of emotional turmoil, he was incapable of keeping the promise he had made to himself in his previous state of relative tranquillity, and he would hurry round to her house and insist on seeing her on every one of the following days. Or, even if she had not already written him a letter, if she merely sent a reply agreeing to his suggestion that they stop seeing each other for a time, this made him feel the immediate need to be with her. For, quite contrary to Swann's expectation, Odette's agreement to his suggestion had brought about a total transformation in him. Like all those who enjoy the possession of a certain thing, in his attempt to find out what it would be like to be deprived of it for a time, he had removed the thing in question from his mind, but left everything else intact and the same as before. Whereas the real absence of that thing is very different; it does not amount merely to a partial deficiency, but to a complete upheaval of everything, a totally new arrangement that cannot be foreseen.

However, there were other occasions (for instance, when Odette was about to leave on a journey) on which Swann, taking as his excuse some recent tiff with her, would make up his mind not to write to her or try to see her again until after her trip, giving to this casual separation (the greater part of which was inevitable anyway since she was going away, and which he was simply anticipating by a short while) the appearance of an outright break. and counting on it to make Odette believe their falling-out this time would be for good. He could imagine how upset and anxious she would be at not seeing him or receiving a letter from him, and his jealousy was soothed away by this glimpse of how she would be, making it easier for him to accept the notion that he would not be seeing her again. No doubt, at odd moments, on a remote horizon of his mind, separated from him by his decision and the whole intervening stretch of three weeks' absence which he had already accepted, he could also glimpse, with a twinge of joy, the knowledge that he would see her again when she came back. But this glimpse was accompanied by so little impatience that he would begin to wonder whether he might not be glad to double the length of a period of self-denial that was so easy to bear. So far, this period was only three days old, a much shorter time than some previous occasions when he had put up with Odette's absence without even having had the opportunity to prepare himself for it mentally. Then he would have a moment's trivial annoyance about something or perhaps a slight indisposition, which would not only make him see the present moment as an exception to which the rule should not apply (a moment when elementary common-sense would make it advisable for anyone to welcome the relief to be derived from a coming pleasure and to postpone the effort of imposing one's willpower on one's feelings at least until such time as there would be benefit in so doing) but actually slackened the tension of his will, which relaxed its grip; or else, on a stimulus as slight as the memory of something he had neglected to find out from Odette, such as which colour she had decided to have her carriage repainted or whether the shares she

meant him to buy for her at the Stock Exchange were ordinary or preference (it was all very well to show her he could live without her, but if it just meant the repainting would have to be done again or the shares turned out to be worthless, a fat lot of good that would do him!), suddenly, like a taut elastic springing back to its original position or air rushing into the vacuum chamber of a pneumatic pump as soon as it is opened, the thought of seeing her again was released from its attachment to a distant future and jumped back into the present as an immediate possibility.

This thought of Odette met no further obstacle in his mind, and was so irresistible to Swann that he found it had been much less anguishing to face the prospect of counting off one by one each day of the fortnight and more that Odette was to be away from him than it was now to wait for ten minutes while his coachman harnessed the horses and brought round the carriage which was to take him to her; and he spent those minutes in an agony of joy and impatience, compulsively gloating and doting on the thought of seeing her again soon, which at the very moment when it had seemed so far removed from him had suddenly leapt back into the forefront of his consciousness. For this thought was no longer opposed by any desire to exclude it at all costs from his mind, Swann having dispensed with that desire as soon as he had proved to himself - or as soon as he believed he had proved to himself — that he would have little difficulty in living without her and that, consequently, there was now no point in going through the motions of a trial separation, since he would be quite capable of managing the real thing whenever he felt it was called for. The fact was, too, that when the prospect of seeing Odette once again came back to him, its colours and potency, which had faded through previous habit, had now been touched up and laced with a new enticing virulence by his having had to do without her, not just for those three days, but for a whole fortnight and more (since, to the mind, the duration of a period of self-denial must include by anticipation the whole of the time originally set aside for it); and what would once have been merely an expected pleasure that he could deny himself without great difficulty had now become the unforeseeable bonus of a happiness that one is powerless to forego. Besides, the thought of being with her again was made more temptingly beautiful by his ignorance of what she might have been thinking or doing as a result of his three-day estrangement from her, and what he was looking forward to now was the thrilling revelation of Odette as a semi-stranger.

Odette, on the other hand, just as she had seen his refusal of the money as nothing but bluff, took as a mere excuse to see her again his request for information about the repainting of the carriage or the shares to be bought. She did not reconstruct in her mind the various phases of Swann's crises; her picture of them omitted any understanding of the way they worked and derived solely from what she already knew of them before they began - the inevitable, indispensable and always identical outcome to which they led.

Her mental picture of them was incomplete (though possibly all the more profound) if judged from Swann's point of view; he would no doubt have felt misunderstood by Odette, as a drug-addict who is convinced he has been prevented by some chance occurrence from giving up his addiction at the very instant when he was about to renounce it for ever, or a victim of tuberculosis who feels his final recovery has been set back by some purely accidental indisposition, may feel misunderstood by a doctor who declines to attach the same importance to these alleged chance contingencies, seeing them as mere disguises which the addiction or disease, continuing its incurable ravages, has put on so as to make itself apparent in a new way to the patient, while the latter has been blithely flattering himself he will soon be rid of his affliction for ever. In fact, Swann's love had by now reached the stage at which a doctor and, in the case of some illnesses, even the most intrepid surgeon begin to wonder whether it would still be reasonable, let alone possible, to deprive a patient of his inveterate vice or to extirpate the root of his illness.

As for the extent of his love, Swann himself was not directly aware of it. There were times when his attempts to assess it would lead him to conclude that it had diminished, faded away almost to nothing — for example, on certain days he was reminded of the time before he had fallen in love with her, when her lack-lustre complexion and even her expressive features had caused him so little pleasure, not to say something verging on displeasure. 'That's a definite improvement, you know,' he would tell himself the next day. 'When you take a good clear look at things, you must admit there was dashed little enjoyment in going to bed with her yesterday. Come to think of it, I thought she was quite ugly.' In this judgment he was quite sincere; but of course his love for her was not confined to the regions of sexual desire. In fact, the actual person of Odette now had little bearing on it. If his eye chanced upon her photograph standing on his desk or if she dropped in to see him, he found he had difficulty in equating either the pasteboard likeness or the features of real flesh with the constant unfocussed ache inside himself. He would think, almost with surprise, 'That's her,' as though, on being confronted by a concrete exteriorisation of an illness from which one is suffering, one were to fail to recognise it as the pain one is feeling. He would puzzle over what 'her' actually was; for if there is any similarity between love and dying, it does not lie in the vague cliches that people bandy about, but in the fact that both these experiences make one probe deeper into the mystery of personality, for fear that its reality may dissolve. By now, the disease of Swann's love for Odette had spread and multiplied so much, had infected so many of his intimate habits, his every act, his every thought, his health, his sleep, his whole existence and even his wishes for what was to become of him after death, it had become so much an integral part of him that any attempt to rid him of it would most likely have resulted in his own

total destruction — or, as the surgical term puts it, his love was past the operable stage.

This love of Swann's had had the effect of severing him so completely from all other interests in life that whenever he happened to go back into fashionable society, telling himself that his fine friends, like a rich jewelsetting which Odette might not actually have been capable of appreciating at its worth, might give him back some of his own worth in her eyes (which might have been true, if these friends had not themselves been devalued by his love, which to Odette's mind debased all things it touched, by appearing to mean that they too must be of little value), what he felt on such occasions, apart from his distress at being in places and among people unknown to her, was the disinterested enjoyment he might have derived from a novel or a painting dealing with the pleasures of a leisured class, just as when he was at home his gratification at contemplating the smooth workings of his household, the smartness of his wardrobe or his servants' uniforms, and the wise investments he had made, was the same as he got from reading in Saint-Simon, one of his favourite authors, descriptions of the 'mechanics' of Mme de Maintenon's daily life or the dishes served at her dinners, or else of Lulli's combination of canny avarice and lavish expenditure. To the very slight extent that his severance from such things was not yet absolute, the reason for this new pleasure in his life was that he was able in this way to make a momentary migration into the few areas of his existence which had remained almost foreign to his love and sorrow. In this respect, his personality as 'young Swann', given to him by my great-aunt and her likes, being distinct from his more individual personality as Charles Swann, was the one he now most enjoyed being. One day, wishing to send a birthday present of fruit to the Princess of Parma (who, in any case, could do indirect favours for Odette by letting her have tickets for first-nights or other gala occasions) but being unsure of how to go about ordering it, he asked a maiden cousin of his mother to do it for him; this lady, who was overjoyed at being asked to run an errand for Swann, had reported to him by letter that she had not selected all the different fruits at the same establishments, but had chosen the grapes at Crapote's where they specialise in them, the strawberries at Jauret's, the pears at Chevet's where they had the finest ones, and so on, adding, 'each and every fruit hand-picked and inspected by myself. The terms in which the Princess expressed her gratitude to him almost enabled him to taste the fragrance of the strawberries and the melting texture of the pears. But much more importantly, he had been struck by the words 'each and every fruit hand-picked and inspected by myself', which had soothed his sufferings by removing his mind to an area of experience which he seldom visited, although it belonged to him by rights, by virtue of his descent from a family of solid upper middle-class wealth and background, which had conserved and handed down to him, in case he should ever need

to avail himself of them, an ancestral familiarity with all the right addresses and the art of selecting a proper present.

In fact, it had been out of his mind for so long that he was 'young Swann' that on the rare and brief occasions when he assumed this other personality, he experienced a keener pleasure than any of those which he could feel at other times, and to which he was indifferent; and although the kindness shown to him by his middle-class connections, who still thought of him first and foremost as 'young Swann', was less marked than that of his aristocratic friends (less marked but also more genuinely flattering, since at least in the middle classes it is never to be found without true esteem), no invitation from a titled acquaintance, whatever entertainments fit for a king it might promise, was able to give him the sort of pleasure he got from a letter asking him to be best man, or merely a guest, at a wedding in the family of some old friends of his parents, some of whom still saw him from time to time — such as my grandfather, who had invited him the previous year to my own mother's wedding - while others hardly even knew him in any personal way, but felt that common courtesy imposed upon them a duty towards the worthy son and heir of the late M. Swann.

On the other hand, by virtue of his long-standing close relations with fashionable people, they too to some extent belonged to his household and family background. The contemplation of these splendid friendships gave him the same comforting sensation of reliability as he felt on seeing the grand estates, the fine silverware or exquisite table linen that his family had passed on to him. The thought that if he should ever collapse in his own house, his manservant would automatically run for assistance to the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Reuss, the Duc de Luxembourg and the Baron de Charlus, gave him the same consolation as our own old servant Françoise derived from the knowledge that she would be buried one day wrapped up in her own fine sheets, bearing her own mark and never darned (or else darned with such meticulous attention that they redounded all the more to her credit as a seamstress), a shroud which, whenever she thought of it, as she often did, warmed her with a certain satisfaction based, if not on wealth, at least on self-esteem. Most importantly - since every single action or thought of Swann's which concerned Odette was constantly overshadowed and controlled by his unacknowledged suspicion that he was, if not less dear to her, at any rate less pleasant to be with than the most boring of the 'regulars' who went to the Verdurins' - whenever his mind turned to that different world in which he was considered the acme of the admirable man. who was invited out and sought after and whose absence was remarked on and regretted, he would begin to believe once more in the possibility of a happier life and almost to yearn for it, as an invalid who has been bedridden and on a strict diet for months may feel a stirring of appetites on reading in the paper the menu of an official dinner or an announcement about a cruise in Sicilian waters.

The excuses he felt obliged to make to these fashionable friends were for not visiting them; those he made to Odette were for not staying away from her. When he did visit her, he not only paid for the pleasure (wondering, at the end of a month when he might have tried her patience a little too much by going to see her rather often, whether four thousand francs was really enough) but also needed an excuse, such as a present he had bought for her, a piece of information she required, or M. de Charlus who happened to be on his way to see her and insisted that Swann come too. Or if he could think of no excuse, he would beg M. de Charlus to go and see her immediately and to mention in the course of conversation, as though it had just occurred to him, that he must get hold of Swann and would she be so good as to send for him straight away? More often than not, Swann would wait in vain for her summons; and that evening Charlus would tell him that the trick had not worked. The fact was that not only was she quite often out of town, but even when she stayed in Paris he hardly ever saw her; and now, whenever he asked her to see him, the Odette who had once loved him and said, 'I'm always free,' or 'What do I care about what people think?' would remind him of the proprieties or else say she had some other engagement. If he mentioned the fact that he intended to go to a charity ball, the opening day at the Salon, a first-night at the theatre or any function which he knew she would be attending, she told him he was trying to flaunt their liaison in public and was treating her like a street-walker. Things came to such a pass that Swann, foreboding the day when he might be prevented from meeting Odette anywhere and knowing how fond she was of my great-uncle Adolphe, with whom he himself had once been on friendly terms, went round one day to the latter's flat in the Rue de Bellechasse, to ask him if he would bring his influence to bear upon her. Whenever Odette had mentioned my uncle to Swann, she had invariably affected a lyrical manner: 'Oh, yes, but he's not a bit like you! His friendship for me is such a splendid thing, such a great and beautiful feeling! It would never enter his head to degrade me by being seen about with me everywhere!'; with the result that when he came to speak of her to my uncle, Swann was in a quandary and was not quite sure of how sublime his tone should be. He began from the premiss of Odette's a priori excellence, the axiom of her superhuman angelic quality, the revealed truth of her virtues which could neither be demonstrated nor deduced from experience: 'I'd like to have a talk with you. You know Odette, you know what an adorable creature she is, what an angel she is, you know how far above other women she is. And you also know what people are like in Paris. Odette isn't known to everybody in the same way as you and I know her. Which means there are people who think I'm making myself look a bit ridiculous, and she won't even allow me to be seen out with her, at the theatre, for instance. Now, she thinks highly of your opinion, so could you not have a word with her for me, just to impress upon her the fact that she's exaggerating the harm I do her reputation by greeting her in public?'

My uncle's advice to Swann was that if he stopped seeing Odette for a while, this would probably strengthen her love for him; and, to Odette, that she should let Swann meet her in public wherever he pleased. A few days after this conversation, Odette told Swann she had just had a disillusioning experience and that my uncle had proved he was no different from other men - he had just attempted to rape her. She calmed Swann down and talked him out of challenging my uncle to a duel; but the next time Swann met him he refused to shake his hand. Swann's regret at falling out with my uncle was especially keen because he had been hoping to see him again for a discreet conversation, with the aim of getting to the bottom of certain rumours he had picked up about the life led by Odette some years before in Nice. Nice was where my uncle Adolphe happened to spend the winter; and Swann had the idea that he and Odette might well have originally met there. Swann had been profoundly disturbed by the mere mention, made by somebody one day in his hearing, of some man who was supposed to have been her lover. However, although there were things which until being told of them he would have believed unbearable to be told and flatly impossible to accept, when he did learn of them, they were amalgamated once for all into his sadness, he believed them to be true and would have found it inconceivable that they might never have taken place. But each one of these things left an ineradicable mark on his image of his mistress. He even inferred from something he was told on one occasion that Odette's easy virtue, the mere thought of which he would never have entertained, was in fact common knowledge and that in Baden-Baden and Nice, where she had once been in the habit of staying for a few months of the year, she had acquired a certain erotic notoriety. He sought out some well-known womanisers, with the aim of questioning them; but they all knew he was acquainted with Odette, and anyway he was too afraid of arousing their curiosity about her again and perhaps giving them the opportunity of pursuing her. Although until then nothing would have struck him as so boring and futile as Baden-Baden and Nice and the style of life led there by cosmopolitan people, now that he had been told Odette might once upon a time have led a gay existence in these two pleasure-spots (whether for the sole purpose of meeting a financial need which thanks to himself no longer existed, or acting on temperamental impulses which could conceivably reassert themselves, he might never know for certain) he was beset by vicious qualms of blind impotent vertigo as he strained to fathom the bottomless deeps into which had sunk for ever the early years of MacMahon's presidential term, when one wintered on the Promenade des Anglais and summered under the linden trees at Baden-Baden, and he saw those years steeped in a profound atmosphere of dire but stirring mystery, as though they had been coloured for him by a poet's vision; and if the trite chronicle of the Riviera and its trivia at that period could have helped him understand the simple enigmas of Odette's smile and expressive glances —

which were so guileless and straightforward, after all - he would have devoted himself to the task of reconstructing it with more passion than the art historian who scrutinises every scrap of documentary evidence surviving from fifteenth-century Florence in the hope of gaining a more acute insight into the spirit of Botticelli's Primavera, beautiful Vanna or Venus. Often he would sit gazing pensively at her, saying nothing, and she would remark, 'My, you do look sad!' Not so long before, he had abandoned his notion of her as a creature of sterling goodness, the equal of the finest women he had ever known, and had come to accept the idea of her as a kept woman; and more recently he had found himself having to revert from the Odette de Crécy whose name might once have been a by-word among a merry fraternity of rakes and philanderers to this dear face with its expression that could be so gentle and her nature that was capable of such humanity. At these moments he would ask himself, 'What possible significance can it have that Nice is full of people who've heard of Odette de Crécy? That sort of reputation, even if it's true, is made up of second-hand opinions.' He would reflect that the legend surrounding Odette's name, even if there was any truth in it, was something extraneous to her and did not reside within her like some baleful and inalienable fund of personality; he would remind himself that this creature who might on occasion have been known to do wrong was after all a mere woman with kind eyes, a heart full of sympathy for human suffering, a ready body which he had had in his arms, which he had used and handled, a woman whom, if he ever managed to make himself indispensable to her, he might one day be able to possess in her entirety. There she would sit, tired as often as not, and with her face briefly blank, drained of the secret fever of joyous expectation, of all those unknown things which caused him such pain; she would lift back her hair with both hands, broadening her brow and her whole face; and at such moments, in all its humane simplicity, some sudden thought, some generous impulse, the like of which lies latent in every individual, waiting for the moment of relaxation or the mood of mental repose when the true self comes to the fore, would shine from her eyes like a beam of light. Immediately, her face glowed, the way a grey landscape is transfigured at sunset by the light shed through a sudden rift in the clouds. The life he glimpsed in Odette at such moments and the future she almost seemed to be dreaming about, Swann felt sure he could have shared with her; in them he could see no foul dregs, none of this noisome, malignant agitation. Few and far between as they had become, such moments were not valueless. For Swann's memory smelted these fragments, moulded them together, discarded the dross and slag that separated them and gradually refined a golden image of Odette, made of gentleness and moments of peace, to whom in later years (as will be seen in the second part of this work) he was to offer sacrifices which the other

[†] The reference is to A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, published in 1918 (JG).

Odette would never have obtained from him. But how rare those moments were now! And how seldom he saw her these days! Even their regular evening rendezvous were no longer sacrosanct, as she would leave it until the last minute to tell him whether she could see him or not, well aware that he would always be free and wanting to make sure that, if she saw him, she would not be missing the chance of being invited out by somebody else. So she would profess to be expecting a message of the utmost urgency; even if she did let Swann come to see her and then, after their evening together had begun, received an invitation from friends to join them at supper or make up a party for the theatre, she would jump for joy and rush off to change. As she progressed through the successive phases of her preparations, each of her movements brought Swann closer to the brink of absence from her, that moment when she would disappear and nothing could hold her back; and when at last she was ready, chancing a final glance at the mirror, her eyes sharpened and brightened with expectancy, touching up her lips, tidying a stray curl on her forehead and asking for her sky-blue evening cape with the golden tassels, Swann would look so down in the mouth that she could not repress a gesture of impatience as she snapped at him, 'Huh, is that all the thanks I get for allowing you to stay with me until the very last minute? And I thought I was doing you a favour. Well, that's nice to know — I'll remember, next time!' Sometimes, at the risk of irking her, he promised himself to find out where she had gone, or dreamt up schemes for an alliance with Forcheville in the hope that he might learn something from him. Generally, once he had found out who it was she had spent the evening with, it was not difficult for him to discover somebody among his many connections who had some acquaintance, even a nodding one, with the man who had taken her out, and who could satisfy his curiosity about this or that aspect of the evening. While he was occupied in writing to a friend, to enlist assistance in the task of clarifying some such point, he enjoyed momentary relief and repose from the incessant and unanswered queries that kept forming in his mind, and transferred to someone else his exhausting compulsion to investigate. Of course, once he was in possession of certain information, he was hardly any the wiser. Knowing something may not mean that one can affect a course of events; but the things one knows, one can hold on to, if not with one's hands, at least with the mind; and that, because one can then arrange them as one prefers, can give one the illusion of being in control of them. Whenever M. de Charlus was with Odette, Swann was content. He knew that nothing would happen between her and Charlus, that his friend only went out with her for Swann's own sake and that he would have not the slightest reluctance to retail everything she had done. On occasion, her refusal to see Swann on a certain evening would be so categorical and she would seem so set on going out somewhere that he had to beg Charlus with great insistence to make himself available as her escort. The following day, not daring to question Charlus too closely, he would pretend to misunderstand the latter's answers, thus contriving to have him re-explain the events

of the night before in different words, each of which would help console and relieve Swann, who was soon informed that Odette had devoted her evening to the most innocent of pleasures: 'What's that, Mémé old chap? I don't follow. You mean you didn't go straight to the waxworks from Odette's? You went somewhere else first, I suppose. No? This is fascinating! You've no idea how much I'm enjoying all this, Mémé old boy! And what an odd idea to go on to the Chat Noir afterwards! Typical of her. Oh, I see, it was your suggestion. How odd. Well, I mean, yes, it was quite a good idea presumably there were all sorts of people there that she knew? Not one? You mean she didn't speak to a single soul? Well, that is amazing. So you just sat there like that, just the two of you, is that it? Yes, I can imagine it. I say, Mémé old sport, what a grand chap you are! I'm terribly fond of you, you know.' These exchanges were balm to Swann's heart. Having sometimes had the misfortune to be struck, during a casual conversation with someone to whom he was barely even listening, by statements like 'I saw Mme de Crécy yesterday with some man I didn't recognise', each word of which had no sooner penetrated him than it solidified into a foreign object with sharp harsh edges, ripping through him to lie like spent lead in his heart, he was soothed now by the mildness of the words, 'She didn't know anybody there. She didn't speak to a soul', which wafted gently through him with a smooth, clement, invigorating fluency. Then a moment or two later he would think Odette must find him awfully boring if she preferred that sort of entertainment to his own company. And though he felt reassured by the triviality of these pastimes, they also caused him as much pain as an infidelity.

When he did not manage to discover where she had gone, the anguish which beset him, for which the sole specific was the sweet reprieve of Odette's presence (a specific which in the long run aggravated his condition, but brought him at least momentary respite from his pain), could even have been soothed, if Odette had only allowed him to remain in her house while she was out and wait there until, by coming home, she would cancel out and allay all the anxious intervening hours, and break the evil spell which had made him see them as different from other hours. But Odette would never permit this and he set off for his own house. On the way home, he would force his mind to entertain thoughts of the future and stopped thinking about Odette. By the time he was getting undressed, he would be turning over in his head quite cheerful prospects; and as he got into bed and put out the lamp, he would promise himself, with a twinge of hope in his heart, that in the morning he would go and look at a certain painting. But then, with the approach of sleep, as soon as he relaxed the mental check in which he had kept himself and which had become so habitual that he had stopped noticing it, a sudden icy shudder rippled through him and he started to sob. Reluctant to wonder why, he wiped his eyes and said to himself with a blithe laugh, 'Well, this is great! I'm turning into a neurotic!' After which, he could only think with immense weariness that in the morning he would have to take up again his investigations into the doings of Odette, think of strings to pull, ways and means of getting to see her. This unforgiving need to pursue such relentless, changeless, fruitless activity was so odious to him that one day when he found a swelling on his abdomen, he felt a pang of genuine joy at the thought that it might be a fatal tumour, that from then on he would not have to bother about a thing, since illness could take him over and put him through the motions of life until the not too distant day when it would have finished with him. In fact, the recurring wish for death that often visited him unconsciously at that period was not so much a desire for release from the cruelty of his suffering as an attempt to escape from the unremitting monotony of effort.

For all that, he still wished he could survive until such time as he no longer loved her, when she would have lost all reason to lie to him and he could find out from her at long last whether or not, on that afternoon when he had dropped in to see her, she had been in bed with Forcheville. There were often times when for days on end his suspicion that she was in love with some other man sidetracked his preoccupation with this question about Forcheville and made it almost a matter of indifference to him, in the way that a new phase of a disease can feel briefly like a relief from the earlier stages of its development. There were even times when no suspicion tormented him and he believed he was cured. But then the following morning on waking he could feel the same old ache which throughout the previous day he had managed to dilute in the deluge of different sensations. The seat of the pain had not shifted. In fact, it was the force of its throbbing which had woken him.

Since Odette never gave him the slightest information about any of the matters of such moment that took up so much of her time every day (although he had enough experience of life to know that such matters amount invariably to a pursuit of pleasure) his attempts at imagining them never lasted very long at a time, as his mind had nothing to work on; so instead, he rubbed a fingertip over his weary eyelids, as though wiping his monocle, and brought his thoughts to a dead stop. However, out of this unknown element in which Odette lived, there loomed from time to time certain occupations which she had suggested were linked to some indeterminate obligation of hers to a distant relative or some old friends; and these personages, being the only frequently mentioned impediments to his seeing her, had taken on in Swann's mind the character of fixtures that shaped the essential setting and immutable outlines of Odette's life. There was, for example, the special tone of voice in which she periodically spoke of 'my day for going to the Circus† with my girl-friend'; and if Swann felt unwell and

† In the early 1880s l'Hippodrome, an open arena near the Place de l'Alma, offered popular entertainment of a circus-cum-music-hall variety, including horse- and chariot-races and trained-animal acts. 'Circus', although inadequate, seems less misleading than other possible English equivalents (JG).

thought to himself, 'Perhaps Odette will agree to come and see me', then suddenly remembered that this was that very day, he would immediately dismiss his first thought: 'Oh, of course not! There's no point in asking her to pop round. I should have remembered — this is her day for going to the Circus with her girl-friend. By all means, make the most of what's possible. But what's the point of wasting effort on suggestions that are bound to be turned down?' This duty of Odette's to go to the Circus, which Swann accepted so uncomplainingly, not only seemed unavoidable to him; its very quality of inevitability also seemed to lend a colour of plausible legitimacy to whatever had even the remotest connection with it. If a passer-by lifted his hat in the street and raised the hackles of Swann's jealousy, she might answer his questions about the man by linking him to one of these great duties in her life, saying, 'He's just a gentleman who was in the party of my girl-friend that I go to the Circus with,' an explanation that allayed Swann's suspicions, since it struck him, as soon as she mentioned it, as quite natural and obvious that the girl-friend would have other guests as well as Odette in her party at the Circus; it was just that he had never really tried, or managed, to picture them. How he would have loved to make the acquaintance of this girl-friend who went to the Circus and be invited by her along with Odette! He would have given up all his elegant friends for a single person that Odette was in the habit of seeing, even her manicurist or a girl who served her in a shop! He would have taken more trouble for them than for a queen. For was it not a fact that in sharing with him the part of Odette's life which they owned, they would be giving him the only effective sedative for his suffering? What happiness it would have given him to spend his days with one or other of the insignificant people with whom Odette still remained in touch, whether out of self-interest or genuine simplicity! How gladly he would have chosen to live out the rest of his days up on the fifth floor of some squalid enviable tenement to which Odette would never take him, where, if he had set up house with the retired dressmaker, perhaps even pretending to be her lover, he could have been graced by a visit from Odette almost every day! The life he could have led for ever in one of those working-class districts struck him now, for all its abject straitened circumstances, as steeped in an atmosphere of sweet tranquillity and fulfilment.

It still happened on occasion that, if Odette had met him somewhere and then saw a man approaching who was a stranger to him, Swann would notice on her face the very same expression of affliction that it had had the day when he had dropped in to see her while Forcheville was there. However, these were by now rare occurrences; and on days when despite all the other important things she had to do and her fear of what people might say, she did manage to see Swann, the main impression she gave was one of self-confidence, which, whether it was an unconscious compensation or a natural reaction, was certainly in marked contrast to the awe and timidity which she had shown in the early days of their relationship, when a letter

from her had begun with the words, My dear Charles, My hand is trembling so much that I can hardly write . . . (At least, so her letter had said; and surely unless there had been a grain of sincerity in her feelings, she would have had no desire to exaggerate it). She had liked Swann in those days — one's hand only ever trembles for one's own sake or for those one is fond of. But when one's happiness is no longer entrusted to their safe-keeping, how unperturbed, how free-and-easy, how forthright and outspoken one becomes with them! Nowadays, when she spoke to him or wrote him a note, she never used the sort of words with which she had once pretended he belonged to her, she never created opportunities to refer to him as 'my' this, 'my' that, she never said things like 'You are my property, this is the fragrance of our love, I shall keep it for ever', she never talked of the future or even of death as a special experience for the two of them to share with one another. In those early days, everything he said to her was greeted with admiration: 'Oh, Charles, you're so different from everyone else!'; and as she gazed at his face and rather elongated head with its thinning hair (which made people who knew how successful he was with women think, 'Mind you, he's not what you'd call really handsome - but he's got something! I mean, that quiff of hair, the monocle and that smile') she would say, as though more anxious to discover what sort of man he was than merely to become his mistress, 'If only I could find out what goes on inside that head of yours!' Now, though, anything he said to her was greeted with a tone either of exasperation or of indulgent condescension: 'Why do you always have to be different from everyone else?' And when she noticed his face (in which the only difference was that worry had aged it a little, yet which now made everybody think, 'Mind you, he's not what you'd call really ugly - but there's something ridiculous about him! I mean, that quiff of hair, the monocle and that smile,' their imaginations obeying the promptings of preconceptions, by virtue of the ability one has to follow the meaning of a symphonic movement once one has read the programme notes or to see family resemblances in a child once one has met his relatives, and recognising the indefinable disparity which a period of a few months can create between the look of an adored lover and the look of a deceived husband) what she said was, 'If only I could alter what goes on inside that head of yours or talk some sense into it!'

To which Swann, greedy for any crumb of comfort from her, for ever prone to wishful thinking and giving himself the benefit of any doubt to be inferred from Odette's behaviour to him, would answer, 'Well, you can if you want to.' Then he would attempt to prove to her how noble a task it would be for her to make him happy, govern his life, set him to work, a task to which any number of other women would be only too pleased to devote their lives (although, if any of them had devoted their lives to it, it is fair to say that the noble task would have struck him as nothing so much as a tactless and intolerable infringement of his personal freedom). He persuaded himself, 'If she didn't love me a little, she would have no desire to change

me. And if she's going to change me, she'll have to see more of me.' Hence, her rebuke could really be seen as a proof of her interest in him or even an expression of her love for him! Indeed, she gave him so few of those now that he was constrained to read them into her prohibitions of one thing and another. One day, for instance, she told him she disliked his coachman, who was capable of saying things about her to Swann behind her back, or who at any rate was not as punctilious and deferential towards him as she felt he should be. Odette could sense that Swann was longing to be told, 'From now on, don't let him drive you when you come here,' as he might have longed for a kiss from her lips. Being in a good mood that day, she told him so; and Swann was touched. That same evening, conversing with M. de Charlus, with whom Swann could enjoy the relief of being able to talk about her quite openly (since every word he uttered, even banalities to people who did not know her, had some bearing on her), he said, 'Mind you, I do believe she really loves me. I mean, she's so nice to me that she can't possibly be indifferent to what I do.' Or if he was on his way to see her and happened to give a lift for part of the way to a friend, should the latter remark, 'I say, that's not Loredano up on the box tonight,' Swann would reply with a tone of glum gratification, 'Heavens! Not likely! Believe you me, old chap, it's more than my life's worth to turn up at the Rue La Pérouse with Loredano on the box! Odette doesn't like me to be driven by Loredano, you see. She thinks he's not right for me. Well, you know what women are like! She'd throw a fit! God, yes, if I want a good talking-to, all I have to do is turn up with old Rémi on the box!'

This is not to say that Odette's new way of treating Swann, her indifference, her offhandedness and irritability, did not hurt him. They did; but he was not aware of the hurt — for since Odette had cooled towards him very gradually, a little more with each passing day, he could only have measured the magnitude of the change in her attitudes towards him if he had been able to set side by side the way she was with him now and the way she had been in the beginning. This change in Odette was a deep, hidden wound to Swann, causing him pain morning, noon and night; if he ever sensed that his thoughts were straying too close to it, he quickly redirected them elsewhere, away from the possibility of suffering. It did occur to him, in an abstract way, 'There was once a time when Odette loved me more than she does now'; but he never had a clear memory of that time. Just as there was a desk in his study that he managed never to look at, avoiding it by a small detour each time he went in or out of the room, because lying in one of its locked drawers was the chrysanthemum she had given him the first time he had taken her home and the letters from her which said, A pity it wasn't your heart you left behind - I wouldn't have let you have it back, and Whenever you need me, at any hour of the day or night, I'll be at your beck and call for ever, so there was a spot inside himself that he never allowed his mind to approach, sending it if necessary on an extensive diversion of thought so as to avoid the place - because it was the seat of his memory of happier days.

However, there came an evening when this extreme caution proved unavailing. It was one of those evenings when he had gone back into the world of his fashionable friends, to a party at the house of the Marquise de Saint-Euverte, as it happened, the last of the functions that season at which she was presenting performers who would later appear in her charity concerts. Swann, who had toyed with the idea of going to each of her previous parties but without being able to pluck up the resolve to actually go to any of them, had been dressing in preparation for this one when the Baron de Charlus had dropped in to suggest they go together, so that his company might help cheer Swann up a little and save him from complete misery. To which Swann had replied: 'I don't have to tell you how pleased I would be to go with you. But the greater thing you could do for my happiness tonight would be to go and see Odette. You know what a good influence you have on her. I think she'll be staying in for a bit this evening, then going to see her old dressmaker friend, and I'm sure she'll be glad enough for you to go with her. But whatever it is she's doing, you're bound to find her at home to begin with. Try to keep her amused, old chap, and see if you can't talk some sense into her. You might even be able to arrange something she would like for tomorrow, something the three of us could do together, I mean. And see if you can't put some ideas into her mind for this summer, something she might fancy doing, say, like the three of us going on a cruise or something. But, as for tonight, I'm not expecting to see her — unless you can think of some dodge, or she decides she wants to, in which case, just send me a message to Saint-Euverte's any time before midnight, or back here after midnight. Thank you, old fellow, for everything you do for me. You know I'm dashed fond of you, don't you?'

The Baron promised to go and pay the suggested visit once he had dropped Swann outside the Saint-Euverte house. When Swann arrived there, though tranquillised by the knowledge that M. de Charlus would be spending the evening in the house in the Rue La Pérouse, he was caught in a mood of melancholic indifference to anything that had no bearing on Odette and especially to things connected with fashionable society, a mood which gave to these things the charm to be found in anything which, because our will and desires are no longer directed towards it, appears to us as itself. As soon as he stepped out of the carriage, right in the foreground of the fictitious epitome of their domestic arrangements with which hostesses like to present their guests on gala occasions and in which they try to observe certain standards of costuming and stage-setting, Swann was cheered by the sight of the descendants of Balzac's 'tigers', the footmen and grooms, functionaries who more properly officiate at outings, but who were now drawn up, booted and hatted, out in the drive, in front of the mansion or across the stable-doorways, as gardeners might stand in attendance by their flower-gardens. Swann's old habit of looking for analogies between living

people and portraits in art galleries not only was still at work in him but had become a more constant and generalised mechanism of his mind; and now that he was capable of viewing fashionable life with such detachment, it offered to him on this occasion what amounted to a comprehensive series of living works of art. In the entrance-hall (which during his days as an attender at fashionable parties he used to walk into in his overcoat and out of in his tails, without the slightest awareness of anything that happened there, the few moments he actually spent in it being, mentally, either part of the function he had just left or part of the one he was about to be shown into) he noticed for the first time in his life the scattered pack of large servants, draped here and there on wall-sofas and chests, and dozing in magnificent idleness until, with the unexpected arrival of this tardy guest, they roused, nobly raised their sharp greyhound profiles, stood up, came together and formed a close circle about him.

One of them, whose markedly ferocious countenance made him resemble the executioner in certain Renaissance paintings which feature decapitations, stepped forward with a ruthless air about him to take Swann's things. Fortunately, the dangerous steely glint in his eyes was offset by the softness of his lisle gloves, and as he came up he seemed to be full of scorn for Swann's contemptible person and solicitude for his top-hat. He took hold of it with a show of carefulness to which the excruciating propriety of his posture† lent a suggestion of ethical squeamishness and a daintiness of touch to which the evidence of his great strength gave a hint of pathos. He passed the hat to one of his retinue, a diffident novice whose feelings of alarm were expressed by a rolling of furious eyes in all directions and whose restless excitement was that of a captured wild beast during the very first hours of its domestication.

A few feet away, a great hefty fellow in livery stood about vaguely musing, static and statuesque, as redundant as the purely decorative warrior who, in Mantegna's scenes of most turbulent carnage, can be seen leaning pensively on his shield while all about him people run amok and massacre one another; standing indifferently apart from the group of his colleagues who were busying themselves with Swann, he seemed as determined to take no interest in these proceedings, on which he cast a cruel, veiled, unfocussed sneer, as though it had been the Massacre of the Innocents or the Martyrdom of Saint James. Indeed, he seemed to be a member of that longlost breed of men who sprang from the union of some ancient Greek statue with a Paduan model of the Master's, or one of Albrecht Dürer's Saxons, and who have since vanished from the face of the earth (unless they only ever existed in the altarpiece of San Zeno and in the Eremitani frescoes where Swann had once caught a glimpse of them and where they stand musing to this day). Also, the locks of his ginger hair, which Nature had crinkled but

[†] The French gives pointure, meaning 'size' (in shoes, hats, gloves, etc), which makes no sense and may be a misreading for posture (JG).

which he had smoothed with a smear of brilliantine, were freely modelled as in the classical Greek sculptures that the Mantuan master studied so closely, and which, although the only form of creation they ever represent is man, nonetheless contrive to imply through his simple forms a wealth of variations seemingly based on the whole range of natural life, so that a head of hair, with the smooth coils or beak-sharp curves of its curls, the flowering three-tiered tiara of its tresses, can resemble at one and the same time a clump of seaweed, a clutch of fledgling doves, a braid of hyacinths and a skein of plaited snakes.

There were others, just as colossal in their proportions, stationed on the steps of a monumental staircase which, because of their decorative purpose and marble-like immobility, could have been dubbed like the one in the Palace of the Doges 'The Staircase of the Giants', and which Swann started to climb in a mood tinged with sadness at the fact that it had never been climbed by Odette. What joy it would have been, though, to climb the grimy staircase of Odette's retired dressmaker friend, in all its evil-smelling, treacherous gloom, to that one-room attic flat where he would have gladly paid more than the price of a weekly box-seat at the Opera for the privilege of being there on the evenings of Odette's visits, and even at other times, when he could have talked about her and been among people who were used to seeing her when he was somewhere else and who, for that reason, seemed to have in their possession a part of Odette's life that was somehow more real, more inaccessible and more mysterious than what he knew of it. Each evening, on the retired dressmaker's foul-smelling but enviable staircase, there being no back stairs for tradesmen, one came upon empty dirty milkcans left on the mat outside the doors; whereas here, on this magnificent but unesteemed flight of steps that Swann was now climbing, were to be found, on one side or the other, at different heights, posted in front of the irregular recesses made in the wall by the window of the porter's lodge or the door to a servant's flat, representing the domestic departments which they headed and paying homage on their behalf to the guests, the porter himself, the chief steward, the bursar (worthy persons who for the rest of the week lived their own lives on their own premises, ate their family meals like independent shopkeepers and who might before long take up more prosaic service in the household of a doctor or a factory owner), all of them being careful to abide by the instructions given them along with the gorgeous regalia which they were allowed to wear only on very rare occasions and in which they felt somewhat ill at ease, and standing there beneath the arch of their respective doorways, their ceremonial splendour tempered with a touch of plebeian good-nature, like so many saints in their niches; while an enormous usher in full ecclesiastical finery banged his crozier on the marble floor as each guest passed by. At the top of the stairs, up the whole length of which he had been shadowed by a wan-faced servant who, with his hair tied at the back of his head in a short beribboned pigtail, looked like one of

Gova's sextons or the notary in the last act of a Molière comedy, Swann walked past an office in which footmen, sitting like scriveners in front of great ledgers, stood up to enter his name. Next he walked through a smaller vestibule in which (like those special rooms designed by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art, deliberately left bare of everything except the piece that gives its name to the room) the sole exhibit, just inside the door, resembling some priceless statue of a look-out by Benvenuto Cellini, his body leaning slightly forward and his face, redder than the red gorget at his neck, blazing with diffidence and eagerness, was a vouthful footman; as he gazed with avid abandon and utter absorption through the Aubusson tapestries hanging in front of the reception-room where the music was being performed, he seemed, with his expression of soldierly single-mindedness or supernatural faith, to be designed as an allegory of vigilance, a memorial to expectancy or an incarnation of the call to arms, and to be on the watch, like a stone angel or a sentinel on top of a keep or a cathedral tower, for the first sign of the enemy or the coming of the Day of Judgment. To go through into the concert-room, Swann now only needed the doors of it to be opened, which was done for him by an usher bedecked with chains who bowed low to him and seemed to be handing over the keys of a captured city. Swann's thoughts, however, were in the house where he could have been at that moment if only Odette had allowed it, and his heart flinched at a memory-glimpse of an empty milk-can standing on a

On the far side of the hanging tapestries, when the sight of the servants was replaced by the sight of the guests, Swann instantly recovered his sense of male ugliness. Indeed, even the ugliness of faces with which he was well acquainted struck him as something new, now that their features were reduced to bare autonomous outlines and stood in purely aesthetic relationships to one another, instead of having the practical usefulness of helping him identify a certain person whose appearance had hitherto meant a set of pleasures to be welcomed, boredom and nuisance to be avoided, or polite motions to be gone through. Standing among the great press of men, it seemed to Swann that even the monocles worn by many of them (which once upon a time would have signified to Swann's eye purely and simply that they were wearing monocles), having lost their previous association with a fashion followed by all of them, had now acquired a certain individuality. Perhaps because he now saw General de Froberville and the Marquis de Bréauté, who were chatting just inside the doorway, as a pair of figures in a picture, instead of the helpful friends of long standing who had put him up for the Jockey Club and acted for him in duels, the General's monocle, held between his eyelids like a splinter of shrapnel disfiguring his scarred, vulgar, triumphant face, looked to Swann, stuck as it was cyclopswise right between his brows, like a monstrous wound that might amount to evidence of valour but which certainly constituted indecent exposure; whereas the monocle that the Marquis had added, as a festive touch, to his pearl-grey gloves, crush hat and white tie, substituting it (like Swann himself) for the common-or-garden glasses when going to a social gathering, had its underside smeared with what resembled a biological specimen prepared on a slide for the microscope — his diminutive eye, which teemed with goodwill towards all men and beamed unblinking at the height of the ceilings, the sumptuous preparations, the fascination of the entertainments and the quality of the refreshments.

'Gad, Swann! Where have you come from?' exclaimed the General. 'Haven't set eyes on you for ages.' Then, noticing how drawn Swann looked and thinking his absence from society might have been caused by some serious illness, he added, 'Fit as a fiddle you look, d'you know that?' Meanwhile the Marquis de Bréauté was saying to a writer of fashionable romances, 'I say, old fellow, what on earth are you doing in a place like this?' To which the writing gentleman, equipping his eye with his sole organ of psychological enquiry and ruthless analysis, to wit, a monocle, answered with his air of self-important mystery and strongly rolled 'r', 'I am here to observe.'

The monocle worn by the Marquis de Forestelle, being minute and rimless, obliged his eye to remain set in a permanent painful contraction, appeared to be grafted into his face like a piece of extra cartilage, of inexplicable function but exquisite material, gave to the Marquis an expression of infinite wistfulness and made women think he must be capable of breaking his heart in the grand manner. On the other hand, the one sported by M. de Saint-Candé, which was surrounded like Saturn by an immense ring, acted as the centre of gravity of his whole face, which was for ever arranging and disposing itself with sole reference to it, the ruddy quivering nose and the sarcastic fat-lipped mouth grimacing with the effort of equalling the non-stop barrage of dazzling wit emitted by the glass disc, and was preferred to many another handsomer eye by snobbish and perverted young women, to whom it suggested concealed artificial charms and novel refinements in sensual expertise; while M. de Palancy with his monocle, his large carp-like face and round eyes, opening and closing his mandibles every so often and progressing slowly among the guests as though wondering where he was going, looked as though he was transporting with him an accidental and possibly purely symbolic fragment of the glass wall of his aquarium, a part meant to represent a whole, which reminded Swann, great admirer as he was of the Vices and Virtues of Giotto in Padua, of Injustice with his leafy branch beside him to suggest the forests in which he lurks.

At the urging of Mme de Saint-Euverte, Swann had moved farther into the room and, with the aim of listening to a flautist's rendition of one of the arias from Orfeo, had ensconced himself in a corner. This proved, however, to be an unfortunate position, as his field of vision was entirely occupied by

two mature ladies, sitting side by side, the Marquise de Cambremer and the Vicomtesse de Franquetot who, because they were cousins, would spend their time at functions searching for one another as though in a railwaystation, carrying their handbags and preceding their daughters, and would not rest until they had reserved with a fan or a handkerchief two adjoining seats - Mme de Cambremer being connected with hardly anyone and therefore especially grateful for the companionship of Mme de Franquetot, and the latter, for her part, being much sought after and therefore thinking there was something smart and admirable in showing to all her fashionable acquaintances that she preferred to them the company of this insignificant person with whom she had in common certain shared memories of younger days. Savouring a mood of ironic melancholy, Swann watched these ladies as they sat listening to a piano interlude (Liszt's legend Saint Francis of Assisi preaching to the Birds, which had come after the piece for flute) and following the virtuoso's staggering technical feats, Mme de Franquetot with eyes that not only showed desperate anxiety, as though the keys on which this nimble display was being given were a series of trapezes from which the performer ran the risk of a two-hundred-foot fall, but also glanced occasional astonishment or even outraged disbelief at her companion, as much as to say, 'Well, I never! You wouldn't believe a man could do a thing like that!'; and Mme de Cambremer, as befitted a woman with a proper musical upbringing, keeping time with her head, a metronome pendulum which swung so far and fast from side to side (and with the sort of distracted abandon in her eyes that suggested a level of pain that had gone beyond the bearable, could no longer be controlled and cried aloud, 'I can't help it! I can't help it!') that she was for ever snagging the diamond pendants of her ear-rings on the shoulder-straps of her dress and having to rearrange the bunch of black grapes she wore in her hair, while maintaining the rhythm of her wild oscillations. On Mme de Franquetot's other side, and sitting a little farther forward, was the Marquise de Gallardon, her mind full of its favourite preoccupation — the fact that she was related by marriage to the Guermantes - which was, in her own eyes as well as, she supposed, in the eyes of the world, a source of great glory, but also some shame, since the most prominent of the Guermantes did not want to have much to do with her, perhaps because she was a notorious bore, or because she had a malicious streak in her, or because she belonged to an inferior branch of the family, or perhaps even for no particular reason. Whenever she happened to be in the company of an unknown person, such as Mme de Franquetot at that moment, she would be mortified by the fact that her own acute awareness of her kinship with the Guermantes was not visible to the naked eye and could not take on some external shape, after the manner of those characters and symbols which stand in vertical columns beside the saintly personages in Byzantine church mosaics and represent the words they are supposed to be uttering. At this moment she was reflecting that, in the six

years since her cousin the Princesse des Laumes had been married, the young lady in question had never once graced her with an invitation or a visit. This knowledge filled her with fury and pride; for, having so often told people who expressed surprise at not meeting her at Mme des Laumes's house that her reason for not going there was to avoid meeting Princesse Mathilde and that her true-blue Royalist family would never have forgiven her for deigning to know the descendant of the usurping Corsican upstart, she herself had come to believe in this tale as the true reason why she never visited her young cousin. She could remember having several times asked Mme des Laumes whether there was some way in which they could meet; but the memory she had of this was invariably vague and in any case she would cancel the humiliating thought of it by muttering, 'Well, I mean, it's not for me to make the overtures, is it? I'm twenty years her senior!' Invigorated by the virtues of this secret speech, she would thrust back proud shoulders that looked quite dislocated from her torso and supported a head laid almost horizontally on top of them, reminding one of the severed head of a roast pheasant stuck back on to the bird for its ceremonial serving in full regalia of feathers. Stunted, dumpy and mannishly thick-set as she was by nature, she had been straightened up by snubs and insults, like one of those trees which have taken root in a dire position on the brink of a precipice and are forced to grow backwards so as to keep their balance. The obsessive obligation to keep on reminding herself, by way of consolation for not being quite the equal of the other Guermantes, that her real ground for having so little to do with them was the staunch unflinching pride she took in sticking to a principle, had over the years moulded the very shape of her body, giving her a regal bearing which, to the eyes of middle-class women, looked like a sign of good breeding and had even been known to kindle in the jaded eyes of club-men a flicker of desire. If Mme de Gallardon's conversation had been analysed according to those stylo-statistical methods which, by computing the relative frequencies of certain symbols, can work out the key to a secret code, it would have been apparent that, even allowing for the most everyday turns of phrase, it contained no more frequently recurring elements of speech than: 'my cousins the Guermantes, you know', or 'at the house of my Aunt Guermantes', or 'the health of Elzéar de Guermantes', or 'my cousin Guermantes's box at the theatre'. Whenever the name of any illustrious personage was mentioned to her, she would greet it with the statement that though she was personally unacquainted with the gentleman in question she had often seen him at the house of her Aunt Guermantes; but these words would be delivered in such a bleak and toneless voice that it was obvious her lack of personal acquaintance with the gentleman in question could only be put down to that set of stubborn and ineradicable principles which she could feel behind her squared shoulders, as rigid as the bars of those ladders on which physical training instructors stretch you out so as to improve your

It so happened that the Princesse des Laumes, whom one would not have expected to see at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, had just that minute come into the room. So as to make it plain that it was not her intention to show off the superiority of her own social status in a salon which she was visiting out of pure condescension, she had sidled in meekly, even though at that point there was no press of people to push through or to stand aside for, and she then kept towards the back of the room, looking as though that was where she belonged, the way a monarch may queue up like anyone else at a theatre booking-office so long as the authorities are unaware of his presence; and there she stayed, making sure to let her eyes stray no farther than a pattern in the carpet at her feet or the folds of her own skirt, so as not to appear to be attracting attention to herself or expecting favoured treatment, occupying the spot which had struck her as the most unassuming, right behind Mme de Cambremer who was a stranger to her, and knowing full well that she would not have to stand there any longer than it took for Mme de Saint-Euverte to catch sight of her and raise her voice in joyous cries. She stood watching Mme de Cambremer's pantomime of musical appreciation, but refrained from imitating it. The Princesse des Laumes was in no way averse to creating the most agreeable impression possible of herself, if it meant that the favour she was doing her hostess by dropping in for a few minutes might thereby redound doubly to her own credit. But she had a natural abhorrence of what she called 'overdoing it', and she would make it plain that it was not for her to indulge in any sort of 'goings on' which were out of keeping with the spirit of her usual circle; for all that, she could not help being impressed by such 'goings on', under the influence of that urge towards imitation of others, which is akin to timidity and can be set off in the most self-confident individuals by contact with a new social environment, even one they recognise as inferior to their own. She was beginning to wonder whether Mme de Cambremer's antics were not a necessary response to the piece being performed (which might for all she knew be a new-fangled departure from any music she had ever heard before) and whether, by refraining from similar antics herself, she might not be displaying an inability to understand the music as well as bad manners towards her hostess. So, by way of a compromise between incompatible urges, sometimes she merely straightened her shoulder-straps or put a hand to her fair hair to steady the little berries of coral or pinkish enamel, frosted with diamonds, which formed her simple and charming head-dress, while eyeing her ecstatic neighbour with a kind of cold-blooded inquisitiveness; and at other times, with her folded fan, she would momentarily keep time to the music, but, so as not to surrender her independence, on the wrong beat.

The pianist had finished the piece by Liszt and began one of the preludes of Chopin, at which Mme de Cambremer turned to Mme de Franquetot with a fond smile, her eyes brimming with fulsome suggestions of auld lang syne and the self-satisfaction of the connoisseur. For as a girl she had

learned how to caress Chopin's phrases, which with the inordinate sinuous length of their graceful necks are so fluent, flexible and tactile, which seem to be meandering off-course, far away from their original direction, in an aimless tentative search for their proper place, straying anywhere but towards the destination where one might have expected to feel their final touch, but which are only feigning these fanciful detours so as to return more purposefully, more accurately, more knowingly, and, as though ringing cut-glass echoes that make one want to cry aloud, strike home into one's unsuspecting heart. Brought up in a provincial family which had few contacts with anyone, she had hardly ever been to a ball; but on a forlorn piano, in her antique manor-house, she had been in raptures at all those imaginary waltzing couples whom you could slow down, then hasten on round the floor or scatter gently about the room like the petals from a fullblown rose, then she would turn away for a moment from the dancing and lend an ear to wind sighing through pine-trees down by the lake, where all at once one might catch sight of a slim young man wearing white gloves, with an undreamt-of grace that no earthly lover could match and a voice that had an uncanny tuneless lilt to it. These days, however, the quaint beauty of this music seemed more than a little faded. In recent years, it had fallen in the esteem of the discriminating public, losing its place of honour and its special charm, and even the pleasure derived from it by people of poor taste was furtive and stale. Mme de Cambremer ventured a cautious glance about the room. She was well aware that her young daughter-in-law (whose great respect for her new family did not extend to things of the mind, on which, endowed as she was with a smattering of harmonic theory and Greek, she was the authority) had nothing but scorn for Chopin and actually suffered physical pain if she happened to be present when any of his music was being performed. Mme de Cambremer, delivered from the vigilance of this Valkyrie, who was sitting across the room among a group of people of her own Wagnerian generation, relished a moment of sheer delight. And the Princesse des Laumes shared this delight. Although she had no natural gift for music, fifteen years previously she had studied with a piano teacher of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a woman of genius who, having fallen on hard times late in life, had once more turned to giving music lessons at the age of seventy to the daughters and grand-daughters of former pupils. The good woman was now dead, but her methods and the beauty of her playing lived on whenever one of her pupils, even one of those who might have grown into mediocrities in other respects, given up music and rarely bothered even to lift the lid of a piano, sat down to play. So the nod of appreciation with which Mme des Laumes greeted the pianist's interpretation of the prelude, which she knew by heart, was that of the expert. As the pianist played a new phrase, the end of it came spontaneously to her lips and she murmured, 'As charming as ever', doubling the initial ch, a sign of refinement which she felt shape her lips into a lovely flower and give such a

romantic pout to them that she instinctively put on a look to match them, filling her eyes with a dreamy sentimentality. Mme de Gallardon, meanwhile, was thinking how annoying it was that she so seldom had an opportunity of meeting the Princesse des Laumes, and how satisfying it would be to teach her a lesson, next time they met, by snubbing her. She was unaware that her cousin was, in fact, in the room. But as Mme de Franquetot moved her head, the Princesse des Laumes became visible. Mme de Gallardon immediately rushed over to her, disturbing everybody; then, wishing to maintain a frigid formality of manner and thus remind all and sundry of her reluctance to be on speaking terms with a person at whose house one might find onself confronted at any minute by that Princesse Mathilde, and the fact that it was not up to her to make the first overtures, since she belonged to 'a different generation', while at the same time trying to counteract her prim stand-offish bearing with a speech which could give a semblance of justification to her approach and force her cousin into a conversation, she thrust at her a hand that brooked no evasion, glared and asked, in a tone of concern that suggested the Prince might be critically ill, 'And how's your husband?' The Princess burst into a peal of her own unique and unmistakable mirth, a style of laughing which was calculated not only to make it plain she was deriding somebody but also to make herself look prettier by focussing her entire expression on to her animated mouth and shining eyes, and answered, 'Why, he's as right as rain!' Then she laughed even more.

At which Mme de Gallardon, stiffening her back and contriving a facial expression that, though more stern than before, still showed anxiety about the Prince's condition, said, 'Oriane' (and here Mme des Laumes stared with waggish amazement at an imaginary witness whom she seemed to be assuring that she had never in her life permitted Mme de Gallardon to call her by her Christian name), 'I'm most anxious for you to pop in tomorrow evening and hear a Mozart clarinet quintet. I'd like to have your opinion on it'

She gave the impression not so much of issuing an invitation as of begging a favour, of needing the Princess's assessment of the Mozart quintet, as though it was a dish prepared by a new cook, on whose culinary skills it might have been worthwhile to invite the comments of a gourmet.

'Well, I can give you that here and now. I'm familiar with that quintet — and I like it!'

'But, you see, my husband isn't at all well these days. It's his liver. And he'd be so pleased to see you,' Mme de Gallardon went on, making it the Princess's bounden duty, for the sake of elementary charity, to accept her invitation.

The Princess had a reluctance to tell people she had no desire to attend functions at their houses. Every day she wrote letters to decline invitations, saying how sorry she was at being prevented (by an unexpected visit from her mother-in-law, an invitation from a brother-in-law, the fact that it was

her opera night or that she was spending the weekend in the country) from going to parties which it would never have entered her head to go to. In this way she gave to many people the happiness of believing that she was a member of their circle of friends, that she would have been glad to visit them and that the only reason she had not was the sort of aristocratic contretemps which they were flattered to see competing with their own invitation. Also, she belonged to the witty Guermantes set which still kept alive something of the tradition of lively intelligence, uncluttered by platitudes or conventional pretences, that derived from Mérimée and was given latter-day expression in the comedies and librettos of Meilhac and Halévy; and the spirit of this special wit she adapted to everyday social contacts, transposing it even into her ways of expressing politeness, which showed a constant effort towards concreteness, precision and a regard for the simple unvarnished truth. She never held forth at great length to a prospective hostess about her eagerness to accept a particular invitation; she thought it more gracious to make mention of the actual trite circumstances which would determine whether she could accept it or not.

'Look, the fact is,' she said to Mme de Gallardon, 'tomorrow evening I must go and visit a friend who has been inviting me to one 'do' or another for ages. Now, if she's taking a party of us to the theatre, with the best will in the world, it will be out of the question for me to come to you. However, if we stay in, then that'll mean I'll be the only one there and I can slip away.'

'Oh, by the way, have you seen your friend M. Swann?'

'What! Is my darling Charles here? I didn't know. I must try to catch his eye.'

'It's a bit funny to find the likes of him at Old Mother Saint-Euverte's, isn't it?' asked Mme de Gallardon. 'Mind you, I know he's intelligent' (by which she meant 'designing'). 'But, all the same, a Jew being a guest in the house of a woman who's the sister and sister-in-law of a pair of Archbishops!'

'Well, I must confess to my shame that that doesn't shock me,' said the Princesse des Laumes.

'Oh, I know he's a convert, and his parents and grandparents were converts before him. But you know what people say — that it's the converted ones that really stick to their religion. And that they only get converted for show, anyway. Is there any truth in that, do you think?'

'I have no view on the matter.'

The pianist had by now finished the prelude, the first of the two Chopin pieces he was to play, and went straight into a polonaise. However, ever since the moment when Mme de Gallardon had mentioned Swann's presence to her cousin, Chopin himself could have risen from the dead and played his whole repertoire without succeeding in interesting Mme des Laumes. Of the two great human families, she belonged to the one in which curiosity about the people one does not know is replaced by interest in those

one does know. As with many women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the knowledge that someone else from her own set was present at some gathering, even if she had nothing in particular to say to that person, was enough to engross her interest to the exclusion of everything else. From that moment on, in the hope that Swann would notice her, like a tame white mouse moving its nose towards then away from a sugar-lump that someone is teasing it with, the Princess kept turning her expression of eager complicity in shared secrets, quite unrelated to the mood of Chopin's polonaise, in Swann's direction; and whenever Swann made a slight change in his position, she made a parallel adjustment to her magnetised smile.

'Oriane, I hope you won't take offence at this,' Mme de Gallardon went on, incapable as ever of preventing herself from thwarting her own grand social ambitions and her desire to shine one day in the eyes of the world, and preferring the more immediate, privy, unsung pleasures of casting aspersions, 'but I've heard from different people that your M. Swann is a man whom one should never let darken one's door. Is there any truth in that, do you think?'

'Well, surely you know more about that than I do,' rejoined the Princesse des Laumes. 'You've sent him dozens of invitations and he has never yet darkened your door.'

Then, leaving her cousin to her mortification, she let out another peal of laughter that offended those who were listening to the music and attracted the attention of Mme de Saint-Euverte who, because she had been sitting, as propriety demanded, close to the piano, had not yet set eyes on the Princess. Her delight at seeing her was increased by the fact that she had assumed Mme des Laumes was still at Guermantes helping to look after her father-in-law, who was unwell.

'Goodness me, Your Highness! I didn't know you were here!'

'Yes, I just stood here in my small corner. And I've been hearing such lovely things.'

'What! Have you been here for quite a while?'

'Well, yes, actually, quite a long while which seemed quite short. If it was long, it was only because I couldn't see you.'

Mme de Saint-Euverte offered her armchair to the Princess, but the latter replied, 'No, no, not at all. Don't bother about me. I'll be perfectly all right anywhere'. Then deliberately selecting a little backless bench-seat, so as to show what an unspoiled and down-to-earth Great Lady she was, she said, 'Look, this footstool's good enough for me! It will make me sit up straight! Oh, dear, I am making a lot of noise! I'll be shown the door if I'm not careful!'

The pianist was now forcing the pace, there was a climax of musical passion, and a servant passing round refreshments on a tray rattled cutlery, at which, as on each of these weekly occasions, Mme de Saint-Euverte made gestures at him, which he could not see, to have him leave the room. A

recently married young woman, who had been taught that somebody in her position should never appear jaded, was beaming smiles of pleasure across the room towards her hostess, trying to catch her eye and send her a glance of pure gratitude for having been deemed worthy of sharing in such a rapturous occasion. The interest she focussed on the performance, although less anxious than that of Mme de Franquetot, was no less intense. However, her concern was not for the pianist but for the piano itself, on top of which a candle, jerking and shuddering at each fortissimo, seemed to be in danger, if not of setting fire to its own shade, then of dripping hot wax on to the rosewood of the instrument. Eventually she could bear it no longer, rushed up the two steps to the dais and ran over to rescue the piano from the candlestick. Just as she laid a hand on it, the final chord rang out, the polonaise ended and the pianist stood up. The young woman's bold venture and the ensuing moment of incongruous intimacy between herself and the pianist created a generally favourable impression among the audience.

'I say, Princess,' said General de Froberville, coming across to greet Mme des Laumes as their hostess moved away, 'did you see what that little lady did just now? Rather remarkable, what? Does she happen to be one of the performers?'

'Not at all. She's just an unimportant person by the name of Cambremer,' the Princess blurted out. Then, instantly, she added, 'I'm just telling you what I've been told. I've not the first idea of who she might be. Somebody behind me said they're country neighbours of Mme de Saint-Euverte. But I don't think anyone knows them from Adam. They're probably somebody's country cousins! Actually, I don't know if you're well up in the dazzling company here tonight, but personally I can't put a name to any of these hair-raising characters. What do you think they do with themselves apart from coming to Mme de Saint-Euverte's evenings? If you ask me, she must have got them as a job-lot, along with the musicians and the chairs and the refreshments. You must admit that Belloir's department-store supplies most lifelike guests! How on earth does she pluck up the courage to hire all these extras week in week out? I've never seen the like of it anywhere!'

'But Cambremer is a fine old family name, you know,' said the General. 'It can be as fine and old as it likes,' snapped the Princess. 'That still doesn't make it *euphonious*.' She gave a special emphasis to the word, as though pronouncing it between inverted commas, a quirk of affected speech that was peculiar to members of the Guermantes set.

'Do you think so, now? She's as pretty as a picture, though,' said the General, keeping his eyes on Mme de Cambremer the younger. 'Would you not agree, Princess?'

'If you ask me she is a little too forward. And in a woman as young as she is I think that's not very nice. You see, we belong to different generations,' replied Mme des Laumes, using an expression that was common to both the Gallardons and the Guermantes. Then, seeing that the General could not

take his eyes off Mme de Cambremer, she added, partly out of spitefulness towards the young woman, partly out of a desire to be pleasant to the General, 'Not very nice... for her husband! It's a pity I don't know the little lady — you're so fascinated by her, I could have introduced you' (which, if she had known her, she would probably have made a point of not doing). 'Well, I'll have to be off soon. I've got to go and wish many happy returns to a friend who has a birthday today.' Her tone of matter-of-fact modesty reduced the fashionable gathering to which she was going to the level of mere mummery, a boring ceremonial which it was compulsory, but in a way also touching, for her to attend: 'And I have to meet Basin there, too. While I've been here, he's been visiting friends of his — you know them, I believe, they're called after one of the bridges over the Seine — the Iéna family.'

'Well, it was a victory before it was a bridge, Princess,' rejoined the General. 'But, you know,' he added, taking out his monocle to wipe it, as though changing the dressing on a wound, while the Princess instinctively averted her eyes, 'for an old soldier like myself, although Napoleon's nobility aren't the same as the other kind, there's no getting away from it, in their own way they're pretty all right. I mean, when all's said and done, they fought and died like heroes.'

'Oh, I'm full of admiration for heroes,' said the Princess, with an edge of irony to her voice. 'And that's got nothing to do with why I stay away from Basin's Princesse d'Iéna. It's just that I don't know them, whereas Basin does. He positively dotes on them! Oh, I know what you're thinking and it's not that at all — he's not having an affair with her and I'm not trying to put my foot down. Mind you, for all the good it does when I do try to put my foot down...,' she added forlornly, it being common knowledge that Basin, Prince des Laumes, had first cuckolded his beautiful cousin the day after their wedding and had not stopped since. 'Anyway, that's got nothing to do with it this time. They're just people he's known for ages, they get on together like a house on fire and I say "good luck" to him. But I can tell you that the sort of thing he says about their house — I mean, just imagine, every stick of their furniture is Empire style!'

'Well, what do you expect, Princess? It's the stuff their grandparents handed down to them.'

'Well, yes, I daresay. But it's still horrid and ugly! I'm quite well aware that one can't expect everyone to surround themselves with nice things. But I do object when they surround themselves with ridiculous things! I mean to say, is there anything more snobby-pretentious or tastelessly low-brow than all those ghastly chests of drawers with swans' heads sticking out like bath-taps?'

'Actually, you know, I do believe they must have quite a few really nice things, like that famous mosaic table that was used at the signing of the Treaty of . . .'

'Oh, yes, I grant you they must have a few things of historical interest. But

it can't possibly be *nice* stuff . . . since it's so frightful! I mean, we've got things like that, too, things Basin inherited from the Montesquious. Only we keep them at Guermantes, locked up in the attics where nobody can set eyes on them. But, as I said, that's not the point. I'd love to go and visit them with Basin, I could even put up with their sphinxes and all their brass knobs, if I knew them. But the fact is — I don't! I was for ever being told when I was a little girl that it was rude to go into the homes of people you didn't know,' (she delivered this statement in a childish tone) 'so I'm just doing as I've been told. Just think how people might react if they found themselves being invaded by people they don't know! I mean, they might make me feel very unwelcome!' At the thought of this, the Princess, with coy flirtatiousness, smiled her sweetest smile at the General, filling her blue eyes with a soft and distant wistfulness.

'Come now, Princess! You know as well as I do they'd be beside themselves with joy if you . . .'

'Really? Why should they?' she asked with irrepressible petulance, either because she wished not to give the impression of knowing that their reason would be she was one of the greatest ladies in all France, or because she wished for the gratification of being told so by the General. 'No, but, why? For all you know, they might be cut to the quick. Obviously, I can't say for certain, but if I go by what I feel myself, then I must say I find it such a nuisance to have to see the people I already know that if I had to see people I don't know as well, "heroic" or otherwise, I'd go off my head! In any case, I'm not so sure that the conquering-hero manner would go down very well in society these days — present company excepted, of course! But it's frequently such a bore to have people to dinner that the thought of having to sit beside Spartacus — no thanks! Believe you me, if I'm ever short of a guest to make up the numbers at table, I'll never include Vercingetorix in a dinner-party. I'd probably keep him for gala occasions. And since I never have any of those . . .'

'Haw, haw! My dear Princess, a blind man could tell you're a Guermantes! Yes, by Jove, that's the wit of the Guermantes family, all right!'

'Isn't it odd how people always talk of "the wit of the Guermantes family"? I've never been able to understand why. I mean, do you know of any other member of the family who's got it?' she asked, and burst into a rippling melody of mirth, with all her features concentrated and coordinated into a set expression of vivacity and her eyes sparkling with a bright sunny gaiety which only ever reached its full radiance, as now, in response to praise of her wit or beauty, even though the praise might originate from herself. Then, 'I say, there's Swann. He seems to be greeting your little Cambremer girl. Look — there he is, standing beside Old Mother Saint-Euverte. Oh, you're not looking in the right direction! Go and ask him for an introduction. And hurry up — he's trying to get away from her!'

'Have you noticed how awful he's looking?' asked the General.

'Ah, my dear Charles! At last he's coming over! I was beginning to wonder whether he was avoiding me!'

Swann was, in fact, very fond of the Princesse des Laumes; as well as which, the sight of her reminded him of the Guermantes estate near Combray and the whole of the surrounding countryside which he loved so much but did not dare visit, for fear of leaving Odette to her own devices. In conversation with the Princess, Swann used the semi-literary, semiflirtatious banter that he knew she enjoyed; it came back to him automatically whenever he made one of these brief excursions into the world where he had once been at home, and on this occasion it also expressed his own yearning to see the countryside again. In a stage-whisper, meant for the ears not only of Mme de Saint-Euverte to whom he was speaking but also of Mme des Laumes to whom his words were really addressed, he said, 'Ah! And here we have the ravishing Princess! Look at her - she has come up here all the way from Guermantes just to be able to listen to Liszt's Saint Francis of Assisi. And before she left, like a dainty little bluetit, she just had time to pick a few hips and haws to put on her head. They've still got a sprinkle of dew-drops on them, or a touch of the hoar-frost that must be making the Duchess shiver. My dear Princess, how very fetching!'

'What did you say? The Princess came up on purpose from Guermantes? Oh, but you shouldn't have, Your Highness! Oh, dear, I didn't know! Oh, how embarrassing!' exclaimed the naive Mme de Saint-Euverte, unused to Swann's way of putting things. Then, looking more closely at the Princess's headgear, 'Oh, yes! You're right, it's meant to look like what-do-you-call-thems, not chestnuts, but you know what I mean. Oh, it's a lovely idea! But how on earth did the Princess know what music would be on the programme tonight? I mean, the musicians didn't even tell me!'

In the company of women with whom he kept up this flippant coquetry in conversation, Swann was in the habit of delivering himself of well-turned whimsical nothings which proved incomprehensible to many other fashionable people, and so did not bother to explain to Mme de Saint-Euverte that he had not been speaking literally. The Princess, however, exploded once more with laughter, Swann being highly prized in her set as a great wit; in addition to which, any compliment addressed to herself invariably struck her as being laced with the most delicate subtlety and irresistible merriment.

'Well, I must say, Charles, I'm delighted my little hips and haws find favour in your sight. What were you doing greeting the Cambremer female just now? Is she a country neighbour of yours, too?'

Mme de Saint-Euverte, seeing the Princess contentedly chatting with Swann, had moved away. Swann said, 'Well, she's your neighbour as well, Princess.'

'My neighbour? Have people like that got country estates all over the place? I wouldn't mind being in their shoes!'

'Well, it's not actually the Cambremers themselves. It's her side of the

family — she being Mlle Legrandin-that-was who used to appear in Combray. I'm not sure whether you realise you are Countess of Combray and that the local chapter still pays dues to you.'

'I don't know anything about what the chapter pays. But I can tell you that their village priest touches me for a hundred francs per annum, which I wouldn't mind getting out of, thank you very much! You know, these Cambremer people have a rather astonishing name.† It comes to a stop just in time. But it's a pity it comes to a stop at all!" she added with a laugh.

'The beginning of it's a bit risky, too,' said Swann.

'Yes! The double abbreviation . . .'

'It must mean somebody who is very angry but very squeamish, and doesn't dare to let the whole of the first word pass his lips.'

'But, then, since he wasn't able to prevent himself from starting the second word, he'd have been better to finish the first one and get it over with! I say, we are having a tasteful exchange, aren't we, Charles?' Then, her voice dropping to a soothing plaintive murmur, she added, 'You know, it's a great nuisance that we don't see anything of you these days. I do so love it when we can have a little talk. Someone like that old fool Froberville would never have grasped what I meant about the Cambremers' astonishing name. Isn't life an awful thing? The only time I don't feel bored is when I'm with you.'

This was presumably not true. But Swann and the Princess did share a certain way of considering the small things of life, the effect of which - or just possibly the cause of which - was a marked similarity in their ways of expressing themselves and even in their pronunciation. It was a resemblance that was unobtrusive, since their voices were utterly unlike one another. But once the mind had stripped Swann's words of their acoustical disguise and the moustache through which they emerged, one realised that what one was hearing were the turns of phrase, the modulations, the whole style of the Guermantes set. On matters of importance, Swann and the Princess had not a single opinion in common. But now that Swann was beset by such sadness and for ever cringing from the faint shudder that precedes tears, his need to speak about suffering and sorrow was as irresistible as the murderer's to speak of his crime. And when he heard the Princess refer to the awfulness of life, he felt as comforted as though she had been speaking about Odette: 'Yes, indeed, life is an awful thing. You know, we really should see more of each other, my dear Oriane. The thing that's so nice about you is that you're never cheerful. We should spend an evening together.'

'What a good idea! Look, why don't you come down to Guermantes? My mother-in-law would be delighted. People say it's an ugly part of the world, but I must say it's a place I don't mind at all. I do hate picturesque places!'

'Yes, I agree, it's lovely,' answered Swann. 'In fact, it's almost too beautiful and alive for me at the present moment. It's a place to be happy in. It may only be because I've lived there, but there are all sorts of things about the place that touch me. At the slightest puff of wind or a ripple across the wheatfields, I always have a premonition that someone is going to arrive suddenly, or the feeling that I'm about to be informed of something or other upsetting. Then there are all those little houses along the river banks... No, I'd be far too unhappy there!'

'Look out, Charles old chap, look out! There's that ghastly harpy Rampillon! Oh, she's seen me! Quick, hide me! Remind me what it was that happened to her, I can never remember — she had to marry off her daughter, wasn't it, or was it her lover? Or perhaps both of them? To each other? Oh, no, I remember — she got jilted by her Prince! Look, pretend we're having a nice cosy conversation and then the forlorn, forsaken one won't come over here with an invitation to dinner. Actually, I'd best be off. But, listen, Charles, to celebrate the fact that I've actually set eyes on you for once, why don't you elope with me to the Princess of Parma's? She'd be overjoyed to see you, and so would Basin — he's going to meet me there later. I mean, just think — if we didn't hear of your doings now and then via Mémé, we'd lose touch altogether, you and I!'

Swann declined the suggestion. Having notified M. de Charlus that he would be going straight home from Mme de Saint-Euverte's party, he was reluctant to go on to the Princess of Parma's and thus run the risk of not receiving the message which he had been expecting all evening to be handed to him by a servant and which, on his return home, he might well find waiting for him in his own porter's lodge. Later that evening, Mme des Laumes said to her husband, 'You know, poor old Swann is just as nice as ever, but he does look miserable. You'll see for yourself what I mean, because he said he'd come to dinner one evening. Isn't it stupid that such an intelligent man should have his heart broken by a person like that? I mean, she's not even interesting - in fact, I'm told the woman is a complete fool,' she added, with the superior wisdom enjoyed only by those who are not in love and who believe that a clever man should only ever break his heart over somebody who is worth it, which is rather like being surprised that people deign to suffer from cholera all because of an organism as insignificant as the comma bacillus.

Swann was looking for an opportunity to take his leave. But just as he was about to make good his escape, General de Froberville asked him for an introduction to Mme de Cambremer and he had to accompany him back into the reception-room to look for her.

'I say, Swann, old fellow,' said the General, 'I wouldn't mind being that

[†] The ensuing few lines of untranslatable banter about the name Cambremer rely for their comedy in French on the unstated puns between: the final syllable -mer and the exclamation merde (= shit); and the first two syllables Cambre- and the name Cambronne. Cambronne was the Napoleonic general who, anecdote has it, at Waterloo, rejected the English summons to surrender with the insult Merde, a euphemism for which, mot de Cambronne, (meaning literally 'Cambronne's word') is still to be heard (JG).

little lady's husband! Better than being slaughtered by savages, what?'

The words 'slaughtered by savages' lacerated Swann's heart and he felt an instant need to pursue this conversation with the General: 'Well, you know, there are worse ways to die. Some very fine men... I mean, there's ... well, there's that explorer fellow whose ashes were brought back to France by Dumont d'Urville — La Pérouse, you know.' Merely to pronounce the name made Swann as happy as if it were Odette herself who was under discussion. He went on in a doleful manner, 'Yes, La Pérouse was a very fine character, a very interesting man.'

'Ah, yes, well, of course, La Pérouse,' agreed the General. 'A name to conjure with, all right. Got a street called after him, too.'

'Do you know someone who lives in the Rue La Pérouse, then?' asked Swann in some agitation.

'Only Mme de Chanlivaut, the sister of that Chaussepierre chap, you know. She treated us to an excellent theatrical evening the other day, I must say. That's a salon that will be in the front rank one of these days, you mark my words.'

'I see, she lives in the Rue La Pérouse, does she? That's nice for her, it's such a nice street — so sad-looking.'

'What? Good Lord, no! You mustn't have been over there for a while. Nothing sad-looking about it these days. A lot of building going on throughout that whole district.'

Swann eventually managed to introduce M. de Froberville to young Mme de Cambremer. Never having so much as heard the General's name before, she gave him the smile of delighted surprise with which she would have greeted him if his name had been a household word; for she was as yet unacquainted with all the friends of her new family and whenever somebody strange was brought up to her for introduction, suspecting that this must be one of them and believing it was tactful to appear to have heard a great deal about such people since her marriage, she would hold out her hand with a show of hesitation, calculated to hint at a fund of acquired aloofness to be overcome and the spontaneous warmth of her own nature winning through. To her husband's parents, whom she still believed to number among the most eminent people in the country, she was a gem of a daughter-in-law, a view of her they made a point of stressing to all and sundry, since they preferred to let it appear that their real reason for approving of their son's marriage to her was her intrinsic and irresistible charm rather than her great wealth.

'It is obvious, Ma'am, that you have the soul of a musician,' said the General, in an oblique allusion to the candlestick episode.

Meanwhile the concert had resumed and Swann realised he would be unable to leave before the end of the new item. He found it irksome to have to go on standing there among all those people whose stupidity and pointlessness were made more excruciatingly evident to him by the fact that in their ignorance of his love (not to say their inability, even if they had known of it, to be concerned by it or to do more than smile it off as childish nonsense or deplore it as sheer madness) they made his feelings for Odette seem like a purely subjective state of mind, existing solely inside himself and without any point of reference in the outside world which could attest to the reality of it. It pained him in particular, so much so that even the sounds of the instruments made him want to cry aloud, to have to increase the length of time he spent in this place of exile from Odette, in which she would never set foot, where not one single person or thing knew of her existence, from which she was totally and utterly absent.

Then all at once it felt as though she had appeared in the room, and the spasm of anguish that tensed inside him was so appalling that he could not help clutching at his heart. For the violin had climbed into the higher register and hung there now as though full of expectancy, waiting longer and longer and still holding the same high trill, quivering with excitement at seeing the loved one approach and making a desperate effort to last until her arrival, to welcome her before fading away, to use the last of its own failing strength to keep the way open, as one holds open a door which would otherwise slam shut. And before Swann had time to understand what was happening and tell himself, 'Quick! Don't listen! It's the little phrase from the Vinteuil Sonata,' all his memories of the time when Odette had been in love with him, which until that moment he had managed to keep stored away, out of sight and out of mind, were deceived by a stray sunbeam from the lost springtime of love that seemed to have come again, and they suddenly roused, to wing their way back up out of the depths and carol cruelly to his forlorn ears the forgotten rhapsodies of happiness. Hitherto, when he had found himself using forms of speech such as 'In the days when I was happy. . .' or 'When she still loved me. . .', it had been without any great pain, since in these abstract expressions his intelligence had managed to secrete only spurious surrogates of the past which contained no scrap of the real thing. But what came back to him now was everything that had absorbed and preserved for ever the perishable essence of his vanished happiness: the curly snowy-white petals of the chrysanthemum which she had tossed up into his carriage and which he had held to his lips; the embossed letter-head of the Maison Dorée at the top of the note in which he had read: My hand is trembling so much that I can hardly write; the way her brows had come together as she begged him in a voice full of yearning, 'But you won't forsake me for too long, will you?'; the hot smell of the curlingtongs with which the barber used to crimp his hair while Loredano went off to fetch the young working-girl; the torrential rain that had fallen so often that particular spring; the drive home in his victoria on those freezing moonlit nights; the whole interlocking network of thought-patterns, sensations associated with the time of year and even the feeling of his skin, that had woven over a period of weeks a uniform mesh of memories in which

his body was once again held. At that time, by way of an experiment in sensual curiosity, he had been dabbling in some of the joys experienced by those to whom love is the be-all and end-all of life. He had believed it would be possible to venture no farther, that he would not have to experience their sorrows as well. Yet, what an insignificant thing Odette's charm seemed to him now, compared to the immeasurable halo of dread that had spread out from it, those profound qualms of anguish at not knowing, at any hour of the day or night, what she had been up to, at not being able to possess her in every possible way, at all times and in all places! And her voice as she had exclaimed, 'Look, I'm always free! I can see you whenever you like,' came back to him with a pang. For now she was never free. He remembered the passionate interest she had taken in his occupations and the way she had longed for him to let her have some part in them — a favour he had done her against his better judgement, seeing in it at the time only the possibility of irksome complications to his life! And the fact that she had actually had to beg him to let her introduce him to the Verdurins and their circle! And how, at the time when he used to allow her to come and see him at home once a month, she had had to talk him round and insist on her idea that it would be such fun to see each other every day, a practice that had originally struck him as something of a bother and a bore, against which she had been the first to repine and which she had eventually abolished - by which time, for himself, it had become a painful and ungovernable craving! He could see now that he had never spoken a truer word than the flippant, flirtatious remark with which on their third meeting he had tried to dismiss her repeated suggestion that he should let her come to see him more often — 'I don't want to break my heart over you,' he had said. Now and then, he still received a note from her, jotted on the letter-headed paper of some restaurant or hotel - now, though, the embossed legend burned him like letters of fire: 'Written from the Hotel Vouillemont? What on earth must she have gone there for? Who was she with? What did they do?' He remembered the gas-lamps being turned off along the Boulevard des Italiens, when all hope had faded and he had come upon her at last among the unquiet wandering shades, on that night which had seemed almost supernatural to him and which (having now become part of a time when his certainty that she would be overjoyed to see him and drive home in his arms meant that he had never so much as wondered whether he might not offend her by turning up to meet her somewhere) did in fact belong to that mysterious realm which, once its gates have closed behind one, one can never re-enter. And it was then that Swann noticed a silent witness to this reliving of lost happiness, a disconsolate motionless figure whom he did not immediately recognise and whose sadness touched him so deeply that he had to lower his eyes in case anyone should notice they were brimming with tears. He had just caught a glimpse of himself.

Once he had realised the identity of this figure, his pity was replaced by

jealousy towards this former self who had been loved by Odette, towards all those of whom he had ever thought without any great pain, 'perhaps she loves them', for now he had exchanged the imprecise notion of loving, which is empty of love, for the chrysanthemum petals and the letter-head of the Maison Dorée, which were crammed with it. Then as his pain became too acute, he rubbed a hand across his brow, let his monocle fall out and busied himself wiping it. And if he could have seen himself at that moment, he might have added another eye-glass to the collection he had made earlier that evening — his own, which he was now shuffling about like a distressing thought, trying to erase anxiety from its misted surface with a handkerchief.

The violin is capable of intonations so akin to certain contralto voices that, if one is prevented from seeing the instrument being played and hence from relating what one hears to the appearance of it — which affects the sound — one's ears can easily be deluded into believing that a woman has started to sing among the orchestra. On looking up, all one sees are the violins, as precious as Chinese boxes, yet now and then one is still misled by the sirensong; at times, too, one seems to be hearing the call of a genie, imprisoned inside the magic box, a dancing devil bewitching the inner space with the vibrations of its frenzy, while at other times it sounds like some wraith of supernatural purity charging the air as it passes with its invisible message.

As though the performers were not so much playing the little phrase as going through the motions of the rituals it required before it would deign to emerge, and then observing the prescribed solemnities that would make it prolong by a few moments the miracle of its visitation, Swann, for whom it was as invisible as if it had belonged to an ultra-violet world, and who was savouring as a refreshing metamorphosis the temporary blindness that afflicted him in its proximity, knew it was present like a guardian goddess who, in her concern for his love, had disguised herself as this acoustical apparition so as to single him out among the crowd and speak to him in private. As she drifted by, like a soothing muted perfume, murmuring her secret message to his ear, which examined every word of it and regretted that they faded away so soon, Swann's lips pouted a spontaneous kiss at her fleeting winsome form. He no longer felt estranged and alone, since she was speaking to him gently of Odette. For he had long since lost his former impression that he and Odette were unknown to the little phrase - after all, it had so often shared moments of happiness with them! And it had just as often reminded him of how precarious and fragile such moments were. At this very moment, too, instead of the contained suffering that this smiling music, with its tone of limpid disenchantment, had once suggested to his mind, what he heard in it was a gracious wistful resignation. As it flitted past, wafting in its meandering wake hints of sorrows that he had once detected in its smile but never heeded, unscathed by them himself, it seemed to say of these same sorrows, which had now become his and from which he had no hope of ever being free, as it had once said of his happiness,

'What do they matter? Such things are of no importance.' At which, in a sudden impulse of pity and tenderness, Swann's thoughts turned for the first time towards Vinteuil, who seemed to him now something like a longlost heroic brother who must have suffered, like Swann himself, the torments of the damned. What kind of life must he have had? What appalling suffering must the man have been through, to have acquired such god-like powers, such boundless creativity? Now that it was the little phrase which intimated the pointlessness of his pain, Swann took comfort from such counsel, although not many minutes before, when he had believed he could read the very same meaning in the faces of indifferent people who saw his love as a futile infatuation, it had struck him as unbearable. The difference was that the little phrase, whatever its view on the indurability of such emotional states, saw in them something that was invisible to these people - instead of seeing them as things of less moment than the matterof-factness of daily life, it saw them as having such urgent and over-riding significance that they, and only they, were worthy of being expressed. For what it had attempted to copy, or rather recreate, was the special flavour of private grief; and it had succeeded in capturing that intimate experience and making visible the essence of it, despite the fact that this essence lies in its very incommunicability and its insignificance for anyone other than the person who feels the emotion. Thus, the achievement of the little phrase was that it made every one of these same people, even if they had no more than an ounce of music in them, acknowledge the value and enjoy the divine consolation of such private experiences, even though they might continue to belittle them in practice, in each of the individual love-relationships with which they might come in contact. No doubt the code in which the little phrase had couched these insights could not be broken down into logical discourse. But for the past year and more, now that Swann had developed, if only temporarily, a love of music, which had helped him towards the discovery of many unsuspected riches in his inner self, he had been convinced that musical subjects were actual ideas, belonging to another world and a different order of existence, unknown, shrouded in mystery and ungraspable through the intellect, but nonetheless quite distinct from one another and having their separate values and meanings. After his very first visit to the Verdurin salon, when he had had someone play over the little phrase for him, trying to puzzle out the magic spell with which, like a perfume or a caress, it outwitted and enveloped him, he had realised that the shrinking, shivering impression it conveyed of soothing warmth offered then withdrawn, came from the closeness of the intervals between its five component notes, and especially from the constant reiteration of two of them. But even as he realised this, he was well aware that his process of reasoning was not based on the phrase itself, but on the mere musical equivalents which, for the convenience of his intelligence, had taken the place of the mysterious entity glimpsed by him during the course of that evening, long before meeting the Verdurins, when he had heard the sonata for the very first time. He also knew that his mental image of the piano keyboard distorted even more the plane on which he conceived of music and that the scope available to a composer is not a paltry seven-note scale, but a gamut of immeasurable dimensions, the extent of which is still totally undiscovered, except for a few isolated notes, worlds apart, separated from each other by vast reaches of unfathomed darkness in which lie hidden all the other millions of notes that make it up, notes of tenderness and passion, courage and serenity, as different from each other as one universe from another; and those few have been brought to light by a handful of great artists who, by rousing inside us a response to the theme they have discovered, are in fact blessing us with a glimpse of the richness and variety which lie concealed, far beyond our usual ken, in those unplumbed disheartening depths of the self, which we think of as a void, null, vain and non-existent. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians. One could sense that the contents of his little phrase, despite the obscure surface it presented to the intelligence, were made of a substance that was so coherent and undeniable, and which the phrase shaped into such an arresting and original statement, that it remained in the mind of anyone who heard it with all the force and identity of a concept. Whenever Swann made mental reference to it, it was to a certain conception of love and happiness, the special essence of which he had no more hesitation in identifying than he had in recognising what was peculiar to the Princesse de Clèves or to René, when such titles occurred to him. Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it still existed in a latent state within his mind, on a par with certain other unique ideas, such as the ideas of light, sound, relief or sensual pleasure, the inestimable treasures which give beauty and diversity to our inner world. If in the end we are reduced to nothing, it may well be that they too will be lost and obliterated for ever. But at least for as long as we are alive, once acquainted with them, we can no more set about unlearning them than we can nullify our own knowledge of a particular object in the tangible world, or than we can be in doubt, for instance, about the lamplight that suddenly transforms every object in a room and banishes even the memory of darkness. In this respect, Vinteuil's little phrase (like one of those motifs from Tristan, say, which may also feel like a definite acquisition in the realm of sentiment) had taken on our mortal status and an element of humanity that had something touching in it. Its ultimate fate was now inseparable from the future and reality of any human spirit in which it had become one of the most special and idiosyncratic insignia. It may be that the only ultimate truth of existence lies in the nothingness to come and that it is our inner life that is unreal; but in that case, we feel, these ideas and musical utterances which only exist through that inner life must also be devoid of reality. We may perish, but we hold as hostages these captives from a divine world which will have to take their chance with us. And death in their company will be somehow less bitter, less inglorious — perhaps even less likely.

Swann was, therefore, not mistaken in believing that the phrase really existed. However, although it was human to that extent, it belonged also to a species of supernatural creatures which, even though we have never set eyes on them, we can recognise with immediate delight whenever some explorer of those invisible reaches manages to capture one of them, bring it back from the divine world to which he has access, and let it shine down briefly on ours. This was what Vinteuil had done with the little phrase. Swann could sense that all the composer had done with his musical instruments was reveal it, make it visible, faithfully follow its contours with a hand that was so gentle, careful, delicate and unfailingly reliable that the sounds rendered each momentary inflexion of it, fading and blurring so as to convey shadows, then firming and focussing when it had to copy a sharper outline. And clear confirmation that Swann's belief in the real existence of the little phrase was well founded could have been supplied by the fact that any music-lover with an iota of taste in him would have been instantly aware of a misrepresentation, if Vinteuil, lacking the power to see its outlines clearly and render them accurately, had added here and there touches of his own invention in an attempt to cover up his shortcomings as a visionary or his incompetence as a

The phrase had now disappeared. Swann knew it would re-appear right at the end of the final movement, after a lengthy intervening section that Mme Verdurin's pianist always omitted. This development contained remarkable ideas, which Swann had not recognised on first hearing the sonata but which he could now distinguish clearly, as though their originality had left its former disguise of sameness in the cloakroom of memory. He was now hearing all the separate themes to be assembled into the finished phrase, like the premisses on which a general conclusion is built. He was witnessing its conception and gestation. And in a private exclamation he thought: What daring! What genius! This Vinteuil must be the equal of men like Lavoisier or Ampère, conducting his experiments, discovering the secret laws of some unknown force, striking out through some unexplored no-man's-land, towards the only possible goal, urging on the invisible team to which he entrusts himself but which he will never set eyes on! What a beautiful dialogue there was between piano and violin at the beginning of that final passage! The absence from it of human speech, instead of leaving it open to unbridled fancy, as might have been expected, had eliminated fancy altogether; never had any verbal discourse been subject to such a strict discipline of necessity, never had it posed such pointed and apposite queries or given such incontrovertible replies. It started with the piano, unaccompanied, lamenting like a bird forsaken by its mate; the violin heard it and responded, as though from a nearby tree. It sounded like the beginning of the world, as though there were no other creatures on the face of the earth, or rather as though they were the

sole denizens of a world removed from everything else, constructed out of logic by a creature who had designed it to contain only themselves — the world of this sonata. Was that a bird, that hapless invisible being whose complaint was tenderly taken up again by the piano, was it a wraith, or was it the still inchoate soul of the little phrase? Its cries came so quickly that, to echo them, the violinist had to ply his bow busily. He seemed to be trying to charm this magical bird, to be lulling it into captivity. He had taken over its soul, and now his own body, in a fit of possession, was shaking like a medium's, with the presence of the little phrase. Swann knew that the phrase would speak to him once more. At that moment he felt so removed from himself that, in anticipation of the imminent encounter with it, he was moved almost to tears, in the way in which one can be moved by an affecting line of poetry or the news of a sad event, that is, not when one is alone but when one is speaking of such things to a friend, through whose eyes one can see oneself as somebody else, to be sympathized with. Then the phrase did re-appear, but only to pause and rejoice briefly, as though hanging motionless, before vanishing for good. Swann concentrated on the fleeting moment of its duration. It hung before him, poised on the expectant air like an iridescent bubble. Like a rainbow which has faded and almost disappeared, then suddenly, on the point of extinction, brightens and glows with a glory of colour as never before, the little phrase augmented its two previous shades with chords of other colours, blending into a soaring hymn all the hues of the prism. He sat there, not daring to move and wishing he could impose silence and immobility on the whole audience, as though the slightest movement would foil the fragile supernatural spell before its final faint sigh could die completely away. Not that anybody would even have dared whisper at that moment. This wordless soliloquy by a single absent person, who might even be dead (as Swann did not know whether Vinteuil was still alive or not), fading into an echo above the last rites conducted by these two celebrants, was enough to hold the total attention of three hundred people and made of the dais on which a man's soul had just been resurrected one of the noblest altars on which any supernatural ceremony could be enacted. And when the little phrase eventually disintegrated and the fragments of it drifted away among the themes which had already replaced it, although Swann was initially annoyed at seeing the Comtesse de Monteriender, a renowned perpetrator of howlers, lean over to give him her impression of the sonata before the performance was even completed, he could not help smiling at the words she used, and may even have detected in them a deeper meaning than she had intended - astounded by the virtuosity displayed by the musicians, she exclaimed, 'It's fantastic! I've never seen anything like it. . .' But then, with a scrupulous respect for accuracy, she qualified this statement with the codicil: '... since tableturning!'

From then on, Swann knew that the love Odette had once felt for him

would never return and that his hopes of happiness would be for ever unfulfilled. After that night, if she ever happened to show some vestige of fondness for him or do him some unsolicited favour, he would note these ostensible signs of a slight renewal of her affection with the sympathetic but sceptical concern, the despairing joy, of people who have been nursing an invalid friend through a terminal illness which has all but run its course and who announce, as though it amounted to a significant event, 'You know, yesterday he went through the accounts all by himself and he actually found a mistake in our calculations,' or 'He's just enjoyed an egg, and if he manages to keep it down we might try him with a chop tomorrow,' although they know such things can have no bearing on the imminence and inevitability of his death. And since he was by now utterly convinced that, if he were to lead a life without Odette, she would eventually become quite unattractive to him, he would not have minded if she had left Paris never to return. He would have had the courage to stay there without her; but he could still not bring himself to be the one to leave.

He had often considered leaving. Now that he had taken up his work on Vermeer again, he should really have gone to spend at least a few days in the Hague, Dresden and Brunswick. He was convinced that a Diana with Her Companions, acquired by the Mauritshuis at the recent Goldschmidt sale as a Nicolaes Maes was in fact a Vermeer; and he wished he could study the actual canvas, so as to confirm his hypothesis. But the prospect of leaving Paris while Odette was still there, or even if she herself was out of town, was so unbearable to him (since the fine point of pain is sharpened by new places, where habit no longer blunts the cutting edge of feeling) that the only reason he was able to go on entertaining the constant thought of it was that he knew his mind was already made up never to turn that thought into a deed. There were times when this intention to travel came back to him in the guise of a dream, in which, having forgotten the impossibility of leaving, he would actually set off somewhere. On one occasion he dreamed he was leaving on a journey that would last a year — he was leaning down from the open window of a railway carriage, urging a young man, who was weeping on the platform as he saw Swann off, to come with him. As the train started to move, his anxiety woke him up and he remembered that he was not going away at all, that he would be seeing Odette that very evening and the following day, and almost every day from then on. Still suffering from the shock of the dream, he blessed the set of circumstances which ensured his independence, thanks to which he could continue to share in Odette's life and, with any luck, be allowed to see her now and again; and as he counted each of these blessings - his position; his wealth, which often enough proved so necessary to her that she could not contemplate a definitive break with him (it was even rumoured that her ulterior motive in continuing the relationship was to have him marry her); his friendship with M. de Charlus, which as it happened had never been of any great advantage to him in his

dealings with Odette, but at least gave him the consolation of knowing she would be told flattering things about himself by this mutual friend who stood so high in her estimation; and even his intellect, which he employed in the daily unremitting hunt for devious new pretexts which could make his presence, if not agreeable to Odette, at least necessary — he was struck by the thought of what would have become of him if he had enjoyed none of these advantages, if like so many others he had been poor, of humble extraction, living in circumstances so unfavourable that he would have had to accept whatever work was offering, or perhaps inextricably bound to a family or a wife — why, he might have had to leave Odette! The horror that had stayed with him from the dream could have come true! And he said to himself, You never know when you're well off! You're never as unhappy as you think you are!

Then, realising that this way of life had been going on now for years, that the best he could hope for was that it should last indefinitely, that he would be prepared to sacrifice all his work and all his pleasures, all his friends and ultimately his whole life-time to this daily waiting for an hour of Odette's company which he well knew would bring him no happiness, he wondered whether he was not mistaken, whether all those circumstances which had proved so favourable to his love and prevented Odette from breaking with him had not also been detrimental to his own destiny, and whether the outcome most to be wished for might not be the one which he could only entertain at present as long as it was confined to the world of his dreams—his own departure. And he said to himself, You never know when you're badly off! You're never as happy as you think you are!

There were times when he wished she would be painlessly killed in a traffic accident — for she was constantly exposed to that fate, gadding about somewhere or other, morning, noon and night. Then, when she turned up safe and sound, he would wonder at the human frame, its resilience and powers of resistance that thwarted and kept at bay all the perils to which it was prone (and which seemed infinite in number to Swann now that in his was prone (and which seemed infinite in number to Swann now that in his heart of hearts he had covertly appraised them) and by so doing enabled people to devote themselves almost with impunity to their daily round of deceit and self-indulgence. At such times, he felt keen sympathy with the Sultan Mahomet II (whose portrait by Bellini he liked) who, because he had fallen uncontrollably in love with one of his wives, stabbed her to death, with the intention, as his artless Venetian biographer puts it, of setting his mind at rest. Then, in a flush of indignation at his own self-centredness, he would feel that, since Odette's life or death meant so little to him, he deserved no pity for all the suffering he had been through.

Incapable as he was of separating from her once for all, if he had at least been able to see her without impediment, his mental torment would eventually have abated and his love for her might even have died. So, as long as she had no desire to leave Paris for good, he wished she would stay there

for ever. Knowing that her only lengthy absence came in the months of August and September each year, he had a period of months in which, at his leisure, he could dilute the bitter foretaste of this separation with all the future time which existed in him by anticipation, a fluid synthesis of unelapsed days similar to the days he was now living, which flowed in a cold clear current through his mind, sustaining his sadness but without causing him too great agony. But all it needed to jeopardize his inner future was one word from Odette, which could freeze that limpid free-flowing stream of certainty into a solid petrifying bulk, as unmoving as a glacier; and Swann would suddenly feel himself filled with a huge irreducible mass that strained the inner bulkheads of his being to breaking-point - Odette had just said, inspecting him with her sly casual smirk, 'Forcheville is going on a nice trip during the Whitsun holidays. He's off to Egypt,' which he knew instantly was to be taken to mean: 'I'm going to Egypt at Whitsun with Forcheville.' In fact, if he happened to ask her a few days later, 'By the way, what about that trip you said you were taking with Forcheville?' she would answer without thinking, 'Yes, that's right, my dear, we're leaving on the nineteenth. We'll send you a postcard of the Pyramids!' And he longed to know whether she was Forcheville's mistress, to put the question directly to Odette herself. He knew that, superstitious as she was, there were limits to the perversion of the truth beyond which she would never go; as well as which, his former reluctance to ask her such questions, for fear she might take offence or even come to hate him, no longer mattered, now that he had irrevocably abandoned all hope of ever being loved by her.

There came a day when he received an anonymous letter — it said that Odette had been the mistress of countless men (the names of some of them were given, including Forcheville, M. de Bréauté and the painter) as well as of certain women, and that she was to be seen in brothels. He writhed to think that he counted among his friends a person who was capable of writing him such a letter (for certain details in it suggested that whoever had sent it had a pretty close acquaintance with Swann's life) and racked his brains to find out who it could be. But he had never entertained the slightest suspicion about the sorts of untoward things that people might be capable of, the deeds that have no visible link with their words. So that when he began to wonder whether the unknown substratum in which this abomination had its roots underlay the apparent personality of M. de Charlus, or perhaps M. des Laumes or even M. d'Orsan, since he had never heard any of these men speak a word in favour of anonymous letters and since everything they did say supported the inference that they all disapproved of them, he could find no reason for connecting the outrage to the character of any particular one of them rather than to one of the others. Charlus, for instance, was no doubt ever so slightly unbalanced, but he was a kind-hearted man of basically sound character; and M. des Laumes, although lacking in cordiality, was dependable and fair-minded. As for M. d'Orsan, Swann

knew he could be relied on more than anyone else he had ever met to rise to even the saddest occasion with the most sincere sympathy in word and the most fitting discretion in deed. In fact, the more he thought about it, the less he could comprehend the somewhat indelicate role that d'Orsan was rumoured to have played during an affair with a rich woman; and every time Swann thought about him, he felt obliged to disregard the man's bad reputation, finding it incompatible with so many instances of unquestionable considerateness. For a brief moment, Swann's mind seemed to cloud over and he thought of something else, so as to see things more clearly. Only then did he have the courage to focus on his previous thoughts again. But what he discovered was that, whereas previously he had been unable to suspect anyone in particular, now he had to suspect everyone. M. de Charlus was fond of him and had a heart of gold, that went without saying - but then, he was also a neurotic who could be genuinely upset one day if Swann was unwell, yet the very next day, acting out of jealousy or anger, or in response to some unpredictable impulse, he might attempt to vent some grudge against him. He belonged to a breed of men who are the worst in the world, after all. The Prince des Laumes, for his part, was not nearly as attached to Swann as was M. de Charlus. But for that very reason des Laumes was not as touchy as far as Swann was concerned. As well as which, despite his undoubted insensitivity, he was as incapable of treachery as of the truly handsome gesture. Swann regretted not having spent his life surrounded exclusively by men like des Laumes. But then he reflected that the only thing that prevents people from harming others is goodness of heart, and that he could only have implicit faith in people with natures similar to his own, people like M. de Charlus, for instance, who was unimpeachable in matters of feeling — the mere thought of causing Swann such pain would have been intolerable to the man. Whereas, with an insensitive creature like the Prince des Laumes, a man of a quite different stamp, how could one even begin to imagine what he was capable of, since the motives on which he acted sprang from such a divergent source? To have one's heart in the right place, that was the thing, and Charlus's was in the right place. So was M. d'Orsan's heart, of course, and his relationship with Swann, which was cordial if not close and was based on the pleasures of conversation with someone who shares your views on everything, made for a more placid exchange of feeling than the demonstrative affection of M. de Charlus, who was given to acting in the heat of the moment, for ill as well as for good. If there ever was a man in whom Swann could detect sympathetic understanding and a genuine liking for himself, then M. d'Orsan was that man. But what about the disreputable life he led? Swann wished he had been more mindful of it in the past and regretted having so often said, by way of a joke, that it was only in the company of a real blackguard that he ever felt spontaneous admiration and esteem for a man. And he thought: It's no accident that when people judge a person, they always judge him on his actions. One's actions are the

only things that have the slightest significance, unlike one's words or thoughts. Charlus and des Laumes may have this or that fault, but they know what it is to be a gentleman. D'Orsan may have no faults at all, but the man does not behave like a gentleman. And if he's capable of acting badly once, he's capable of acting badly again. His suspicions focussed next on Rémi; and although the coachman could have done no more than provide the initial inspiration for the letter, Swann felt sure for a while that he had now hit upon the right hypothesis. For one thing, Loredano had a good reason to bear a grudge against Odette. And for another, surely a servant, occupying his menial position, imagining one's wealth and one's personality defects to be greater than they are, and envying or despising one for having them, will be bound to act very differently from one's friends and social equals? He also suspected my grandfather — whenever Swann had asked a favour of him, he had invariably turned him down, hadn't he? And he had such a deep-rooted bourgeois sense of propriety that he might even have believed it was all for Swann's own good! Bergotte was another target of Swann's suspicions, as was the painter, and then the Verdurins; and in passing, Swann noted with admiration and approval, as more than once before, how right fashionable people were to keep aloof from those sorts of artistic circles, where such abominations were not only possible but perhaps even boasted about and looked on as good fun. But then he remembered examples of good turns done by people from this Bohemian background, and compared them to the life of hand-to-mouth expedients, sometimes amounting to confidencetrickery, to which members of the aristocracy could be reduced, either by lack of money, a craving for luxury or the corrupting influence of hedonism. In fact, what the anonymous letter proved was that he numbered among his acquaintances a person who was capable of treachery, and that there was no more reason to suppose that this treachery had its hidden roots in the unexplorable heart of hearts of the man of sensibility rather than in the unfeeling man, in the artist rather than in the staid bourgeois, or in the manservant rather than in the patrician. Against what yardstick could one judge people's behaviour? Now that he came to think of it, not one of the people he knew could be cleared of the imputation of foul play. Did that mean that he must stop seeing them all? His mind clouded over, he rubbed his forehead once or twice with both hands, wiped the lenses of his glasses on his handkerchief and told himself that after all plenty of people who were every bit as good as he was went on having dealings with Charlus, the Prince des Laumes and the rest of them, which must mean, if not that these men were incapable of villainy, then at least that there is an inescapable necessity in life, accepted by everyone, to go on having dealings with people who may not be incapable of it. So his manner of greeting all these friends about whom he had harboured such dire suspicions was as cordial as before, although it concealed a purely theoretical reservation: that one of them might have tried to reduce him to despair.

As for what the letter actually said, he was untroubled by it, not one of the charges levelled at Odette having the merest shadow of probability. Like many others. Swann was intellectually lazy and unimaginative. Although perfectly well aware of the general truth that people's lives are full of contrasts, he nevertheless imagined, when it came to one particular person, that the part of that individual's life of which he knew nothing must be identical with the part of which he knew something. The things that were never mentioned he pictured on the model of the things that were. When he and Odette were together, if their talk turned to some other person who had done something dishonest or confessed to an unworthy motive, her outspoken condemnation of such behaviour was based on the same principles of common decency that Swann had picked up from his own parents and which he still observed. Then she would set about arranging her flowers, sit and have tea with him, ask how his work was coming along. By extrapolation. Swann would transpose such habits into the other part of Odette's life, and whenever he wanted to imagine the life she led when he was not there he always saw her going through these same motions. If he had been given a description of her that showed her being to another man what she was to him (or rather what she had for a long time been to him) he would have been greatly hurt by it, because the picture it gave of her would have seemed a plausible one. But the suggestion that Odette actually frequented brothels and took part in orgies with other women and led the dissolute life of the inveterate debauchee, why, it was nothing but an insane fabrication! And, thank God, the imagined sequence of chrysanthemums, cups of tea and outbursts of righteous indignation left no room in her life for anything like that! However, now and again, he would hint to Odette that there were people who, out of sheer nasty-mindedness, retailed to him everything she did; and by the shrewd use of some true but insignificant detail which had come to his knowledge quite by chance, he would imply that he had inadvertently divulged a tiny fragment, among a great many others at his disposal, of a complete reconstruction of her daily life concealed in his mind, thus giving her the impression that he was well informed about things of which he had no knowledge or even the slightest suspicion — for although he frequently lectured Odette about the need for a scrupulous respect for the truth, his real motive for this insistence, whether he was aware of it or not, was his desire that she should tell him everything she did. No doubt he did have the high regard for sincerity that he professed to her; but it was regard for a procuress who could keep him fully informed about the daily doings of his mistress. And, not being disinterested, this love of sincerity had no improving influence on him. The only truth he worshipped was the truth Odette could tell; but so as to obtain it from her, he did not mind resorting to untruth, although he still made sure of impressing on Odette that untruthfulness is the ruin of anyone who uses it. In fact, Swann told as many lies as she did, being unhappier than she was and no less selfish. And

Odette, listening to these tales of her own doings, would eye him with suspicion, tingeing her expression, just in case, with a touch of indignation, so as not to appear to be begging forgiveness or blushing with shame for anything she might have done.

One day, during the longest period that he had yet enjoyed of emotional tranquillity undisturbed by attacks of jealousy, having arranged to go out to the theatre that evening with the Princesse des Laumes, he glanced at a newspaper to see what play was being performed. The impact of the title, Wenches of Marble, by Théodore Barrière, was so appalling that he winced and turned away from it. The noun marble, which his eyes had so often read elsewhere that they had stopped noticing it, had suddenly become visible to him once more, appearing as it did in this unexpected context and seemingly illuminated by the glare of footlights, and he had instantly remembered an anecdote Odette had once told him about going to the Industrial Exhibition with Mme Verdurin, who had bantered to her at one point, 'Be careful! I know how to warm you up! You're not made of marble, you know.' According to Odette, it had been just a joke between them, and he had seen no significance in it. But at that time he had trusted her more than he did nowadays. And now there was this anonymous letter with its mention of sexual goings-on of that kind. Not daring to look back at the newspaper, he unfolded it, turned to another page, so as to avoid setting eyes on Wenches of Marble again, and ran a mechanical glance over the columns of news-reports from the provinces. Stormy weather in the Channel, with some property damage in Dieppe, Cabourg and Beuzeval - he flinched again.

The name of Beuzeval had reminded him of another spot near the Channel coast, Beuzeville, which is combined by hyphen with another name, Bréauté, which he had often seen on maps but which he now realized for the first time was also the name of his friend M. de Bréauté, mentioned in the anonymous letter as having been one of Odette's lovers. He could accept, as far as M. de Bréauté was concerned, that there was nothing implausible in the charge; but, when it came to Mme Verdurin, well, that was just out of the question! The fact that Odette might tell an occasional lie did not mean one could assume she never told the truth; and in the words spoken by Mme Verdurin and passed on to Swann by Odette herself, he had seen one of those risky, pointless little pleasantries of the kind exchanged by women who lack experience of life and any personal acquaintance with vice, who show in this way their fundamental innocence and to whom — Odette being a case in point — it would be unthinkable to harbour a fond passion for another woman. Whereas, the indignant way in which she had scotched the momentary suspicions aroused in him by her story fitted perfectly with everything he knew about her likes and dislikes and her whole temperament. But now, with a sudden insight inspired by jealousy and akin to the revelation in the mind of the poet or scientist that gives the completeness and impact of a concept or a natural law to the hitherto shapeless rhyme or

single unsupported datum, Swann was struck for the first time by something Odette had said to him, fully two years before: 'Our Mme Verdurin is all over me these days. I'm her little pet. She keeps kissing me and insisting I go everywhere with her. She even wants me to call her by her Christian name!' At the time, Swann had made no connection between this statement and the silly remark retailed to him by Odette and meant to hint at untoward goings-on; in fact, he had interpreted it only as a sign of warm friendship. But now the memory of Mme Verdurin's expressions of fondness for Odette had suddenly linked in his mind with the memory of her vulgar little joke. Having coalesced in the mind, he saw them as inseparable in reality, the affectionate words giving a serious and significant colour to the harmless banter, which in its turn made the affection seem less innocent.

He went to visit Odette and sat in a chair at some distance from her. He could not bring himself to kiss her, not knowing whether a kiss might rouse tenderness or anger in himself or in her. He sat there, saying nothing, watching their love die between them. Then he plucked up resolution and said, 'Odette, darling, I know I'm being horrid. But there are things I must ask you. Do you remember the time I got an idea into my head about you and Mme Verdurin? I want to know whether there was any truth in it, either about her or about some other woman.'

She shook her head and showed an expression of distaste, the sort of grimace often used to suggest a reluctance to accept somebody's boring invitation, such as 'Would you like to come and see the big parade on Bastille Day?' However, because this movement of the head and facial expression usually imply a comment on a future event, they tend to give a shade of doubt to a denial of something in the past. Moreover, the reluctance they suggest seems to be based on grounds of purely personal expediency, rather than on any deep-seated moral revulsion. So when Swann saw Odette's indication that his suspicion was false, he realised it might be true.

'I've already told you. You know perfectly well,' she added, looking irritable and unhappy.

'Yes, I know you told me. But are you sure? Don't say: "You know perfectly well". Just say: "I've never done anything like that with any woman"."

In a mock-serious voice, as though to humour him and be done with the matter, she recited, like a lesson learned by rote, 'I've never done anything like that with any woman.'

'Can you swear it on your holy medal from Notre-Dame-de-Laghet?' He knew she would never swear a false oath on that medal.

'Oh, stop being horrid to me!' she exclaimed, side-stepping his question. 'Don't you think you've gone far enough? What's got into you today, anyway? Do you really want me to start hating the sight of you, is that it? There I was, trying to make things nice for you, the way they used to be between us, and that's all the thanks I get for my pains!'

But Swann, unrelenting, merely paused, like a surgeon awaiting the end of a muscular spasm that has interrupted an operation but cannot deter him from going through with it, then said with a plausible mildness of tone, 'If you think I'm going to be angry with you, Odette, then you're very much mistaken. I don't mention things to you if I don't know anything about them, you know. And I always know more about things than I let on. But you're the only one who can make a clean breast of it all and take away the pain of something that will go on making me hate you if I only have somebody else's word for it. Any anger I might feel at you would have to do not with your behaviour - I'd forgive you any sort of behaviour, since I love you — but with your untruthfulness, your ridiculous untruthfulness that makes you insist on denying things I already know to be true! How do you expect me to go on loving you, when I hear you persisting with statements, actually swearing to the truth of statements I know to be false? Odette, please don't prolong the agony of this moment, it's unbearable enough as it is for both of us! Whenever you like, this very second, you can make it end and you'll be free of it for ever. Just swear to me on your holy medal that you did or didn't ever do things like that.'

'Oh, for goodness' sake! How do I know!' she exploded. 'I mean, I might have done ages ago without realising what I was doing. But only a couple of

Swann's mind had entertained every possibility. But reality must be something that has no more connection with possibility than has, say, the thrust of a dagger into one's flesh with the distant shifting of clouds in the sky; for the words only a couple of times carved something like the shape of a cross into the living tissue of Swann's heart. How mysterious that a few words, a mere disembodied utterance upon the air, could lacerate a heart as though they had made bodily contact with it, could make a man ill and act on him like a poison in the blood. Swann found he was thinking of the absurdity he had overheard at Mme de Saint-Euverte's party: There's never been anything like this since table-turning. For this pain was unlike anything he would have believed possible. Not just because his imagination, even at the moments of his profoundest misgivings, had rarely prospected so far into the realms of pain and evil, but also because whenever he had imagined them, the pain and evil had been blurred, an imprecise experience, devoid of the distinctive horror given off by the words only a couple of times, and having no trace of this specific cruelty, which felt as different from anything he had ever known as a strange disease may feel when one is suffering from it for the first time. And yet Odette, the source of such terrible pain, was no less dear to him — in fact, she had become more precious to him, as though the more unbearable his suffering became, the more valuable and necessary to him was the tranquillizing effect of the antidote which she and nobody else possessed. It seemed to him now that she needed to be treated with greater care, like an invalid who has taken a sudden turn for the worse. He

longed to be able to make sure that the frightful thing she said she had done only a couple of times would never happen again. And to make sure of that, he would have to watch over her. It is often said that all one achieves by undeceiving a friend about the misdeeds of his mistress is to make him more attached to her, because he disbelieves what he is told — but that may be nothing to the strengthening of the attachment if he does believe it! But how on earth, thought Swann, can I ever protect her? He might just be able to keep her away from one particular woman - but what about all the hundreds of others? Swann realised for the first time the whole insanity of the desire that had started to germinate in him on the night when he had missed Odette at the Verdurins': the for ever unfulfillable desire for complete possession of some other person. Fortunately for him, underneath these new agonies which had swarmed into him like an invading horde, there existed a basic nature of his own, much older than they were, more clement, and as quietly industrious as the cells of a damaged organ which immediately set about their preparations to repair the injured tissue, or the muscles of a paralysed limb which go on trying to make their accustomed movements. These ancient aboriginal inhabitants of his self summoned up all of Swann's resources and committed them for a moment to the mysterious labour of restoration which gives an illusion of relief to the convalescent or the patient recovering from an operation. On this occasion, the respite through exhaustion was perceptible not so much in the head, which was usual with Swann, as in the heart. But anything in life which has once existed tends to reproduce itself; and like a dying animal twitching with another spasm after its death throes seemed to be over, the same agony as before, ending Swann's temporary reprieve, cut the same cross into his heart. He remembered those moonlit nights when he lolled in his victoria on the way to the Rue La Pérouse, voluptuously gloating on himself as a manin-love and serenely unaware of the poisoned fruit those fatuous feelings would be bound to bear. All this mental activity had taken place in a split second, the time it took to lift a hand to his heart, catch his breath and force a smile to hide his torment. He was already formulating new questions to ask. For his jealousy, which had already gone to more trouble than any enemy so as to maim him in this way, to acquaint him with the most searing pain that he had ever experienced, was not yet convinced that he had suffered enough and was trying to make sure he would be wounded even more cruelly. Like a baleful Fury, it possessed him and hounded him on to his own destruction. And if his torments did not at first increase, it was through no fault of his own, but only because Odette was remiss.

'Odette, darling,' he began, 'it's all over and done with now. But, was it anybody I know?'

'No, of course not! I swear it. Anyway, I think I probably exaggerated just now. I don't think things went that far.'

Swann smiled and went on, 'Look, I do know it's of no importance

whatsoever. But it's just a pity you can't tell me the name. If I could just picture the person, that would prevent me from thinking about it ever again. It's your own good I'm thinking of when I say that, because that would mean I wouldn't go on pestering you about it. It's such a relief to be able to imagine things like that, you know. The things that are really unbearable are the ones one can't imagine. But you've already been so nice to me I don't want to bother you any more. I'm just profoundly grateful to you for being so good to me. It's all over now and we'll say not another word about it. Except just one more question: how long ago was it?'

'Charles, for God's sake! Can't you see what you're doing to me? It was ever so long ago, I tell you! It's something I never even think about! Anyone would think you're hell-bent on giving me a taste for that sort of thing again!' And with unthinking silliness and intentional malice, she added, 'And a fat lot of good that'll do you, too!'

'But I only wondered if it had happened since I got to know you. It wouldn't be at all surprising if it had, I suppose. I mean, did it happen here? If you could only tell me which particular evening, I'd be able to think what it was I was doing myself. You must see, Odette darling, it's just not possible for you to have forgotten whoever it was you did it with!'

'Oh, for goodness sake! I've no idea! I think it may have been in the Bois, one of those nights when you joined us later on the island. You had been dining with the Princesse des Laumes,' she said, glad of the little detail that bore out her truthfulness. 'At this table near ours there was this woman, you see, that I hadn't set eyes on for ever so long. She said to me, "Come in behind this little rock and see how pretty the moonlight is on the water." Well, I just yawned in her face to begin with and I said to her, I said, "No thanks. I'm a bit tired just now and I like it just sitting here." She told me the moonlight on the water was more striking than anything I'd ever seen. I just said, "Come off it!". Well, I mean, I could tell what she was after, couldn't I?

As she rattled this off, Odette was on the verge of laughing, either because it seemed quite unremarkable to her, or because she was trying to play down the significance of what she was saying, or perhaps because she did not want to seem ashamed and apologetic for what she had done. Then when she saw the look on Swann's face, she changed her tune: 'Oh, you are a rascal! You're just having me on! You're making me tell you lies! And I'm only telling them so you'll leave me in peace!'

This second wound that she had inflicted on him was even more terrible than the first. Never in his wildest imaginings had it occurred to him that this whole thing might be such a recent business, something hidden from his careless eyes not in some region of her past that he had never known about, but in those evenings he could remember so clearly, evenings which, because he had actually spent them in Odette's company, he had believed were familiar to him in everything and which in retrospect had now taken on

an insidious malevolent appearance. For right in the middle of those evenings, this great chasm had suddenly opened: that single instant on the island in the Bois. Odette could make up for her lack of intelligence with a certain attractive naturalness of manner, and she had told her little story with such an apt and unstudied comic talent that Swann, gasping with horror, could visualize everything: Odette's yawn, that little rock. He could hear the gaiety — gaiety, ye Gods! — in her voice, as she said, 'Come off it!'

By now, he sensed she would say no more about it that evening, that there would be no futher revelations, so he said, 'Darling, I'm sorry. I can see I've hurt you. But it's all over now and I'll never think of it again.' But she could see that his eyes continued to stare at all the things he did not know about, back in that irrecoverable past of their love, which in memory had been such a restfully monotonous and undisturbing thing, because of its imprecision, and which had now been mutilated by that minute on the island in the Bois de Boulogne, in the moonlight, after his dinner with Mme des Laumes. Swann was so accustomed to finding life an interesting experience and wondering at the strange revelations it was full of that, although he was suffering from pain the like of which he doubted he could bear much longer, he found himself thinking, 'Life is a really astonishing thing! Full of grand surprises! Immorality is obviously something that's much more widespread than one thinks. Here's this woman, whom I believed in, with her simple, honest ways - well, even if she was perhaps a bit flighty, at least she seemed normal and quite wholesome in her preferences. And then, acting on a highly improbable accusation, I question her and the few hints she drops give away much more than anyone could have suspected!' However, he was incapable of limiting his reactions to his discovery to these disinterested observations. He tried to reach an objective judgment of what she had told him, so as to be able to deduce from it whether she had done such things often and whether she would be likely to do them again. He kept repeating to himself the words she had used: 'I could tell what she was after', 'only a couple of times', 'Come off it!' But repetition did not disarm these memories; each of them still wielded its blade, stabbing him afresh whenever it came to his mind. Like an invalid who cannot help trying to make the same compulsive painful movement, Swann went on saying over and over to himself, 'I like it just sitting here', and 'Come off it!' But the pain was so acute that he had to stop. He was amazed that actions which he had always light-heartedly dismissed as trivial should now have taken on the gravity of an illness which might prove fatal. He knew plenty of women whom he could have asked to keep an eye on Odette for him. But was it conceivable that any of them would see things from his present point of view? Was it not more likely that they would adopt the lax attitude that he himself had always shared until now, which had served him as a rule-ofthumb in all his amatory dealings, and say: 'Oh, you're a jealous old spoilsport! It's only a bit of fun!'? How was it possible that he, who had once

derived nothing but sweet satisfactions from his love for Odette, had now unwittingly stepped through an open trap-door and been suddenly plunged into this new circle of hell, from which it seemed he would never be able to make his escape? Poor Odette - he bore her no ill will. She was no more than partly to blame for all this - after all, it was rumoured that it was her own mother who had sold her to a rich Englishman in Nice when she was still little more than a child. Lines from Alfred de Vigny's Journal d'un Poète which he had once read without great interest came back to him now and struck him with their appalling accuracy: When one is besotted with love for a woman, one should wonder: Who are her closest associates? What kind of life has she led? On these questions rests all happiness in life. Swann could not get over the fact that mere statements repeated in the mind, such as 'Come off it!' or 'I could see what she was after', could hurt so much. Even so, he realised that what he saw as mere statements were in fact the different sections of the framework that held together the suffering he had experienced while listening to Odette tell her story, and which enabled it to come back to him in one piece. For there was no doubt about it - it was exactly the same suffering which afflicted him each time. However, although he now knew what she had told him, although as time went on he even forgot and forgave it somewhat, at each new memory of her words, that original suffering turned him back into the person he had been before she spoke, unaware and unsuspecting; his ruthless jealousy put him back into the position of somebody who had not yet been informed so that he could be hit full in the face by Odette's revelation; and months later, by which time it was all a familiar story to him, he could still be stricken by it as though he had just that moment learned of it. He wondered at the terrible recreative power of his memory and knew that he could look forward to no remission of his torture until such time as the reproductiveness of this inner generator weakened with age. But even when a particular statement by Odette seemed to have lost some of its power to wound him, one of the others on which his mind had hitherto focussed less closely would take the place of the first and strike him with all the vicious impact of something he had never heard before. The recollection of the evening when he had dined with the Princesse des Laumes was now a painful thing. But it was only the core of the ache inside him, which spread shapelessly about that particular evening, radiating towards all the other days before and after it. Now it was the whole length of that season when the Verdurins had so often dined out in the Bois that caused him pain, at whichever moment of it he tried to inspect through memory. And the pain was so severe that the impulses of curiosity generated in him by jealousy gradually came to be neutralized by the fear of the new torture he would inflict on himself if he acted on them. He realised that the whole period of Odette's life that had elapsed before she had even met him, that he had never tried to imagine, was nothing like the abstract and empty length of time he had vaguely pictured, but had been composed of actual

years and crammed with concrete events. He dreaded the thought of learning anything about these incidents and crowded hours, in case her amorphous, colourless, bearable past should suddenly take on some tangible revolting shape and petrify him with a glimpse of its diabolical individual features. So he went on making no effort to visualize Odette's past; but now it was from fear of pain instead of from mental laziness. He lived in hope that a day might come when he would at last be able to hear a mention of the island in the Bois de Boulogne or the Princesse des Laumes without feeling the former agony; and he thought better of encouraging Odette to supply him with new statements, the names of places or details of different encounters which, when his suffering had barely abated, might rouse it again in another form.

However, it not infrequently happened that things of which he was (and yearned to remain) in complete ignorance would be unwittingly revealed to him by Odette herself, without any prompting on his part. The fact was that she was unaware of the vast disparity between her real life, with its depravity, and the relatively innocent life which Swann had once believed, and could often still believe, that she led - the morally corrupt, accustomed as they are to the pretence of virtue which they display for the eyes of anyone whom they wish to keep in ignorance of their addiction to vice, have no way of checking how far and how gradually that addiction, constantly growing yet going for ever unnoticed by them, leads them away from the more common conceptions of life. Some of Odette's actions, because they had to cohabit in her memory with others which she kept concealed from Swann, eventually were contaminated by the latter or took on something of their colouring, without her being able to see anything untoward in them or any incongruity between them and the particular inner ambience in which she kept them all; and then, when she retailed one of them to Swann, he would be aghast at the sudden glimpse they gave of the world in which she was at home. On one occasion he was trying to find out from her, without offending her, whether she had ever been recruited by a procuress. In fact, he was convinced she had never done any such thing; the statement in the anonymous letter had suggested it to his mind as a possibility, but only by way of verbal reflex. However, although he had not given this suggestion any credit, it had remained at the back of his mind, and Swann, so as to be rid of the purely physical but bothersome presence of a suspicion, wanted Odette to abolish it for him.

'I should think not!' she exclaimed. Then, with a smirk of self-conceit that she was by now incapable of realising was bound to strike Swann as highly dubious, she added, 'Mind you, some of them won't take no for an answer! There was another one of them here only yesterday. She sat and waited for me for more than two hours! She'd have offered me any price I cared to name. I'm told it was for an Ambassador! He's supposed to have said to her, "If you can't get her for me, I'll kill myself." They told her I

wasn't in, but eventually I had to go out and speak to her myself before she would go away. Oh, I do wish you could have seen how I went for her! My maid could hear me from the next room! She said later I was shrieking at the woman, "Look, haven't I already said I don't want to? That's how it is, I'm afraid, I just don't feel like it! It's a free country, isn't it? I mean, if I was hard up, it might be a different matter . . ." I've given instructions to the porter never to let her into the house again. He's to say I've gone to the country. Oh, darling, I do wish you could have been hidden somewhere! You would have had a good laugh, I can tell you! As you can see, your little Odette has her good points after all, even though there are those among us who don't appreciate her!'

Moreover, whenever she owned up like this to misdemeanours which she assumed he had already discovered, her confessions did more to raise new doubts in Swann's mind than they did to resolve old ones. The trouble was that Odette's admissions of guilt never exactly matched his suspicions. Even after she had omitted from a confession the core of incriminating detail, the circumstantial evidence she supplied would still contain something that Swann had never imagined possible; the unsuspected newness of it all would overwhelm him and he would find he had to vary the parameters of the equation of his jealousy. And once he had heard these confessions, he could never forget them. Like corpses putrefying in a swollen stream, they clogged his mind, snagged here and there among his thoughts, floated on the surface of his consciousness and polluted his spirit.

One day she mentioned that Forcheville had visited her on the day of the Paris-Murcia Luncheon. 'What?' he exclaimed. 'Did you know Forcheville at that time?' Then, so as not to give her the impression that he had been unaware of this, he added, 'Why, yes, of course you did!' But he had already been afflicted by qualms of dread, at the thought that she might have been lunching at the Maison Dorée with Forcheville on the very day when he had received that precious letter from her which he had so religiously preserved. She assured him he was mistaken. 'And yet, you know,' he went on, in the hope of alarming her, 'the Maison Dorée does call to mind something or other that I found out later was untrue.'

'Well, yes,' she replied, assuming from his manner that he already knew, 'the fact that I hadn't been there at all that night when I said I had just left there and you had been looking for me in Prévost's.' In her decisive tone, what he could detect was not so much cynicism as diffidence and apprehension at the prospect of annoying him (which from a sense of her own dignity she was attempting to conceal from him), as well as a desire to show him that she was quite capable of being above-board with him. This admission dealt Swann a blow that was as clean-cut and powerful as a stroke from a headsman's axe, and was just as devoid of cruel intent, since Odette had no conception of the pain she inflicted on Swann. She even burst out laughing at that point, although this may have been mainly motivated by a

desire not to appear guilty and abjectly apologetic: 'Yes, it's true I hadn't been at the Maison Dorée at all! I'd just been round at Forcheville's house. But mind you, I had really been at Prévost's, that was honest-to-goodness. You see, that was where I came across Forcheville and he invited me round to see his pictures, But then someone else turned up to see him. I only told you I'd been at the Maison Dorée so as not to upset you. So as you can see, it was really quite nice of me! Still, I daresay I shouldn't have said so. But at least I'm being quite open about it now. So why would I not be just as open and tell you straight out I did have lunch with him on the day of the Paris-Murcia Luncheon, if there was any truth in the suggestion? In any case, at that time you and I didn't know each other all that well, now, did we, my darling?'

Swann, instantaneously prostrated by this horrific speech, gave her a sickly craven smile. To think that, even during those months which he had always been so reluctant to remember because they had been such a happy time, even during those very early months when she had been in love with him she had been capable of telling him lies! In addition to that moment when she had told him she had just come from the Maison Dorée and they had 'done the cattleyas' for the very first time, how many other shared things must there have been in their lives which would now turn out to be based on falsehoods of which he had no inkling? He remembered how she had once told him: 'All I have to do is tell Mme Verdurin my dress wasn't ready or that my cab didn't come on time. There are ways and means of getting round difficulties, you see.' No doubt there had been many occasions, unsuspected by him at the time, when her murmured excuses to himself, explaining why she was late or why she had had to change the time at which they had arranged to meet, must have concealed something she had done with somebody else, and no doubt that somebody else had also heard her say, 'All I have to do is tell Swann my dress wasn't ready or that my cab didn't come on time. There are ways and means of getting round difficulties, you see.' At that thought, he sensed the possibility of subterranean untruths underlying every single one of his fondest memories — the simplest things ever said to him by Odette, things he had taken as gospel; or the insignificant daily doings she had retailed to him; or the most familiar places, such as the shop of her dress-maker, the Avenue du Bois or the Circus that she enjoyed so much — untruths lying hidden somewhere in the ample margin of time that can be unused and unaccounted for even in the busiest days and which can serve as a cover for certain acts, untruths seeping into his memory, turning all the things he still held dear into objects of loathing (their happiest evenings together, and even the house in the Rue La Pérouse, which from the very beginning Odette must have been in the habit of leaving at times of the day and night very different from the times she mentioned to him), befouling all of life with something of the lurid nightmare he had glimpsed through her story about the Maison Dorée and,

like the unclean creatures in the *Desolation of Nineveh*, undermining and corroding stone by stone the whole foundation of his past life. And now, whenever his memory flinched from the cruel name of the Maison Dorée, it was not to escape the recollection of happiness that he had long since lost, as had been the case only a short time before at Mme de Saint-Euverte's musical evening, but to avoid a reminder of unhappiness that he had only just discovered.

Then, as had happened with the name of the island in the Bois de Boulogne, eventually the mention of the Maison Dorée lost its power to inflict pain on Swann. For what one believes to be one's jealousy or love is not a single, consecutive and indivisible passion. These feelings comprise an infinite succession of short-winded loves and jealousies, each different from all the others, which in their sequential profusion give an impression of continuity, an illusion of unity. The survival of Swann's love and the constancy of his jealousy were products of the death and inconstancy of countless desires and doubts, all of which had focussed on Odette. If he had not seen her for some time, the ones which died would not have been replaced by others; but the continual presence of Odette for ever fertilised new seeds of alternate tenderness and suspicion in Swann's heart.

There were nights when she would abruptly return to her former affectionate ways, with the tart warning that he had better make the best of these occasions while they lasted, since he might not have another chance before very long; and Swann would have to take her straight home to 'do the cattleyas'. Yet this desire she professed for him was so sudden, demanding and inexplicable, and the way she then made love was so extraordinary and abandoned, that her fond voluptuous enjoyment of him struck him as improbable and saddened him as much as any of her lies or spite. On one of those nights, having driven her home as she had commanded, he was lying in her arms, warmed by her kisses and the loving words which belied her customary coldness to him, when he suddenly thought he heard a noise. He got up and searched all parts of the house, but could find nobody. Then when he could not bring himself to get back into bed with her, she flew into a rage, smashed a vase and snapped at him, 'Oh, you are impossible! You're never satisfied!' He never found out whether she had perhaps concealed another man in the house, in the hope of aggravating his jealousy or arousing his lust.

Swann took to visiting brothels, thinking he might learn something about Odette; however, he never dared mention her by name. The madam would tell him, 'Oh, I've got just the girl for you!' And he would sit about for an hour, chatting morosely with some drab who was amazed that that was all he wanted to do with her. One night, he was told by one of these girls, who was very young and very beautiful: 'What I'd really like would be to find a nice boy-friend all my own, you know what I mean? If I 'ad one, 'e could be sure I wouldn't never go with anyone else.'

'Honestly?' asked Swann anxiously. 'Do you really believe it's possible for a woman to be affected by one's love for her and never be unfaithful to one?'

'Possible, ducky? Well, of course! But it all depends on what she's like, doesn't it?'

Swann found himself saying to these prostitutes the type of thing which the Princesse des Laumes would have enjoyed. He said with a smile to the girl who longed for a boy-friend all her own, 'My, you are nice! You've put on blue eyes tonight to match your sash!'

'And you've got blue cuffs on, too!'

'Well, well, this is a nice little conversation we're having, isn't it? And in such a place! I say, am I boring you, my dear? You've probably got some business to be getting on with . . .'

'No, no, I've got plenty of time, love. I mean, if you was boring me, I'd say so, wouldn't I? I like hearing you talk like that.'

'Well, you flatter me, I assure you.' Then, turning to the madam, who had just come in, 'I say, aren't we having a nice little chat?'

'Well, I was just saying to myself, wasn't I? Aren't they being as good as gold in there, I said. People coming here for a chat now, I said. It's like what the Prince told me just the other day, Sir — it's much nicer here than in his wife's salon, he said. I mean, in high society these days, I'm told there's not one of 'em's any better than what she should be. Shouldn't be allowed, if you ask me. Anyway, I'd better make myself scarce, eh? I know when I'm not wanted, eh?' And she left Swann alone with the blue-eyed girl. He soon took his leave, however, as the girl, knowing nothing of Odette, was of no further interest to him.

The painter had been unwell and Dr Cottard prescribed a sea-cruise for him. Several of the 'regulars' said they would join him. The Verdurins, unable to stay at home all by themselves, first hired a yacht, then bought it, which meant that Odette was often away with them on cruises. Each time she went away, whenever she had been gone for a while, Swann could feel he was beginning to lose his need for her; but each time she came back, as though his emotional remoteness from her was proportionate to the measurable distance in miles that separated them, he could not stay away from her. On one occasion when they set off for a cruise that was to last no more than a month, or so they believed, it turned out (either because they made up their minds on the spur of the moment or because M. Verdurin, as a surprise for his wife, had quietly arranged it all in advance and only let the 'regulars' into the secret as they went along) that, after Algiers, they stopped at Tunis, then put in along the coast of Italy, then in Greece, at Constantinople and even ventured as far afield as the Near East. The cruise had by now lasted for the best part of a year and Swann existed in a state of absolute emotional calm which came close to happiness. Although Mme Verdurin had attempted to convince the pianist and Dr Cottard that the former's aunt and the latter's patients could get along perfectly well without them and that in any case it would be unwise to let Mme Cottard go back to Paris, which according to M. Verdurin was in the throes of a revolution, she was obliged to set them free at Constantinople. The painter accompanied them back to Paris. One day, not long after the return of these fourt travellers, Swann jumped aboard a passing horse-tram that was heading for the Luxembourg, where he had to attend to some business, and found himself sitting opposite Mme Cottard. She was doing her round of visits to lady-friends whose 'day' it was, dressed in her best — a hat with an ostrichfeather, a silk dress, her muff — carrying her parasol-cum-umbrella, her little case of visiting cards and wearing her freshly laundered white gloves. If the weather was fine, she would transport these insignia on foot from the house of one hostess to the house of the next, as long as she did not have to go beyond the confines of one district; however, if she did have to sally farther, she would take the horse-tram, changing from one line to another as necessary. For the first few minutes, uncertain whether she ought to mention the Verdurins to Swann, and before the innate good nature of the woman thawed the frosty formality of the lady of genteel pretensions, she trotted out, in her blurred, subdued, leisurely voice which was completely drowned at times by the din of the tram, a predictable medley of opinions culled from the fuller repertoire which she picked up and distributed in the two dozen different drawing-rooms through which she flitted in a day.

'One need hardly ask a man as up-to-the-minute as you are, M. Swann, whether you've been to the Mirliton yet to look at that new painting by Machard that's the talk of the town. Do tell me, what do you think of it? Are you pro or are you con? Machard's new portrait is the sole subject of conversation in every single gathering at the moment, don't you know! You can't be stylish, you can't be up-to-date, you can't have any savoir-vivre these days, if you haven't an opinion to offer on Machard's new portrait!'

Swann mentioned that he had not seen the painting, at which Mme Cottard was afraid she had offended him by making him own up to this sin of omission.

'Well, good for you! At least you admit it openly and you don't consider yourself to be in disgrace just because you haven't seen Machard's portrait. I think that's admirable of you, I really do! Mind you, I have actually set eyes on it and I can tell you that there are two schools of thought on it. There are some who think it's a bit namby-pamby, if you see what I mean, a bit too much sugar-and-spice-and-all-things-nice, you know? But if you ask me, it's just perfect. Now, of course, it's nothing like the blue-and-yellow ladies by your friend and mine, old Biche. But the fact is, between you and me—and you can consider me an old-fashioned fogy if you like, I have to say what I feel on the subject—I just do not see what Biche's things are about. I † Proust says ces trois voyageurs. But if he means the pianist, the Cottards and the painter, it must be four (JG).

mean, I do recognize the positive qualities in his portrait of my husband. It's not nearly as odd as his other ones, I grant you that. But what does he go and stick on his face? A blue moustache! Whereas Machard, now! Do you know, the husband of the lady I'm just on my way to visit at this very moment (that's why I'm fortunate enough to be sharing this tram with you!) has promised her that if he gets elected to the Académie — he's one of Dr Cottard's colleagues — he'll commission Machard to do her portrait! She's thrilled, as you can imagine! Mind you, another of my friends says she really prefers Leloir. Now, I'm only a poor ignorant laywoman and for all I know Leloir may in fact be superior as a craftsman. But if you ask me, the first thing you should expect of a painting of someone, especially if it's going to cost you ten thousand francs, is that it should be a proper likeness. And a likeness that's nice to look at!'

Having exhausted this subject, the inspiration for which had been the height of her ostrich-plume, the monogram on her little case of visiting cards, the tiny laundry-mark inked inside her gloves by the cleaner and her embarrassment at the prospect of having to broach the subject of the Verdurins, Mme Cottard, since the tramcar was still a fair distance away from the corner of the Rue Bonaparte which was where she was to get off, let her heart take over and spoke very differently to Swann.

'Your ears must have been burning, M. Swann, while we were away on our cruise with Mme Verdurin. You were the subject of many a conversation, believe you me!'

This came as a great surprise to Swann, who had assumed that his own name must be unmentionable in the presence of the Verdurins.

'Well, you see, Mme de Crécy was there, which is saying everything. Wherever Odette happens to be, she can't go for very long without talking about you. And what she says is not to your detriment, you can well imagine. What? Don't you believe me?' she asked, catching a gesture of scepticism from Swann. 'Why, she adores you!' (The word, used in the heat of her enthusiasm, hid no ulterior meaning and was meant to convey only the degree of affection shared by good friends.) 'Mark my words, it would be a bad day for anyone who dared suggest to her face that that wasn't true! On a hundred and one different things, for instance if we went to look at a painting, she would say, Now, if only Charles was here, he'd be able to tell us whether it's genuine or not. There's nobody to match Charles for that sort of thing. And she was for ever wondering: What can he be doing at this very moment? I only hope he gets down to some work. It's such a pity that a chap as talented as that should be so lazy. (Oh, what have I said? Do forgive me, M. Swann!) I can see him as clearly as if he was here — he's thinking about us, he's wondering where we are! And there was one thing she said one day that struck me as such a nice thing to say. M. Verdurin was saying: But how on earth can you see what he's up to at this moment, when you're fifteen hundred miles away -from the man? To which Odette replied: To the eye of a friend, everything is possible! Now, I assure you, I'm not just saying this to flatter you or anything, but you do have in Odette de Crécy a real friend, the like of whom one doesn't often come across. And, I might add, if you're unaware of it, then you must be the only one who is! Mme Verdurin was saying to me the day we left the yacht — you know how it is, people feel closer and speak more freely just before saying goodbye — she said, It's not that Odette isn't fond of us. It's just that the things we say don't count for very much compared to the things M. Swann would say. Oh, goodness me! It's my stop! I've been so carried away with talking to you that I've almost missed the Rue Bonaparte! Would you mind awfully, M. Swann, telling me if my feather is standing up straight?'

Then, from her muff, Mme Cottard withdrew a white-gloved hand which, as she proferred it to Swann, diffused a glimpse of high society throughout the tramcar, scented the air with the smell of cleaning-fluid and dropped a transfer-ticket. Swann, standing on that platform, watched her with brimming eyes as she went battling along the Rue Bonaparte, sporting her plume, dangling her muff in front of her, holding up her skirt with one hand while clutching with the other her parasol-cum-umbrella and the little card-case, its monogram turned outwards so as to be noticed; and he felt a surge of tenderness towards her, and towards Mme Verdurin as well, that was almost as strong as his affection for Odette, an affection which, because it was by now compounded with no pain, had all but ceased to be love.

Mme Cottard, in this respect a better therapist than her husband might have been, had grafted onto Swann's morbid feelings for Odette a set of new feelings which were closer to normality, such as gratitude and friendliness, which, in time, would outgrow the old ones, would one day enable his mind to see her as more of an ordinary human person, more like any other woman who was capable of giving him such feelings, and would quicken her definitive transformation into the Odette whom he had on one occasion liked with a homely untroubled affection, the night when she had taken himself and Forcheville home for a glass of orangeade after the party at the painter's and he had glimpsed a possible future of fulfilment and content to be shared with her.

Hitherto, the frequent thought that the day would come when he would fall out of love with Odette had filled him with panic and he had resolved to be ever on the alert, so that as soon as he felt the initial symptoms of a weakening of his love he would be able to cling to it and prevent it from fading. However, now that his love for her had in fact begun to weaken, he noticed a corresponding and simultaneous weakening of his resolve to remain in love with her. For it is impossible to change, that is to become another person, while continuing to respond to the feelings and desires of the person one was before. Occasionally, noticing in the newspaper the name of one of the men who he had once suspected might have been Odette's lovers, he would still feel a twinge of jealousy. But such twinges

were now very faint; and since they proved that he had not yet left behind him for ever a period of his life in which he had suffered so cruelly (but in which he had also experienced such a range of enriched and refined sensuality) and that before he was out of the wood he might still have a surreptitious opportunity or two to appreciate with impunity what charms it had had, they caused him some not unpleasant qualms of agitation, as the irritation of a last mosquito may remind the morose Parisian, reluctantly leaving Venice for France, that the summer in Italy is not yet a thing of the past. More often than not, however, each time he made an effort, if not to remain in that strangely distinctive period of his life which he now felt was almost over, at least to focus on it clearly while there was still time, what he noticed was that this was already impossible. He wished he could survey like a dear landscape about to disappear from his eyes for ever that time of love which he had just left behind. But it is so difficult to have that gift of double vision, to picture a convincing facsimile of any emotion that one is no longer capable of having, that before long a dense darkness would fall in his mind, in which he could distinguish nothing, and he would abandon his attempts to see, take off his glasses and start wiping their lenses. He told himself he would be better for the rest and that he could try again soon; then he settled into a cosy, lazy mental attitude, as uninquisitive and torpid as the sleepy traveller who covers his eyes with his hat so as to doze in his railway carriage, although he can feel it picking up speed and taking him farther and farther away from the place where he has spent so much of his life, the place he once promised himself he would not let disappear for ever from his field of vision without casting at it one last lingering gaze of farewell. In fact, like the same traveller who may not wake up until long after he has crossed the French frontier, the day when Swann happened on the conclusive proof that Forcheville had been Odette's lover, he realised that the discovery caused him no pain and that his love for her was now something remote from him; and he wished he could have been notified of the moment when he had left it behind him for good. And just as once before, on the point of kissing Odette for the first time, he had tried to imprint in memory her face as it had been to his eyes for so long and as it would never be again in retrospect after that kiss, so now he wished that while she still existed, he could have bade farewell, even if only in the mind, to the Odette for whom he had once felt love and jealousy, who had caused him such agonies and whom he now knew he would never set eyes on again.

In this, as it happened, he was mistaken. He did see her again, just the once, some weeks later. It was while he was asleep, in the twilit limbo of a dream. He was out for a walk with Mme Verdurin, Dr Cottard, an unidentified young man wearing a fez, the painter, Odette, Napoleon III and my grandfather. They were by the sea, following a path along sheer cliffs, looking down on the water sometimes from a great height and at other times from only a few feet, which meant that they were for ever going up and

down; some of the party, already going down the other side of one of these rises, were out of sight of the others who were still climbing to the top. The last glimmers of daylight were beginning to fade and it looked as though a sudden impenetrable darkness was about to fall. From time to time a breaker would splash up over the edge of the cliff and Swann could feel the icy spray of it wet his cheek. Odette kept telling him to wipe his face, but he found he could not, which made him feel embarrassment towards her, a feeling that was only strengthened by his being still in his nightshirt. He trusted that under cover of darkness nobody would notice this, but Mme Verdurin suddenly gave him a long stare of astonishment; at which point he realised her face was losing its shape, her nose was growing longer and she had a heavy moustache. He glanced away, towards Odette - her cheeks were sallow, showing their little red spots, and her face looked drawn and lined, but her eyes, gleaming with tenderness for him, seemed ready to fall on him like great tear-drops, and he felt such a surge of love for her that he longed to take her away with him there and then. She turned her wrist to look at her little watch and said, 'I must be off now.' Then she took leave of everybody in turn, but without singling out Swann for any special attention or arranging where she would see him that evening or some other day. Swann, not daring to ask her where and when they might meet, yearned to go off after her; instead, he found himself obliged to turn away from her and smile an answer to a question from Mme Verdurin. His heart was thudding violently, he had nothing but loathing for Odette now and felt capable of gouging out the eyes he had loved so much only a moment before, or stamping on her jaded cheeks. He walked on up the slope with Mme Verdurin, each step taking him farther away from Odette who was going back down the way they had come. One second later she had been gone for hours. The painter pointed out to Swann that Napoleon III had made himself scarce a moment or two after Odette's departure, adding, 'They must have arranged it in advance, if you ask me. They've probably met up again at the foot of the hill. They just didn't want to take their leave at the same time as each other because it would have looked bad. But she's his mistress all right.' The young stranger in the fez burst into tears and Swann did his best to comfort him, wiping his eyes, removing his head-gear so that he should feel more at ease and saying, 'Look here, old chap, what she's doing is really for the best, you know. If I've told her once to do it, I must have told her ten times. So what's the point of being sad about it? He's the very man she needs; her understands her.' Swann's words of wisdom were meant for his own ears: the young man whom he had failed to recognise at first was none other than himself, since in his dream, like certain novelists, he had distributed parts of his own personality to two different characters, the one in the nightshirt who was having the dream, and the one who now stood before him, wearing the fez.

As for Napoleon III, this was the identity Swann had given in his dream

to Forcheville, because of a vague association of ideas, a certain distortion in the Count's usual features and expression and the ceremonial insignia of the Legion of Honour on its ribbon about his neck — despite all of which, there was no doubt Forcheville was the person that the character in the dream stood for and reminded him of. For as he slept, Swann drew wrong deductions from shifting and incomplete mental images; added to which, he enjoyed a brief gift of creative powers that enabled him to reproduce himself, like certain inferior forms of life, by a simple process of division of self. Adapting the warmth he felt in the palm of his own hand, he shaped the contours of an imagined hand which he seemed to be holding; and he took feelings and impressions of which he was not even aware yet and translated them into a plot of events which, through the logic of their own sequence, would introduce into his sleep the character required at any given moment as a recipient of his love or as someone to wake him up. All at once he found himself in total darkness, an alarm-signal was ringing, inhabitants of the place were running past him, escaping from their burning houses. Swann could still hear the slap and splash of the leaping breakers and the same violent agonized thudding from his heart. Then this tattoo inside his body suddenly quickened and he was swept with an inexplicable wave of pain and nausea. A passing peasant, covered in burns, called as he ran, 'Come and ask Charlus where Odette and her boy-friend ended up this evening. He used to go with her and she tells him everything. It was them that started the fires.' It was his manservant, who had just come in to wake him and was saying, 'Good morning, Sir. It's eight o'clock and your hairdresser has just called. I've told him to call again in an hour's time.'

These words, coming down to Swann through the waves of sleep in which he lay, had only managed to reach his consciousness after being deflected, in the same way as a ray of light is diffused by water into the shape of the sun; similarly, the ringing of the doorbell a minute or two before had resounded through these depths like a fire-alarm, inspiring Swann's adventure among the blazing houses. The scenery of the dream crumbled to pieces; he opened his eyes and heard one last splash of waves from the receding sea. When he touched his cheek, it was quite dry. And yet he could clearly remember the cold wet feeling of the water on his face and the salty tang. He got out of bed and set about dressing.

He had made the early appointment with his barber because, as he had written the previous day to my grandfather, he intended going down to Combray that afternoon. Having heard that young Mme de Cambremer — Mlle Legrandin-that-was — would be down there for a few days, and linking in memory the attractions of her youthful face with the beauty of a country landscape which he had not visited for so long, he found such a compelling charm in the prospect of being able to enjoy both of them at once that he had decided it was high time he spent a few days away from Paris himself. Since the random factors which determine one's contacts with a

certain person may overlap, but not necessarily coincide with, the period when one may fall in love with that person, beginning to operate before that time and continuing after it has elapsed, the very first appearances made in one's life by somebody who is fated to be one's lover come in retrospect to have the appearance of omens and portents. This was how Swann had often thought back to the picture of Odette as she was on the first night he had met her at the theatre, when it had not occurred to him that he might ever set eyes on her again. It was exactly in this way that he now found himself remembering the musical evening at Mme de Saint-Euverte's house when he had introduced General de Froberville to Mme de Cambremer. The web of life is strung with so many strands of interest that not infrequently one and the same circumstance may spin the first filament of a new and as yet unrealised happiness alongside the reinforcing thread of a present sorrow. What Swann had experienced at Mme de Saint-Euverte's could presumably have taken place elsewhere. And of course, if he had happened to go somewhere else on that particular evening, a wholly different set of joys and sorrows might well have come his way, which would also no doubt, in time, have come to seem inevitable. However, what did now seem to have been inevitable to Swann was what had really taken place at Mme de Saint-Euverte's soirée; in fact, he was even tempted to believe there was an element of providence in his decision to go there on that particular evening, for his mind, which was given to admiring the wealth of possibility latent in life and reluctant to entertain difficulties for any length of time (such as the problem of wondering which of that evening's possible outcomes might really have been for the best) saw in the pains of that occasion and in the pleasures which unbeknown to him had been already germinating in it — pains and pleasures that he could not make the irksome effort of weighing against each other — some sort of essential and ordained connection.

Then an hour later, while giving the barber instructions on how to set his quiff so that it would not lose its shape during the train journey, the dream came back to his mind and he remembered things about Odette that it had shown him in close-up — her sallow complexion, the thinness of her cheeks, her drawn features and the worn-out expression round the eyes — all the things about her which, throughout the distinct and consecutive phases of affection for her that had transmuted his abiding love into one long uniform period of mis-remembering the original effect she had made on him, he had stopped noticing ever since the earliest days of their acquaintance, those days that his memory must have revisited while he slept and from which it had brought back the exact imprint of that first effect. At which, the intermittent boorish streak in Swann, which would reassert itself whenever he had recovered from a period of unhappiness and his moral standards took a corresponding turn for the worse, showed itself in his inward exclamation: 'To think I've thrown away some of my best years, I've longed for death, I've had the great love of my life - all for a woman I didn't really like! A woman who wasn't even my type!'

Place-Names: The Name



URING THOSE sleepless nights, of all the other bedrooms which I tried to remember, none was more different from the bedrooms in the Combray house, rich with a fine-grained, palpable, almost edible atmosphere, steeped in piety, than the room in the Grand Hotel at Balbec Sands, the four walls of which, gleaming with enamel paint, contained, like the smooth shining sides of a swimming-bath that tint the water blue, a pure, azure sea-air, smacking of salt. The Bavarian decorator who had been responsible for the furnishing and fitting out of the hotel had used a range of designs in the various rooms, and the one that happened to be mine had three of its walls covered in low-set book-cases with glass doors; these panes of glass, from their different positions about the room, created an effect that the designer had never intended, by reflecting this or that detail of the changing picture of the sea outside, surrounding one with a frieze of bright seascapes, interspaced here and there with blank sections of mahogany. The result was that my whole bedroom looked like one of those model rooms included as set-pieces in ideal-homes-for-modern-living exhibitions and the like, which are hung with works of art designed to gladden the eye of whoever is destined to sleep there and representing subjects in keeping with the setting in which it is intended the room should be eventually located.

Nor was there anything more different from this real Balbec than the one I had so often imagined on stormy days in Paris when the wind-gusts were so violent that Françoise, chaperoning me to the Champs-Elysées, would warn me not to walk too close to the houses for fear of being struck by flying tiles and would then mournfully rehearse the shipwrecks and other natural catastrophes reported in the newspapers. As for me, I could have wished for nothing better than to witness a storm at sea, its attraction being not so much that it would be a stirring spectacle as that it would be a momentary revelation of the real workings of Nature. Or rather, the only spectacles that I found at all stirring at that time were those which I knew had not been

artificially concocted for my entertainment, but were necessary and unalterable — the spectacle of beauty, that is, in a natural landscape or in great works of art. My whole insatiable curiosity about life was directed solely at finding out about things which I believed were more real than I was myself, things whose value for me lay in that they gave a glimpse if not of how some great genius had thought, then of the power or grace to be found in Nature when it is left to its own devices and is not tampered with by men. Just as it would be no consolation for the death of one's mother to be left with nothing but the disembodied reproduction of her loved voice on a gramophone record, so any mechanically contrived imitation of a storm would have left me as indifferent as the luminous fountains in the Exhibition Hall. And as a further guarantee of the storm's authenticity, I needed the shore on which it beat to be the original unspoiled shoreline, and not some esplanade recently laid down by a town-council. In fact, Nature, in all the emotional responses it evoked from me, struck me as the diametrical opposite of any mechanical creations of men — the less evidence it gave of their interference, the more scope it gave to my private ecstasies. An instance of this was Balbec, the name of which, mentioned by Legrandin, had come to mean for me a beach situated somewhere along 'that dire perilous coastline which has claimed so many brave lives through shipwreck and which for six months of the year is shrouded in fog and veiled by the spindrift from the ocean breakers.' Legrandin had also said, 'On that spot, what you can still feel under your feet, much more strongly than at Finistère itself, and even if holiday hotels are beginning to sprout out of that ancient unalterable skeleton of the earth, what you are feeling is the real land's end, the most ultimate inch of France, of Europe, of the whole Earth as it was to the Ancients! It is the last encampment of fishermen, those men who have gone down to the sea in ships ever since the dawn of time, set there on the very brink of the everlasting realm of darkness and the misty watery wastes.'

In Combray one day I had mentioned Balbec Sands to M. Swann, in the hope of learning from him whether it was the best spot from which to witness the most violent storms. The name Balbec he had greeted with these words: 'Balbec? Well, of course. I'm very familiar with Balbec! The church of Balbec dates from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, despite which half of it is still Romanesque. I'd say it's probably one of the most interesting specimens of Norman Gothic. And it's such an oddity, you know. Makes you think of Persian workmanship almost.' At which, that unknown place (which hitherto had seemed to belong utterly to the immemorial world of Nature, to have remained all of a piece with the most primordial geological phenomena and as far removed from human history as the vast rolling ocean, the Great Bear or those same uncouth timeless fishermen of Legrandin for whom the Middle Ages had been as non-existent as for the whales they hunted) underwent a charming transformation in my mind, by abruptly taking their proper place in the sequence of the centuries and

passing through the Romanesque period; and it was a joy to realise that the punctual little leaves of the Gothic trefoil had also patterned that land of wild rocks, like the scatter of frail but hardy plants which brave the snowfields each Arctic springtime. It seemed to me, too, that if the Gothic style had given to the place and its people a previously lacking definition, they in their turn gave some clearer definition to it. Striving to imagine how these fishermen must have lived, I glimpsed their forlorn and unsuspected mediaeval attempts at rudimentary social organization, clinging together on their tiny precarious crag, somewhere along the coast of Hell, beneath the towering cliffs of Death; and the Gothic style seemed to come more alive to me, now that it was isolated from the towns and cities where I had always pictured it, enabling me to see how, in one particular instance, on remote and inhospitable rocks, it had germinated and flowered into a slender spire. I was taken to look at reproductions of the most famous statues in the Balbec church — the shaggy, snub-nosed apostles, the Virgin from the porch and at the thought that it was within my power to see the originals stand out in their three dimensions against a background of salty everlasting mist, the rhythm of my breathing missed a beat. And after that, on sweet stormy evenings in the month of February, the winds that shook my bedroom chimney also shook my heart with the prospect of going to Balbec, combining my yearning to look at Gothic architecture with my yearning to see a great storm at sea.

I longed to set off the very next day, to catch the one twenty-two, that genial, gracious train on whose departure-time, displayed on the railwaycompanies' notices and posters advertising round-trips, I could never set eyes without suffering palpitations - twenty-two minutes past one! That departure-time seemed to cut a delectable notch in a special part of the afternoon, a mysterious mark beyond which all the time it diverted would continue to lead me towards the same evening and tomorrow-morning, an evening and a tomorrow-morning, however, which I would not experience in Paris, but in one of the towns visited by this train and where I might choose to get off - it was to pass through Bayeux, Coutances, Vitré, Questambert, Pontorson, Balbec, Lannion, Lamballe, Benodet, Pont-Aven and Quimperlé, bearing this magnificent cargo of place-names, which it offered to me and from which I would have been incapable of selecting any particular one, given my inability to deny myself any of the others. Or, even without waiting for that train, if I dressed quickly and set off this very night (assuming that my parents permitted it), I could reach Balbec when a livid dawn was breaking over the raging seas and take shelter from the drifting spray in the church of Persian design.

Then, as Easter drew near and my mother and father promised me that for a change I could spend the holidays in the north of Italy, all at once the tumultuous dreams of storms which had been filling my head with the desire to see the great breakers come rolling in from all directions and crash

down from their immense heights onto a wild and lonely shore, where churches as steep and rugged as a cliff-face harboured shrieking sea-birds among their spires, all at once these dreams were cancelled, deprived of all charm and excluded from my mind by a quite different fantasy with which they were incompatible and whose full development they could only have impaired — it was an imagined glimpse of the most glorious springtime, not the Combray type of springtime which could still prick the skin with all the needle-points of a late frost, but the springtime which had already strewn the fields of Fiesole with lilies and anemones and dazzled Florence with Fra Angelico's blazing golden backgrounds. From then on, nothing struck me as having any value, except sunlight, colour and perfumes; for the replacement of one dream-world by the next had brought with it a change of front in my desire, as well as a complete change of key in my sensitivity, as abrupt as any to be heard in music. Soon it turned out that this same modulation from one image to the other could be effected by something as slight as a minor change in the weather, and did not need the stimulus of the return of a particular time of year. For one can often find a day from one season that has strayed into another, that gives one its brief unseasonal experiences, brings to mind its proper time of year, makes one yearn for all the pleasures that belong to it and disrupts the train of one's imaginings, by detaching this single page from a different chapter and inserting it out of place in one's garbled calendar of happiness. And before long, through a process similar to that by which science takes a natural phenomenon, until then of scant and only accidental benefit to human well-being or health, and, by making it possible to produce this benefit at will, gives us the power to enjoy it free of the control and the consent of chance, the re-creation of these competing Atlantic and Italianate fancies eventually came to be independent of mere changes of season or weather. To reproduce one or the other in my mind, all I had to do was speak the names — Balbec, Venice or Florence — inside which were crammed my cumulative desires to go and see those very places. Even in spring, if I came across the name Balbec in a book, it was enough to rouse my longing for storms at sea and the Norman Gothic; and on wild stormy days, the names Florence or Venice made me dream of sunshine, lilies, the Palace of the Doges and Santa Maria del Fiore.

However, although these names absorbed for ever the picture I had of the various places, they only managed this by a process of transformation of the picture and by making the reproduction of it in my mind subject to their own laws. The result of this was that they idealized and beautified my conception of these places, giving them not the remotest resemblance to anything like a real Norman town or Tuscan city; and that, by increasing the wishful delights of the imagination, they compounded the disappointments in store for me as a future traveller. The names magnified my image of the places, by making them more specific and hence seemingly more real. At that age I did not conceive of cities, landscapes or famous buildings as more

or less pleasing pictures, cut-out shapes made from different parts of the same material, but as unknown quantities, each of them different in essence from all of the others, for which something in me hungered and in which, if it only could, it would be bound to find sustenance. So that, once these places and things had been identified by names, names which belonged to them and to nothing else, names like the names people have, they took on a special individuality. Words give us bright and handy little simplifications of things, like the pictures stuck on classroom walls to show children examples of what is meant by 'a workbench' or 'a bird' or 'an ant-hill', and these things are conceived of as being identical to all others in the same category. Whereas, the image conveyed by the name of a person, or the name of a town (which, because of its name, gives one the feeling that it is as individual and unique as a person) is a confused and complex one; it is also a self-coloured image that takes its single tint from the brilliance or dullness in the spoken sound of the name, like those completely red or completely blue posters on which, either because of the limitations inherent in the printing process or because of a whim of the artist, not only the sky and the sea are red or blue, but also the boats, the church and the passers-by. Ever since I had read Stendhal's Chartreuse de Parme, one of the places I most longed to visit was, of course, Parma, which seemed to me to have a smooth, suave, mauve, compact name; and if the possibility of visiting a particular house in Parma was ever broached, the great pleasure it gave me came from the thought of living in a house that was smooth, suave, mauve and compact, the like of which has never been known to exist in any real town in Italy, for the simple reason that it was my imagination creating the house partly out of the bulky sounds of Parma, a closed airless name, and partly out of all the violet-tinted Stendhalian suavity with which I had permeated the name. As for Florence, whenever it came to my mind it was as a city full of some miraculous fragrance and reminiscent of the petals of a flower, because it is known as the City of Lilies and its cathedral as Saint-Mary-of-the-Flower. And 'Balbec' was one of those names in which one can still see, as though depicted on the sort of old-fashioned Norman earthenware pot that retains the colour of the clay from which it was shaped, an illustration of some time-honoured but abandoned custom, a feudal right, a particular locality shown as it had once been or some long out-of-date habit of pronunciation which had modelled its two bizarre syllables and which I was convinced I would hear in the speech of the inn-keeper who would bring me my first cup of coffee then take me to look at the tumultuous seas breaking by the church, and whom I pictured as solemn, mediaeval and cantankerous, a character right out of a thirteenth-century folk-tale.

If there should be an improvement in my health and my parents allowed me, if not to stay in Balbec for some length of time, at least to make initial acquaintance with the architecture and landscapes of Normandy or Brittany by actually catching that one twenty-two which I had so often boarded in

imagination, I would have preferred to get off the train in the most beautiful towns along the line. But however much I compared and contrasted them, I found that, as though I was trying to decide between individual creatures who could not be interchanged, it was impossible to choose, say, Bayeux, which was so lofty, draped in its noble reddish lace, and with its peak glowing in the old-gold light from its second syllable, rather than vitreous Vitré, whose acute accent made black lattice-work framing diamond-shaped panes of glass; or meek and mild Lamballe, all in shades of white, from the off-white of eggshells to a pearly grey; or Coutances, that Norman cathedral crowned by its final, rich, yellow nasal vowel as by a tower of butter; or Lannion, its drowsy village silence disturbed by the rumble of La Fontaine's stage-coach and the chivvying of the fly; or Questambert and Pontorson, silly, simple souls, all white feathers and yellow bills scattered along the road through these poetical riverside places; or Benodet, a name that had almost slipped its moorings and that the stream seemed to be trying to sweep away among its water-weeds; or Pont-Aven, like a pink and white flutter of airy winged Breton bonnets making their shimmering reflections in greenish canal-water; or Quimperlé, more firmly moored, ever since the Middle Ages, between twin murmuring streams that purl and ripple, beading the air with a quiet mist of pearl-grey light, like the dim diminished glow made through the cobwebs on a stained-glass window by the tarnished silver of dulled sunbeams.

There was another reason why these images were misleading — they were of necessity greatly simplified. No doubt place-names had become a repository for everything that my imagination was seeking in life and that, living through the senses and in the present tense, I could only experience in an incomplete and unfulfilling way; no doubt, too, because I had filled them with dreams, the names acted on my desires like a magnet. But names are not all that capacious and I could only manage to fit one or two of the 'chief attractions' of any one town inside its name; they stood there cheek by jowl, unseparated by any intermediate elements. Thus, inside the name Balbec, as though set into the magnifying-glass bubble on one of those souvenir fountain-pens one buys at seaside resorts, I could see a church of Persian architecture surrounded by heavy seas. And this very simplification of the images may well have been one of the sources of their potent influence on me. The year when my father decided that we could go to Florence and Venice for our Easter holiday, finding that there was not enough room to fit into the name Florence the elements that cities usually comprise, I was obliged to create a supernatural city out of what I believed to be the quintessence of Giotto's genius crossed with the fragrances of certain spring flowers. Because no name can be made to contain much more time than space, the name of Florence (like certain paintings by Giotto himself which depict two different moments in the life of the same character, one when he is lying in bed and the other when he is making ready to mount his horse)

was divided into no more than two panels. In one of these, standing beneath an architectural canopy, I was gazing at a fresco which was partly covered by a gradually encroaching curtain of oblique powdery morning sunlight; and in the other (for since I did not conceive of place-names as inaccessible ideals, but rather as containing an ambience of reality in which I would one day be immersed, the intact and as yet unexperienced purity of the mode of existence which I saw in them gave to the most material of pleasures and the tritest of scenes the charm these things have in the works of the Primitives), impatient for the fruit and bottle of Chianti awaiting me at lunchtime, I was striding swiftly across the Ponte Vecchio through a profusion of jonquils, daffodils and anemones. That, despite the fact that I was still in Paris, was what I had before my eyes, and not my actual surroundings. But then, even from the point of view of the most elementary realism, the places we yearn for occupy much more space in our real lives at any given moment than the place where we happen to be. If I had paid closer attention to what was in my own mind when I spoke the words, 'Going to Florence, to Parma, to Pisa, to Venice', I would presumably have noticed that what I had in my mind's eye bore not the remotest resemblance to a city, but was as unlike anything I had ever experienced, and as delightful, as the miraculous revelation that would be brought by the magic of a spring morning to a race of men whose lives had never consisted of anything but dank late afternoons in winter. These unreal, unmoving, unchanging images filled my mind by day and by night and marked off that whole distinct period of my life from those which had preceded it (and which might have seemed identical to it in the eyes of a witness who could only see things from the outside, that is to say, who could see nothing) much as, in an opera, a distinct melodic phrase introduces a new phase of the action which would be unapparent to anyone who was just reading the libretto and would be a total mystery to anyone merely standing about outside the theatre, filling in time. And, of course, even if one limits one's consideration to these purely quantitative terms, the very days that make up our lives are not of equal length. People of rather nervous disposition, such as myself, can rely like motor-cars on a set of gears to get them through different days. There are some days which are hilly and strewn with obstacles, and one spends an inordinate amount of time in reaching the end of them; and there are others that flash by, full of inclines that one can cruise down, singing for all one is worth. For a month, while obsessed by these images of Florence, Venice and Pisa, as by a tune that one cannot hear too often, and while my desire to go to see them had in it an element as profoundly individual as though they were a person I was in love with, I implicitly, constantly believed that these images corresponded to some reality outside myself; and I looked forward to them with a degree of trusting exaltation that could only have been equalled by an early Christian about to enter Paradise. So, untroubled as I was by the contradiction between my desire to see and feel, to experience through my bodily senses

something which was the product, not of them, but of my own untrammelled propensity to daydream — and something which, because it was so different from what my senses knew, tempted them all the more - whenever anything happened to remind me of the reality of these images, my desire for these places would reach fever pitch, because it always felt as though I had just been given a promise that my desire would one day be fulfilled. And although my intellectual excitement was caused by an aspiration towards artistic pleasures, it was maintained by tourist guide-books, rather than by works on aesthetics, and by railway timetables more than by the guidebooks. My excitement would arise from the thought that the way to reach the Florence which I could distinguish in my imagination, so near yet so far away, and which could not be reached by any inner journey, was to make a detour, take the indirect approach known as 'surface travel'. I had, of course, a feeling of happiness whenever I reminded myself, giving special value to what I would be able to see, that Venice meant 'Giorgione's school, Titian's home, the most comprehensive museum of mediaeval domestic architecture'. † But it was nothing to the happiness I felt when, having left our Paris house on an errand and stepping along briskly because of the weather which after a few days of premature springtime had reverted to the semi-winter that usually awaited us in Combray during Holy Week, I set eyes on the horse-chestnuts along the boulevards (standing there, steeped in air as icy and wet as water, yet prompt as punctual guests who arrive properly turned out and undiscouraged by inclemency, and already beginning to crimp and mould out of their stark petrified bulk the invincible greenery whose gradual growth was hindered but not halted by the abortive vigour of the cold) and thought that by now the Ponte Vecchio was bound to be knee-deep in hyacinths and anemones and that the spring sunlight would be tinting the water of the Grand Canal with such deep blues and magnificent emeralds that, as it lapped about the base of Titian's canvasses, its gorgeous colours must vie with theirs. I could not contain my joy when my father, despite a glance at the barometer and a complaint at the cold, began to look up which trains would be most suitable, and I realised that by merely walking into the sooty laboratory one day after lunch and stepping up into one of its magic chambers, which would work its alchemy on everything about me, I could wake up the following morning in the city overlaid with gold and marble, 'bossed with jasper, paved with emerald'. This proved to me that Venice and the City of Lilies were not mere figments flickering on the screen of one's imagination, but did exist at a definite distance from Paris which one would have to cover if one wished to see them, at one particular spot on the face of the globe and nowhere else — in fact, it proved they were quite real places. Having thus conjured them out of

abstract Space, my father proceeded to make them more real for me when, with the words, 'Well, it looks as though you could stay in Venice from the 20th until the 29th of April and then time your arrival in Florence for Easter morning,' he conjured them also out of the time-zone of the imagination (that dimension in which we may undertake not just a single journey at any one moment, but other different journeys simultaneously, none of which need cause us much excitement as they are nothing more than possibilities - the Time that, after having been spent in a first place, can be reconstituted and spent again in a second place) allotting to them, by his words, some of those actual days of one's real life that are the guarantee of the genuineness of the things for which they are used, as such unreplaceable days are consumed by the use to which they are put, never come back and cannot be enjoyed in one place after being enjoyed in another. I calculated that those days would take place during the week beginning with the Monday when the white waistcoat on which I had spilt ink would come back from the cleaners, and that it was towards their inclusion in that particular week that the two Queen Cities whose domes and steeples, through the most thrilling emotional geometry, I would soon be able to plot among the curves and planes of my own life, were now moving, as they began to emerge from the abstraction of virtual time, in which they had not yet begun to exist. However, at this stage, I was still only approaching the ultimate degree of my felicity, which I was not to reach until I heard my father say (only then giving me the sudden revelation that next week, just before Easter, along Venice's splashing thoroughfares, where the ripples glowed ruddy with the reflections from Giorgione's frescoes, there would be none of those men whom I persisted in imagining, despite all dissuasion, as 'majestic, terrible as the sea, the low bronzed gleaming of sea-rusted armour shooting angrily under their blood-red mantle-folds', but that instead I myself could be the single tiny personage in a bowler-hat, posed by the photographer in front of Saint Mark's porticoes in an enlargement of the cathedral which I had been lent), 'It must be pretty cold still on the Grand Canal, if you ask me. You had better pack your winter overcoat and your warm jacket, just in case.' At these words I was suffused with something akin to ecstasy and what I had hitherto believed impossible began to happen: I felt myself actually pass through that 'deep inlet between two rocks of coral in the Indian Sea'; with a supreme gymnastic effort, well beyond my strength, I divested myself of the air that surrounded me in my bedroom, as though it was a pointless carapace, and substituted for it an equal amount of Venetian atmosphere, in the form of that inexpressible sea-air, as bracing and special as the air one breathes in dreams, which my imagination had put into the name Venice; I felt a miracle of disembodiment happening to me, a feeling which was instantly accompanied by the vague nausea that comes with the beginnings of a severe sore throat, and I was there and then confined to bed with such a high and persistent fever that the doctor not only ruled out the present

[†] Here, and at three other places in this paragraph, Proust quotes, not from 'tourist guide-books', but from Ruskin's Modern Painters and The Stones of Venice. It seems appropriate to use where possible Ruskin's words (JG).

possibility of a journey to Florence and Venice but added that, even once I was completely cured, I could not be allowed to entertain the prospect of travelling anywhere for at least another year and that I must be protected from all sources of over-excitement.

Sad to say, he also strictly forbade me to be taken to the theatre to see and hear La Berma. I had been hoping that this sublime performer, whom Bergotte himself called a genius, might have opened my mind to something comparable in significance and beauty to Florence and Venice and Balbec, and might thus have offered me some consolation for having been unable to go to those places. But instead of that, I was to be sent once a day to the Champs-Elysées in the care of somebody who would make sure I did not tire myself out, namely Françoise, who had joined my parents' service after the death of my Aunt Léonie. The thought of going to the Champs-Elysées was unbearable to me. If only it had been described by Bergotte in one of his books, then no doubt I would have yearned to see it, as I yearned for anything of which a facsimile had first been put into my imagination. For it was imagination that breathed warmth and life into such things, investing them with personality and making me long to experience them in reality. But there was nothing about those public gardens that bore the slightest relation to my dreams.

One day, in the hope of allaying the boredom I felt at our usual spot beside the merry-go-round, Françoise had taken me on an expedition, sallying across the frontier guarded at regular intervals by the little bastions of the barley-sugar sellers and into those neighbouring but foreign parts full of unknown faces, where the goat-cart plied. She had then gone back to get some of her things which she had left on her chair by a clump of laurels. As I waited for her, standing about on the great shorn expanse of sparse, parched, sun-yellowed lawn, at the far end of which a statue rises out of an artificial pond, I suddenly heard the clipped tones of a girl who was putting on her coat, fastening away her racket and calling to another girl with gingerish hair who was still playing shuttlecock over by the ornamental pond, 'Cheerio, Gilberte! I'm off home now. But don't forget we're coming to your house after dinner tonight!' This name, Gilberte, passed close to me, its suggestiveness about the private life of the girl who bore it magnified by the fact that it was not being used merely to name her in her absence but actually being addressed to her; that is, as it passed me, it was in action, so to speak, and its potency was made even more dynamic by the descending curve of its trajectory and the proximity of its target; I sensed that it transported inside it all the familiarity with the girl it named, all the mental impressions of her, enjoyed not by me but by the friend who was calling to her, everything which, as she spoke the name, she could visualize about her or at least had stored away in her memory, the facts of their daily relationship, the visits they paid to each other's houses and that entire unimaginable tract of experience which was the more painfully inaccessible

to me because it was so homely and commonplace to the cheerful girl who had tossed it into the air in an exclamation, letting it touch me as it flew by, but without my being able to penetrate it; it had already perfumed the day with the sweet essences drawn by the accuracy of its touch from certain unseen parts of Mlle Swann's fragrant life, such as that coming evening at her house, after dinner; in the air, like a heavenly visitation among those children and their nannies, it trailed a faint nimbus of precious colour, reminiscent of the clouds above Poussin's beautiful gardens that reflect in minute detail, like a cloud in an opera full of chariots and horses, an incident from the life of the gods; and on top of that mangy lawn, at the spot where it was not only a stretch of withered grass but also a moment from the afternoon of the fair-headed shuttlecock player (who went on hitting her shuttle up in the air and catching it until she was called by a governess with a blue feather on her hat) it laid down a patch of miraculously, richly glowing heliotrope, as intangible as a rainbow and superimposed like a carpet, on which, tirelessly, nostalgically and sacrilegiously, I walked up and down, reluctant to tear myself away, until Françoise shouted at me, 'Oy! Get that coat on you, boy, and let's make tracks,' and for the first time in my life I realised irritably that she was given to vulgar turns of speech and, alas, that she wore no blue-feathered hat.

Would she ever come back to the Champs-Elysées? I wondered. The following day she was not there; but I did see her over the next few days. I spent my entire time hovering about the place where she played with her girl-friends, until one day when, there being not enough of them to make a complete team for prisoner's base, she sent someone to ask me whether I would join in and make up their numbers. After that, I played with her whenever she came to the Champs-Elysées. Not that she turned up every day; there were times when she was prevented from coming by her lessons, by her catechism class or a tea-party, by some part of that life she led, independent and isolated from my own, which on only two occasions, condensed into the name Gilberte, I had felt pass so agonizingly close to me, once in the steep little lane at Combray and for the second time on the grass at the Champs-Elysées. She would announce in advance that we would not be seeing her on those days - if her absence was caused by school-work, she would say, 'Oh, it's not fair! I can't come tomorrow. You'll all be having fun without me,' with a doleful manner that consoled me somewhat; but if, unknown to me, she had been invited to a girl-friend's party, she would reply when I asked her whether she would be coming to play the next day, 'Huh! Not likely! Oh, I do hope Mama will let me go to my friend's party!' At least on days like that I knew I was not to see her. But there were other days when without warning her mother would whisk her away on a shopping expedition and the following day she would say, 'Oh, yes, I went out with Mama,' as though it was only natural and not the direst calamity that could befall somebody. Added to which, there were days when bad weather discouraged her governess, who had no liking for getting wet, from taking her to the Champs-Elysées.

So if the sky looked doubtful, from the morning hours I would subject it to an anxious intermittent scrutiny that took account of any and every omen. If I noticed the lady in the house opposite standing by her window and putting on her hat, I would say to myself, 'That lady's getting ready to go out. Therefore, it's weather that people can go out in. In that case, what's to prevent Gilberte from doing what that lady's doing?' Then it might become overcast, at which my mother would say that if the sun would only come out, the weather might brighten up, but that it was most likely going to rain, and if it did rain what would be the point of going to the Champs-Elysées? By lunch-time, my worried gaze would be focussed steadfastly on those uncertain clouds. The sky would be uniformly dull and the balcony outside my window, grey. Then, although the eye could not detect on the sullen stone the slightest brightening of the shade, I sensed on the surface of it something like an effort towards a slight brightening of the shade, the hint of a hesitant vibration from a sunbeam about to give light. A moment later, the balcony had paled to the cool calm reflectiveness of a pool, showing the countless lacy shadows of its wrought-iron balustrade. They were blown away by a gust of wind and the grey stone lay bare and dull again; but then, as tame as town sparrows, they came back. Once again, imperceptibly, the stone began to pale; and then, in a swift continuous crescendo of the sort which rounds off certain overtures, taking a single note and swelling it suddenly into an overwhelming fortissimo, it began to glow before my eyes with the stable undiluted gold of fine weather, against which the black shadow-patterns of the iron lacework stood out like some bizarre and intricate vegetation, seeming to show (in their scrupulous attentiveness to rendering the minutest details) that they were the product of a conscientious and demanding artistic sensibility and suggesting such sharp relief and velvety density in the relaxed and reassuring arrangement of their dark masses that the broad leafy shapes on the surface of that pool of sunlight seemed to bask in the knowledge that they were pledges of tranquillity and contentment.

This instantly maturing creeper, this short-lived rambler, the dullest and most nondescript, many would believe, of all the flora that can climb a wall or decorate a windowframe, has become for me the dearest of all possible plants ever since it first appeared on our balcony like the shadow cast by Gilberte herself, who might even now be at the Champs-Elysées and who would say as soon as I arrived, 'Let's have a game of prisoner's base right away. You're in my team.' Fragile as it was, erased by the merest breeze, it was independent of the season but dependent on the hour, a promise of the immediate happiness that a day can bring or take away and hence of that paradigm of immediate happiness, the happiness of love; lying on the stone, softer and warmer to the touch even than moss, and so hardy a perennial that

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it needs only a glimmer of sunlight, even in the heart of winter, to start budding and put out its leaves of joy.

Even at the time of year when all other foliage has disappeared and the smart green leather on the trunks of ancient trees is hidden by snow, once the snow had stopped falling, and even though the day was still too cloudy for me to be able to hope that Gilberte would be allowed out, without warning, prompting my mother to exclaim, 'I say! Look, the sun's just come out! Perhaps you'll get to the Champs-Elysées after all,' the sunlight would print on the sheet of snow covering the balcony its tracery threaded with gold, patterned with patches of black. On such days at the Champs-Elysées, either we would find nobody was there or else there would be a solitary girl, already preparing to go home, who insisted that Gilberte would not be coming. The chairs which were usually occupied by a grand shivering assemblage of governesses now stood deserted. The only soul in sight would be a lady of indeterminate age, sitting by the lawn, who turned up in all weathers; she was invariably dressed up in the same dark magnificent costume and, if I had been allowed, I would gladly have sacrificed whatever great advantages life might have in store for me to the right to be introduced to her. For every day Gilberte went over to greet her and she would ask after Gilberte's 'darling mother'; and to me it seemed that if only I could have been on speaking terms with this personage Gilberte would have looked on me in a very different light, as somebody who was a friend of friends of the family. While her grand-children strayed away to play somewhere else, she would sit there and read the Journal des Débats (which she always referred to as 'my dear old Débats'); and when she mentioned the police-constable on the corner or the woman who hired out the chairs, she would say, like a dowager who has kept the common touch, 'My old pal the constable', or 'The chair-lady and I are the best of friends.'

On one of these days, when Françoise was feeling the cold too much to sit still, we walked down to the Pont de la Concorde to look at the Seine, which was frozen solid; all the passers-by, even children, were thronging intrepidly about it, as though it was an enormous whale, stranded and defenceless and about to be carved up. On our way back up to the Champs-Elysées, I dawdled forlornly between the motionless merry-go-round and the white expanse of lawn enmeshed in its black network of paths which had been cleared of snow and surmounted by the statue holding in its hand a jet of ice, which seemed to have been added to it by way of explanation of the gesture it was making. Even the old lady had folded away her newspaper and was asking a passing nurse-maid what time it was, thanking her with, 'That's so awfully kind of you!' Then she asked the man clearing the paths if he would go and tell her grand-children she was cold and it was time to go home, adding, 'That would be awfully nice of you! Oh, I don't know how to thank you, I'm sure!' Then all at once, before my very eyes, the afternoon was cleft in two - like a miraculous omen, between the Punch-and-Judy

stall and the circus-tent, against the now beautiful horizon and the clearing promise of the sky, I had just caught a glimpse of Mademoiselle's blue feather! The next moment, Gilberte herself was dashing towards me, her face glowing under a square fur toque, thrilled by the cold, her eleventhhour arrival and her desire to get on with the game. Over the last few yards that separated us she came sliding towards me on the icy surface, her arms wide apart (either to help keep her balance, or because she thought it would look more graceful, or in imitation of the style of skaters), smiling and looking as though she was about to clasp me to her. 'Bravo! Bravo!' applauded the old lady, appointing herself spokeswoman for the whole silent Champs-Elysées and moving a vote of thanks to Gilberte for not letting the inclement day discourage her from coming. 'I say, that's first class! I'd even go so far as to say, as you youngsters do nowadays, that it's "tip-top", or "A.1.", if I didn't belong to a different generation, the generation that was young in the good old days, don't you know. You're just like me, my dear, faithful to our good old Champs-Elysées. I say, aren't we daring, you and I? Let me tell you, I still love it, even like this. You'll probably laugh at me when I say this, but all this snow puts me in mind of ermine!' And the old lady burst out laughing.

The first of the days to which the snow, the living symbol of the powers that might deprive me of the sight of Gilberte, imparted the sadness of a day when one makes last farewells to loved ones (or even when one takes leave of a loved house, because it changed the aspect and all but prevented the use of our sole customary meeting-place, by draping and concealing it as though with alien dust-sheets), also enabled my love for her to progress a stage farther, since it was tantamount to our first shared experience of sorrow. We were the only ones of the usual group who had turned up, and to have her all to myself seemed not only to be the first step towards a close relationship between us but also (as though she had come in such weather only for my sake) as touching a demonstration of feeling on her part as if she had turned down one of those invitations to parties for the express purpose of being with me at the Champs-Elysées; I looked on the vitality and future of our friendship with greater confidence, now that it had proved itself undaunted in the face of the moribund trance of solitude and ruination that lay over all things; and as Gilberte stuffed snowballs down the neck of my shirt, I smiled with tenderness at what seemed not mere favouritism on her part, evidenced by her accepting me as a fellow-traveller through this new wintry landscape, but actually a sign of her staunch fidelity to me holding good through thick and thin. Soon, one after the other like timid sparrows, her girl-friends arrived, black shapes against the background of snow, and we started our game. The day which had begun so dolefully was to end in great joy, for at the beginning of the game of prisoner's base, as I walked over to the side of the girl whose clipped voice I had heard calling to Gilberte on the first day, she said to me, 'No, look here, we all know you'd rather be on

Gilberte's side. Anyway, look — she wants you over there.' And Gilberte was actually calling to me, summoning me over to join her team on the other side of that field of snow, which the sunshine, picking out on it the pink highlights and worn metallic sheen of old brocades, had turned into another Field of the Cloth of Gold.

So that day which had had such a forlorn beginning turned out to be one of the few when I was not too down-hearted. I put it like that because, although my thoughts were now occupied exclusively with the necessity of never letting a day go by without seeing Gilberte (so much so that one evening when my grandmother had failed to come home by dinnertime I found myself automatically reflecting that if she had been knocked down crossing the street I would be unable to go to the Champs-Elysées for some time; to be in love is to have no love left for anyone else), the fact was that the hours I spent in her company, which I had so fretfully and tremulously looked forward to ever since the day before and for which I would gladly have forgone all else in life, were not in any sense hours of happiness. That much I knew, without the shadow of a doubt, since they were the only hours out of my day-to-day existence on which I doted with such obsessive vigilance, and in them I could never detect an iota of enjoyment.

During the long hours which I spent without Gilberte, I felt a constant need to set eyes on her, because by striving so hard to imagine what she looked like I ended up being unable to picture her at all and hence found I had no clear notion of what my love was directed to. Also, she had never yet said she loved me. In fact, she had said, frequently, that among her friends there were other boys whom she preferred to me and that I was just somebody she enjoyed playing with, although she did find me rather absentminded and not alert enough as a player; indeed, she had quite often treated me so coldly that the fond conviction I nursed (that I was really somebody very special to Gilberte) would have been sapped, had that conviction been based on any love she might have had for me, instead of, as things were, on the love I had for her, a fact which made it impregnable, since its survival depended on the way my own inner compulsion obliged me to think about Gilberte. Besides, I myself had not yet spoken to her of the feelings I had for her. What I had done, interminably, was cover every page of my exercisebooks with her name and address, the only result of which was that whenever I set eyes on these haphazard lines, which my own hand had scribbled out without managing to make her think of me, which gave her so much apparent importance in my life without involving her in it in any way, I felt deflated by discouragement because they reminded me not of Gilberte, who would never even see them, but of my own yearning for her, which they seemed to reflect back at me as an utterly subjective, unreal, irksome and impotent figment. The most urgent thing in life was that Gilberte and I should be able to meet and declare our love for one another, for until then our love would seem somehow not to have begun. No doubt

the various reasons why I was so impatient to be with her would not have been as pressing to the mind of a grown man. Later in life, when one is more skilled in cultivating one's pleasures, one may be well content to enjoy merely thinking about a woman in the way I thought about Gilberte, without worrying whether one's image of her corresponds with reality, or even to enjoy loving her without needing any assurance that she loves one in return; it can even be the case that one foregoes the pleasure of declaring one's love, so as to foster her feeling for oneself, after the manner of those Japanese gardeners who obtain their loveliest blooms through the sacrifice of other flowers. But at the age when I conceived my passion for Gilberte, I still believed that Love had a real existence, outside and independently of oneself; and that, though it might allow one, at the very most, to remove some of the obstacles to one's love, it arranged the joys it had to offer in an order which one was not free to tamper with. It seemed to me that, if I had taken it upon myself to replace the sweet thrill of 'Declaring One's Love' by the 'Pretence of Indifference', not only would I be depriving myself of one of the joys which my imagination had most yearned for, but also the love that would result from that substitution would turn out to be a mere personalized variant, artificial, worthless and unrelated to the real thing, from whose mysterious, pre-ordained strait-and-narrow I had strayed.

Unfortunately, on arriving at the Champs-Elysées and having the immediate opportunity of confronting my love for her with its living. breathing cause in the world outside me (and if need be of touching it up so as to make it more like its real model) no sooner did I set eyes on the Gilberte Swann whose presence I had been counting on to refresh the image of her that had blurred in my bleary memory, the Gilberte Swann with whom I had played only yesterday and whom I had just greeted and recognized in response to an instinct as blind as the one which makes us walk by putting one foot in front of the other without even having time to think about it, than it began to appear as though she and the girl whom I doted on in my dreams were not one and the same person. For instance, my memory would have been haunted ever since the previous day by a pair of flashing eyes set in her full ruddy cheeks, yet what Gilberte's face focussed my gaze on now would be the very thing I had completely misremembered — the extreme sharpness of her nose, say, which in an instantaneous association with other features would have assumed the importance of one of those characteristics which enable the naturalist to define a whole species, mutating her into a Girl-with-a-Pointed-Face. Then, while I stood there, trying to condition my mind to take full advantage of this long-awaited moment and to subject the image of Gilberte, which I had prepared before coming but had now managed to mislay, to a process of re-adjustment which over the long hours spent away from her would enable me to be sure it was actually Gilberte I was remembering, that it really was my love for her I was gradually filling out like a composer privately constructing his masterpiece, she would hold out a ball to me. At which, like an idealist philosopher whose body takes account of the outside world while his intelligence disbelieves in the reality of it, the same self which had just made me greet her before I had even recognized her now made me instantly take the proferred ball from her hand (as though she was merely some friend with whom I was going to play, and not the soul-mate with whom I felt I must commune), prompted me to engage her in all manner of good-mannerly and quite meaningless chat until the time came for her to go home, and thus prevented me both from being silent, which would have enabled me at last to recapture my urgent mislaid image of her, and from saying to her the very things that might have made our love take those few vital steps forward which I was obliged every afternoon to postpone until the following afternoon.

Nevertheless, our love did make some progress. One day we had all walked along to a little booth kept by a woman who was specially kindly towards us, being an appointed supplier to M. Swann, who for health reasons — he suffered from an ethnic eczema and the Prophets' constipation - consumed a great deal of her spice-cake.† With a laugh, Gilberte pointed out to me two little boys who looked as though they had stepped out of a children's illustration of Tweedledum and Tweedledee - one of them was refusing a red sweet because he wanted a purple one, and the other one had dissolved in tears and was declining the plum offered to him by his nursemaid because, as he eventually managed to blurt out in a tone of aggrieved passion, 'I want that other plum! The one with the worm in it!' I bought a brace of the woman's cheapest marbles. Then I stood and gazed with longing and admiration at her other ones, made of agate, prisoners glowing inside a little wooden bowl set away from the others; they seemed very precious to my eyes, because they were as fair and smiling as young girls and because they cost all of fifty centimes each. Gilberte, who got much more pocket-money than I did, asked me which of them I thought the most beautiful. In the heart of each one of them flickered the molten transparency of life. I could hardly bring myself to have one of them singled out to the exclusion of all the others; I wished she could buy the freedom of all of them. But there was one which matched the colour of her own eyes and that was the one at which I pointed. Gilberte picked it up, fondled it, turned it over, looking for its seam of sunny gold, handed over the ransom, then gave me the liberated captive, saying, 'Here, you have it. I'm giving it to you as a

On another occasion, still possessed by my desire to go and see La Berma souvenir.' in a seventeenth-century tragedy, I asked Gilberte whether she had a copy of Bergotte's little book on Racine, which had gone out of print. She told me to let her know the precise title of the booklet, and so I sent her a little express letter that same evening, writing on its envelope the name Gilberte † In this context, the dictionaries' 'gingerbread' for pain d'épice (which can contain rye flour,

honey and aniseed, and be a mild aperient) shows its inaptness (JG).

Swann which I had so often scribbled in my jotters. The following day, having had the essay tracked down, she brought it to me, neatly wrapped, tied with mauve ribbon and sealed with white sealing-wax. 'As you can see, it's exactly what you ordered,' she said, producing my note out of her muff. But in the address on the blue letter-form (which only the day before had been nothing more nor less than an express-letter written by me, but which, having been delivered by a telegram-boy to the porter at Gilberte's house and carried upstairs to her room by a servant, had now been transformed into one of those priceless objects: the letters that Gilberte had received that day) I had difficulty recognizing the futile and forlorn outlines of my own handwriting, half-obscured as they were by the circular patterns of postmarks and the pencilled inscriptions added by a postman, the symbols of its translation into actuality, the certificatory imprint left by the outside world, the purple-ringed emblems of real life which for the very first time had managed to match my ideal, corroborating, comforting and redeeming my dreams.

And there came another day when she said, 'You know, you can call me Gilberte, if you like. In any case, I'm going to use your Christian name from now on. It's too much of a nuisance, otherwise.' Despite which, she continued to address me formally for a while, until I drew her attention to it. She gave me a smile, immediately made up a sentence like those concocted ones in foreign language text-books, specially designed to make one use a new word, and appended it to my Christian name. Later on, when I remembered what I had felt at that moment, I was able to focus on the impression of having been briefly held in her mouth, just my barest self, that is, freed from all the equivocal restrictions of social convention which applied both to her other friends and, whenever she spoke my surname, to my parents, and which, in the effort she made, somewhat like her father, to stress certain words, her lips seemed to have stripped away from me, peeling me of them like a fruit of which only the pulp is eaten, while her eyes, adopting the new degree of intimacy expressed by her words, seemed not only to make more immediate contact with my own but showed in a simultaneous smile their awareness of that new intimacy, the pleasure they took in it and their gratitude for it.

However, in the heat of the moment I was incapable of appreciating these new pleasures at their worth. They had been granted not by the girl I loved to me in my role as the self that loved her, but only by the girl I played with to my other self, the one who possessed neither the memory of the real Gilberte nor the mortgaged heart which, because it was the heart which had desired that particular happiness, was the only one that could have recognized the value of it. And even when I was back at home I found no enjoyment in such pleasures, since the daily necessity of living in expectation of the next afternoon as the time when I would at last enjoy an accurate, peaceful and fulfilling gaze at Gilberte, when she would tell me of

her love and explain why it was she had had to conceal it from me hitherto, that same daily necessity obliged me to see the past as devoid of significance, to keep looking forward into the future and to consider the few small tokens she had already given me not for their mere intrinsic importance, not as self-sufficient, but as rungs to climb, as stepping-stones enabling me to keep advancing towards the happiness that had so far eluded me but which would one day be mine.

Although she gave me such tokens of friendliness, she could also cause me pain by appearing displeased to see me; and this often happened on the very days which I had been hoping would bring the fulfilment of my aspirations. If I went into the drawing-room quite early in the morning to kiss Mama and found her ready to go out, her turret of black hair fully assembled and her lovely hands white and plump and still smelling of soap, the sight of a free-standing pillar of dust above the piano and the sound of a barrel-organ playing En revenant de la revue beneath the window were a promise that Gilberte would be coming to the Champs-Elysées, a sudden hint of joy that felt only like a vague anticipation of overwhelming happiness, for they told me that, until that evening, winter would be enjoying an unexpected visit from a day of resplendent springtime. During lunch, a ray of sunlight which had begun a siesta by my chair was dislodged in a flash by the lady opposite opening her window, streaked lengthwise through our dining-room, then leapt back a moment later to pause again at its former point of repose. At school, during the one-o'clock class, I pined with impatience and boredom as the sun draped its golden glow on the edge of my desk, like an invitation to a festivity which I would not be able to accept before three p.m., when Françoise would meet me at the exit and we would make our way to the Champs-Elysées through streets smart with sunlight and crammed with passers-by, above which the balconies, detached by the misty light from the fronts of houses, hung in the air like clouds of gold. But then, disastrously, at the Champs-Elysées, there was no Gilberte, she had not arrived yet! Under an invisible sun which picked out a highlight here and there on a blade of grass, standing motionless on the lawn littered with pigeons that looked like ancient sculptures dug up by a gardener's pick out of the earth of a classical landscape, I kept my eyes fixed on the horizon, expecting at any moment to catch a glimpse of Gilberte following her governess, passing behind the statue which seemed to be invoking the blessing of the sun on the child it held in its arms, drenched with light. The old lady reading her Débats was sitting in her usual chair, at her usual place, giving a friendly wave to a passing park-keeper and calling out, 'Lovely weather we're having!' And when the woman came over to collect the money for her chair, the old lady made a great show of simpering and slipping the ten-centime ticket inside the wrist of her glove, as though it was a posy of flowers that she was trying to show off in the most advantageous position possible, so as to do the right thing by the person who had given them to her. Having hit on this advantageous position, she made an affected swivelling motion with her neck, primped her fox-fur and, as she showed the chair-woman the scrap of buff-coloured paper protruding from her glove, flashed her the warm smile with which a woman, pointing to the beflowered bosom of her ball-dress, asks a young admirer, 'Well, do you recognize your roses?'

In the hope of meeting Gilberte, I took Françoise up towards the Arc de Triomphe. There being no sign of her, I was on my way back down to the lawn, convinced that she would not be coming that day, when the girl with the clipped voice jumped out at me from the side of the merry-go-round and exclaimed, 'Quickly, quickly! Gilberte's been here for the last fifteen minutes! She'll be leaving soon. We need you to make up a team for prisoner's base.' While I had been making my way up the Champs-Elysées itself, Gilberte had arrived via the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, her governess having taken advantage of the fine weather to do some shopping for herself; and M. Swann would be coming to fetch Gilberte on his way home. It was clearly all my own fault - I should not have left the lawn. For one could never be sure of the direction from which she would appear, nor whether she would turn up one day a little earlier or a little later; and this state of expectant uncertainty eventually permeated with a profounder thrill of emotion not only the whole of the Champs-Elysées and the entire afternoon (turning them into a vast tract of space and time at any point of which the image of Gilberte might appear) but also this image of Gilberte herself, since what I sensed behind her image was the hidden reason why it would hit me in the heart at four o'clock rather than half past two, in front of the Ambassadeurs instead of between the two Punch-and-Judy stalls, wearing a Sunday-best hat and not the schoolday beret in which she usually played; what I surmised from these hints was one or other of the occupations of Gilberte in which I could have no part, which forced her to stay at home or go out somewhere; what I had encountered, in fact, was the mystery of Gilberte's unknown life. It was this same mystery which stirred strange feelings in me when, as I complied with the clipped voice's orders and ran down to start a game of prisoner's base at once, I caught sight of Gilberte, who could be so tart and abrupt with all of us, yet who was now curtseying to the old lady with the Débats (who said, 'Lovely sun! A real blaze, isn't it?') and speaking to her with a shy smile and a formality of manner that suggested the very different sort of girl she must be at home, with friends of her parents, when paying a social call or doing any of the numberless things she did in that other life of hers that lay beyond my reach. However, no other person gave me such a powerful impression of that hidden life of Gilberte's than M. Swann, who turned up soon afterwards to fetch his daughter home. For in both him and Mme Swann, because theirs was the house where she lived, and because her school-work, the games she played, the friendships she made, all depended on them, I sensed an unknown inaccessible something, full of charm and full of pain, which I felt from Gilberte, too, but

in them it was if anything stronger, as befitted god-like creatures who wielded boundless power over her and in whom it must originate. Whatever related to them in any way was an object of such unremitting preoccupation to me that on the days when M. Swann (whom I had often seen in the past, when he had been a friend of the family, without being possessed by ravening curiosity) came to the Champs-Elysées to take his daughter home, even after my heart had recovered from the palpitations provoked by the sudden sight of his grey hat and his Inverness cloak, his appearance continued to excite me as though he was a historical character about whom one has read widely and the slightest circumstances of whose existence one finds a source of passionate interest. His intimacy with the Comte de Paris, which had always seemed a matter of utter indifference to me if it was ever mentioned at Combray, now seemed to verge on the miraculous, as though nobody but M. Swann had ever been acquainted with members of the House of Orléans; and his acquaintance with the pretender to the throne of France gave him now such a distinctive silhouette, marking him off so vividly against the drab background of passers-by of all social classes who cluttered up that path through the Champs-Elysées gardens, that I was amazed he condescended to figure among them without insisting they treat him with special favours, which none of them so much as dreamed of according him, so impenetrable was the incognito he had adopted.

The greetings from each of Gilberte's friends he acknowledged politely, my own included (despite the fact that he was no longer on speaking terms with my family), although I felt he did not realize who I was. This reminded me that, after all, he had seen me quite frequently in the country, a memory that I had retained somewhere in my mind, but out of sight. For, ever since I had come across Gilberte again, in my eyes Swann had become first and foremost her father and was no longer the same Swann as he had been in Combray. The current of notions into which I now plugged his name being completely different from the network of associations to which he had once belonged and which I no longer used when I needed to think about him, he had become a new character to me, albeit one who was linked by an artificial, secondary, transversal circuit to our dinner-guest of years gone by. And since nothing now had any value in my eyes unless my love could draw a measure of benefit from it, it was only with a cringing feeling of shame and an impotent wish to abolish them that I remembered those years gone by when, in the mind of this same M. Swann (who now stood before me in the Champs-Elysées and to whom with any luck Gilberte had not actually mentioned my name) I had made a fool of myself on so many evenings by summoning Mama up to my bedroom to kiss me good-night, while she was sitting out in the garden having coffee with him, my father and my grandparents. Telling Gilberte she could play one more game as he had a quarter of an hour to spare, he sat down like any normal human being on one of the metal chairs and paid for his ticket with the hand that Philippe VII† had so often warmly shaken, while we began our game on the lawn, scattering the pigeons which, with their beautiful iridescent bodies, heartshaped and looking like the lilacs of the bird kingdom, ended up in different places of sanctuary — one of them on the lip of the stone cornucopia which, as the bird's beak was hidden by it, seemed to make the gesture of, and to have been expressly designed for, offering the over-abundance of fruit or seed on which its visitor seemed to be feeding; and another one on the forehead of the statue itself, looking like one of those enamelled superimposed attributes which in their polychromy relieve the monotony of the stone in certain sculptures from antiquity, give to the goddess who possesses the distinguishing feature an epithet as specific as a Christian name to a

On one of those sunny days which had disappointed my high hopes, I could not find the courage to conceal my chagrin from Gilberte and said to her, 'I had a lot of things I specially wanted to ask you, you know. I hoped today was going to be important in our friendship. But you've hardly arrived when you've got to leave again! Do try to come early tomorrow, so that I can have a chance to speak to you.'

Her face shone, she actually jumped for joy as she replied, 'Tomorrow? Well, you can be sure, my lad, that I shan't be coming here tomorrow! I'm going to a special tea-party! And the day after, I'm going to a friend's house to see the arrival of King Theodosius! Her windows are right above the route the procession's to take. Oh, it's going to be just super! And then the day after that I'm going to see Michel Strogoff! And after that it won't be long until the Christmas and New Year holidays and they may be taking me to the Riviera! Won't that be terrific! Though, mind you, if we did go to the South I'd miss the Christmas party at home. Still, even if I stay in Paris during the holidays, I shan't be coming here as I'll be out visiting with Mama. Cheerio, then, I must run, there's my father calling me.'

I walked back home with Françoise, through streets that were still festive with sunlight and seemingly redolent of a celebration that had taken place during the day. My legs were as heavy as lead, which inspired in Françoise the comment: 'I'm not a bit surprised. It's been far too warm today, it's been quite out of season. There'll be plenty of other poor people out of sorts today, I shouldn't wonder. God love us, anyone would think things were getting out of sorts up in heaven, too!'

Containing the sobs that welled up inside me, I went over and over the words with which Gilberte had proclaimed how overjoyed she was at not coming to the Champs-Elysées for such a long time. But already the charm that filled my mental atmosphere, given off by my own mind as soon as it began thinking of her, the particular unique posture - even though

mortal woman and transform her into a distinct new divinity.

cramped and painful - that I was unavoidably forced to adopt towards Gilberte by the compulsion of a mental habit, had already begun to read something romantic even into the evidence of her indifference to me, and out of my tearfulness came a smile that was a timid attempt at a kiss. And that evening, as on every evening, when it was time for the postman to come, I said to myself, 'There'll be a letter for me from Gilberte! It will tell me at last that she has loved me from the start. It will explain the mysterious reasons why she has had to hide her love for me, why she had to pretend she could be happy without me, why she has adopted her pretence of being merely Gilberte the girl I play with.'

It was a letter I imagined myself receiving from her every evening; I saw myself reading it, I recited whole sentences from it to myself. Then, in dismay, I would pull myself up short - I had just realised that if I was ever to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not possibly be that particular one, since it had been written by myself. At this thought, I would do my utmost to turn my mind away from the words I wished she would write to me, so as not to focus consciously on them and in so doing eliminate from the range of things that might come true the very words I most longed to read from her. Even if, through some unlikely coincidence, I had received a letter from Gilberte couched in the same terms as the one I had privately invented, I would have recognised it as my own handiwork and been incapable of feeling I had received something that originated outside my own mind, something real and unknown to me, some happiness that derived from elsewhere, that did not depend on my own will, that was a genuine gift of love.

In the mean time, unable to read anything by Gilberte, I read and re-read a page that had at least come to me from her, the page by Bergotte on the beauty of the ancient myths that had inspired Racine, which, along with the agate marble, never left my sight. I was touched by her goodness in obtaining the little treatise for me; and since everyone feels the need to seek reasons for being so much in love (to the point of rejoicing to recognize in the loved one qualities which literature or conversation suggest are those most worthy of inspiring love, absorbing them out of a spirit of imitation and turning them into new grounds for love, even though such qualities may be diametrically opposed to the ones admired by the lover while his love was still in the spontaneous state - as Swann had once discovered with the aesthetic nature of Odette's attractiveness), whereas ever since Combray I had loved first and foremost in Gilberte that unknown element of the life she lived without me, in which, at the expense of my own pointless, worthless life, I wished I could be immersed and allotted a part, now I found myself looking on that same futile irksomely familiar life of mine as a thing of inestimable value, a thing in which Gilberte herself might one day be grateful to have a humble part, as my handmaiden or helpmeet, the cosy, companionable collaborator who would sit by me in the evening, lending a

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[†] The dynastic name and number by which the Comte de Paris of the day chose to be known (JG). 330

hand by collating my collection of treatises. As for Bergotte, the old man of boundless, almost divine wisdom who had been at the origin of my love for her at a time when I had never even set eyes on her, I loved him now mainly because of Gilberte. I pored over his pages on Racine and, with equal pleasure, over the wrapping-paper, with its broad seals of white wax and coils of mauve ribbon, in which she had brought them to me. I kissed the agate marble, the better part of her heart, the part that was not frivolous but faithful, and for all that it was steeped in the mysterious charm of Gilberte's unknown life, it accompanied me in all things, lived in my room, shared my bed throughout the night. Nevertheless, I was well aware that the beauty of this piece of stone and the beauty of Bergotte's pages, which I was glad to associate with the notion of my love for Gilberte, as though they could give it a semblance of body at times when it seemed the flimsiest figment of vanity, predated my love for her, that they bore no relation or resemblance to it, that the elements of which they were constituted had been determined by human talent or mineralogical laws long before Gilberte had got to know me, that not one iota of difference would have been made to the piece of stone or to the book if Gilberte had never loved me and that consequently there was no earthly reason why I should read a hint of happiness into either of them. And while my love for her, in its unfailing expectation that each new day would bring with it the declaration of her love for me, spent the evenings undoing, unpicking the botched work of my afternoons with Gilberte, somewhere in a dark nook or cranny of the self an obscure unknown servant salvaged these unstitched threads and, without any intention to please me or to abet my happiness, reworked them in the different pattern on which she modelled all her productions. She had no particular interest in my love for Gilberte and did not take as a starting-point the assumption that I was loved in return. All she did was mark the actions of Gilberte which had seemed inexplicable to me and the faults in her that I had forgiven; at which, both those actions and her faults took on a new meaning. This different pattern of meaning seemed to hint that, when I saw Gilberte forego the Champs-Elysées with me in favour of a friend's party, a shopping expedition with her governess or her preparations for going away somewhere at Christmastime. I was mistaken in assuming, 'She's just a bit frivolous and too easily led.' For she would have been neither of those things if she had loved me; and if she was merely obeying orders that could not be disregarded, then she would have shown as much desolation as I myself felt on days when I went without seeing her. The new pattern also implied that I for one ought to be quite well aware of what it meant to be in love, since I was in love with Gilberte; it brought to mind not only my ceaseless concern to make a favourable impression on Gilberte — which was the reason why I kept trying to persuade Mama that she should buy Françoise a waterproof and a hat with a blue feather in it or rather that she should spare me the embarrassment of being sent to the Champs-Elysées with a mere house-maid (to which my

mother would reply that I was being unfair to Françoise, who had a heart of gold and was devoted to us all) - but also my single-minded need to see Gilberte, which preoccupied me, months in advance, with trying to find out the time of year when she would be leaving Paris and where she would be going, making me look on the most agreeable spots as places of barren exile if she was to be absent from them and filling me with a yearning to live for ever in Paris, as long as I could be with her in the Champs-Elysées; and it had no difficulty in demonstrating to me that, in Gilberte's behaviour, I would be unable to detect either that concern or that need. What I could detect, on the other hand, was that she appreciated her governess, and was untroubled by what my opinion of the woman might be; that she thought it quite natural to stay away from the Champs-Elysées if it meant she had to go shopping with Mademoiselle, and a very welcome change if it meant she could go out with her mother. And even supposing she ever allowed me to spend my holidays in the same place as she did, the fact was when it came to the choice of that place she would comply with her parents' desires or take account of all sorts of attractions that other people had mentioned, but it would never occur to her to choose a particular place because my parents were considering sending me there. When she told me, as she sometimes did, that she was not as fond of me as of some other boy or that she liked me less than she had the previous day, because I had been playing so incompetently as to make her team lose a game, I would apologize and ask her what I ought to do to make her like me as much as, or more than, other boys; I wished she would tell me not to worry, that I was back in her favour; I begged her to like me, as though she could alter her feelings for me at will or at my behest, or so as to cause me pleasure, or in accordance with improvements and shortcomings in my behaviour, or merely by uttering forms of words. Yet was I not quite well aware that my own feelings for her depended neither on her actions nor on my own will?

And the last hint I received from the new pattern woven by my invisible inner servant was that though we may hope against hope that the past actions of a person who has caused us pain were not in character, there is in the continuity of them an unerring clarity against which hopes are of no avail, and that it is to that clarity, instead of to those hopes, that one must turn if one wishes to guess something of the person's future actions.

My love for Gilberte would pick up these hints, which were trying to convince it that when I saw her next things between us would be no different from what they had been on all previous occasions; that Gilberte's feelings for me, too deep-rooted now to change, amounted to indifference; and that, in the relationship I shared with her, I was the only one who was in love. To which my love for her would reply: 'You're right! That particular friendship has had its day. It will never change now.' And so, the very next day (or else postponing the step till a special forthcoming occasion, such as a birthday or New Year's Day, for instance, one of those days which are unlike all others,

when time turns over a new leaf, disinherits itself from the past and refuses the legacy of its sorrows) I would ask Gilberte to abandon our former relationship and lay the foundations of a new mode of friendship.

I had a street-map of Paris that I was for ever consulting — showing as it did the street where M. and Mme Swann lived, it seemed to me like a map of buried treasure. I went about, mentioning the name of their street on any and every pretext, for the sheer pleasure of hearing it and also out of a sort of chivalrous fidelity, until my father, who unlike my mother and grandmother did not share the secret of my love for Gilberte, asked, 'Why on earth are you for ever bringing up the name of that street? What's so special about it? I mean, it's a very nice street, very handy to the Bois, but there must be at least ten other streets like that.'

On all conceivable occasions, I contrived to make my parents speak the name Swann; not content with just saying it over and over to myself in the privacy of my own mind, I needed to hear the full sweet melody of it, to have the music of it performed for me rather than merely enjoy it by a soundless reading. Besides, this name Swann, which I had known for so many years, had now become for me, as can happen with the most everday words to people afflicted with aphasia, an entirely new name. It was constantly present in my mind, yet my mind could not get used to it. I dismantled it and spelled it out to myself, but the sequence of its letters was a perpetual surprise to me. Not only had it ceased being a familiar name to me, it no longer seemed innocent either. The joys of listening to it struck me as so guilty that I had the impression, during conversation, that people could read my mind and were changing the subject each time I tried to bring in the name. So I would fall back on topics of conversation that still had some relevance to Gilberte, going over and over the same words; and although I knew perfectly well they were nothing but words, words uttered far away from her, unheard by her ears, words devoid of effect or power, able only to rehearse a state of affairs but incapable of affecting it in the slightest, I nonetheless had the feeling that if I could only go on sifting and searching through everything that bore on her life, I might eventually manage to find a clue to happiness. I kept telling my parents that Gilberte was fond of her governess, as though this statement, by being repeated a hundred times, was bound to make Gilberte herself suddenly arrive on our doorstep, her mind made up to live happily ever after in our house. I sang the praises of the old lady who read the Journal des Débats (having already implied to the family that she was a former ambassador's wife or even possibly of noble birth) and I went on celebrating her beauty, sumptuous attire and nobility of bearing until the day when I told them Gilberte had addressed her as something that sounded like Mme Blatin. At which, while I blushed my discomfiture, my mother exclaimed, 'Oh, I know who you mean! Sound the alarm, as dear old grandpa used to say, sound the alarm! So that's who you think is beautiful!

Why, she's a fright and always was a fright! She's the widow of a bailiff, my boy. Don't you remember, when you were little, the lengths I had to go to, to avoid her? At that gymnastics class, do you remember, when I didn't know the woman from Adam and she kept trying to strike up a conversation with me and saying you were "so pretty you couldn't be a boy"? She's always had that same mania for hob-nobbing with people. And if she does know Swann's wife, then she must be not quite right in the head, which is what I've suspected all along, I must say. Because, mind you, despite the fact that she came from a very common set of people, there was never anything at all unsavoury about her, as far as I know. She just had that compulsion to get to know all the right people. Oh, she's horrid and unspeakably vulgar! And she's a trouble-maker, into the bargain!

As for Swann, in the hope of coming to look like him I spent my time at the dinner table pulling my nose and rubbing my eyes. My father would say, 'The boy's an imbecile! He'll look awful, if he goes on like that!' What I wished for more than anything else was to be as bald as Swann. He seemed such an outstanding creature that it struck me as miraculous that people whom I knew actually knew him as well and that in the unpredictable course of an ordinary day one might have the chance of meeting him. One evening, my mother, who was recounting to us, as she usually did at dinnertime, what she had done with herself during the day, uttered these simple words, 'And, by the way, guess who I bumped into in the Trois Quartiers, at the umbrella counter - Swann', and as she spoke, there blossomed for me amid the barren wastes of her story a flower of mystery and beauty. What a delicious wistful pang it was to hear that, only that afternoon, silhouetting his supernatural profile against the faceless multitudes, Swann had gone into a department store to buy himself an umbrella! Among the events of my mother's day, some great, some small, all of equal indifference to me, this happening sent rippling through me the special shock-waves which were for ever vibrating out from the core of my love for Gilberte. According to my father, I took no interest in anything because I never listened to what was being said about the possible political consequences of the visit of King Theodosius, who at that particular time was the guest of France and, allegedly, our ally. But the interest I took in finding out whether or not Swann had been wearing his Inverness cloak was boundless.

'And did you speak to each other?' I asked.

'Well, of course we did,' replied my mother, giving as always the impression that she was reluctant to admit to any coldness between our family and Swann, in case it should lead to an attempt at a closer reconciliation with him than she cared for, given her desire to have nothing to do with his wife. 'I hadn't noticed he was there, actually, but he came over to talk.'

'So, in that case, you're not on bad terms any more?'

'Bad terms? For goodness sake, when were we ever on bad terms?' she

answered, with a touch of impatience, as though I was calling the bluff of the good terms on which she was supposed to be with Swann and trying to manoeuvre her into a resolution of their differences.

'Perhaps he feels offended at not being invited to the house any more?'
'Well, we're under no obligation to issue invitations to all and sundry, are
we? I mean, has he ever invited me to his house? Besides, I've never met his
wife.'

'Yes, but he used to come and see us at Combray.'

'Oh, I know that! But Combray is Combray and Paris is Paris. He's probably got better things to do with his time, and so have I. Anyway, I assure you we didn't look a bit like two people who were on bad terms with each other. We stood there together for a moment because he had to wait for his parcel. He asked after you and told me you play with his daughter.'

I sat there dazed with wonder at this miracle of myself not merely existing in the mind of Swann but being so intricate and intimate a part of his experience that when I confronted him in the Champs-Elysées, quivering with love, he knew my name and who my mother was and could even fill out my present capacity as a friend of his daughter with more than a little knowledge about my grandparents and their relatives, the place where we lived and certain particulars of the life we had all led in former years which might be unknown even to me! For all that, my mother did not seem to have been struck spell-bound by any unique charm emanating from that umbrella department in the Trois Quartiers where, at the moment when Swann had set eyes on her, she had assumed in his mind the configuration of someone in particular, a person with whom he shared certain memories which had prompted his step in her direction and the raising of his hat in recognition.

In fact, neither of my parents appeared to be overwhelmed with delight when they mentioned things like the grandparents of Swann or the profession of outside broker. From the whole social world of Paris my imagination had singled out and sanctified one particular family, just as from the Paris of bricks and mortar it had picked out a certain house, fashioned its front entrance and worked its windows into precious things. But such ornamentation was visible to nobody but me. In the same way as my parents saw the Swann house as similar to all other houses built about the same period in that district near the Bois de Boulogne, they saw the Swann family as belonging to the same category as many another stockbroker's family. They approved or disapproved of it according to its share in a fund of meritorious features common to the entire universe, and could see nothing unique in it. Indeed, things which they appreciated in it they could find in equal, or even greater, measure elsewhere. Hence, once they had agreed that the Swanns' house enjoyed a good situation, they went on to mention some other house that enjoyed a better one (albeit devoid of any relevance to Gilberte) or some other man who was a cut above her

grandfather in the world of finance; and if they had briefly appeared to be sharing my opinion on the matter, this turned out to have been because of a misunderstanding which was very soon clarified. The fact was that for my parents to have been capable of noticing in the ambience that surrounded Gilberte an unknown quality, some analogue in the spectrum of the feelings to infra-red among the colours, they would have had to be equipped with the momentary sixth sense which had been given to me by love.

On days when Gilberte had told me in advance that she would not be coming to the Champs-Elysées, I tried to arrange walks that would lessen the distance between us. At times, I took Françoise on a pilgrimage past the Swanns' house. I encouraged her to repeat again and again what she had picked up from the governess about Mme Swann — 'It seems she's a great believer in her medals. You'll never catch her leaving on a journey if she's heard an owl hooting or something ticking inside the wall like a clock or if a cat crosses her path at midnight or if she hears a bit of a creak in the furniture. I tell vou, she's a very religious person, is Mme Swann!' I was so deeply in love with Gilberte that if we passed the Swanns' old butler out walking one of their dogs, the thrill of it stopped me in my tracks, my eyes pining towards the man's white whiskers until Françoise turned and said. 'What's up with you now?' We would continue on our way, walking past their main coach-entrance where there stood a porter who was unlike any other porter, every inch of braid on his livery giving out the same sad charm as I had felt in the name of Gilberte, and with a look about him proclaiming that he was well aware I belonged to the mass of those who by the stigma of some original sin of unworthiness would be for ever forbidden from sharing in the mysterious life which he was duty bound to guard against the likes of me and which the ground-floor windows seemed equally conscious of their duty to protect, as they stood there, primly closed, their view of the world veiled by the hanging supercilious folds of muslin curtains and resembling not so much other windows as the indifferent eyes of Gilberte herself.

At other times, we walked in the opposite direction, up towards the boulevards, where I would take up station on the corner of the Rue Duphot — I had heard that Swann was often to be seen walking along that street on the way to his dentist's; and my imagination marked Gilberte's father off so exclusively from the rest of the human race, his presence among the things of the real world shed such a magic glow on them all that, long before we reached the Madeleine, I was full of delicious trepidation at the proximity of a street which at any moment might be graced by the supernatural visitation.

More often than not, however, on the days when I knew I would not be seeing Gilberte, I took Françoise towards the Bois de Boulogne, having been told that Mme Swann went for a walk almost every day along the Allée des Acacias (as it was known then), round the larger Lake, then down the Allée de la Reine-Marguerite. The Bois reminded me of the kind of

zoological garden in which one can see a heterogeneous collection of various flora and oddly assorted landscapes — a hill, then a grotto, then a meadow, some boulders, a river, a dry moat, another hill, followed by a marsh which one knows are there merely to provide an apposite or picturesque setting for the hippopotamus, the zebras, the crocodiles, the white rabbits, the bears and the heron; with its complex diversity of small, self-contained worlds (first a farm planted with red trees, oaks from North America, looking like a small-holding somewhere in Virginia, followed by a grove of conifers by the lake-side or a real forest out of which one suddenly started a fleet-footed denizen, wearing slinky fur and rolling her beautiful eyes like a startled animal) it was first and foremost the Garden of Women; and the Allée des Acacias, planted for their pleasure with trees of a single species, like the grove of Myrtles in the Aeneid, was the rendezvous of the most celebrated beauties of the day. As a distant glimpse of the top of the rock from which the sea-lion leaps into the water will fill children with excitement at the prospect of seeing the animal, long before I reached the Allée des Acacias the scent from these trees, broadcast in all directions and giving a first hint of the proximity and singularity of a vigorous yet tractable vegetable personality, then as I came nearer the sight of the tips of their topmost branches, light and leafy, quaint and dainty, elegantly relaxed, trimly cut out of flimsy tissue, on which hundreds of blossoms had alighted like vibratory winged colonies of precious predators, and even the plant's feminine-sounding name with its suggestion of graceful laziness, all these filled me with excitement, too — but the rhythm of that excitement was the urgent tempo of my yearning for sophistication, and it acted upon me like the memory of those waltz tunes at a ball which eventually brings back only the names of ravishing dancers once announced by the voice of a doorman. I had heard it said that along that pathway could be seen certain elegant women who, though not all of them had ever been married, were commonly mentioned in the same breath as Mme Swann, albeit usually under their assumed names; their married name, if they happened to have one, being merely a kind of incognito that men who needed to refer to them would be sure to disclose so as to be understood by one another. Believing that Beauty in the realm of feminine elegance was governed by an arcane set of laws which must have been revealed to these women and that it lay in their power to make that Beauty real and visible, I looked forward as to a dazzling revelation to the vision of their clothes, their horses and carriages and countless other details about them into which I breathed my own belief in them, like a secret soul that gave to the shifting impermanence of the tableau they formed the timeless cohesion of a masterpiece. The one I most wanted to see was Mme Swann and I stood about, waiting for her to pass by, as anxious as though it was Gilberte herself I was expecting, for her parents, imbued like everything else in her life with her peculiar charm, inspired in me love that was not only as potent as the love I had for her, but was in fact

fraught with a more painful perturbation (since their point of contact with her was the whole domestic area of her life, the very part of her which I was forbidden to know) and filled me with the feeling of veneration which we always have for those who enjoy an unlimited power to harm us — for as will be seen, I was soon to find out that they were reluctant to let her go on playing with me.

First place in the range of aesthetic merits and fashionable splendour I assigned to simplicity, whenever I caught sight of Mme Swann, on foot, wearing a woollen polonaise, a little pill-box hat ornamented with a brilliant lophophore plume, and with a posy of violets on her bodice, hurrying along the Allée des Acacias (as though her reason for being there was just that it was her shortest way home) and winking in response to the greetings of gentlemen in passing carriages who recognized her at a distance from her appearance, raised their hats and said to themselves that she was smarter than all the rest of them put together. But that same simplicity could easily be downgraded and its place taken by glamorous luxury — all it needed was for me to walk up and down for another hour, reducing Françoise to exhaustion and the complaint that she was 'ready to drop', in the hope of catching a glimpse of a carriage (that I did not so much see as I felt my heart suddenly branded by the sharp dispiriting imprint of its shape) bursting out from the Porte Dauphine road and redolent of royal prestige, suggesting a monarch's progress in a way that no real Queen in later life was able to match, since by then my idea of royal power was less vague and more empirical, spanking along behind two flying horses as brisk and slender and delicately turned as any in the drawings of Constantin Guys, with a huge coachman as fierce and furry as a Cossack sitting on its box beside a diminutive groom who was reminiscent of the 'tiger' of Balzac's Baudenord; a victoria it was, of quite incomparable style, set specially high on its springs, hinting through its gorgeous up-to-the-minute lines at more traditional design and carrying Mme Swann, who reclined luxuriously inside it, her hair now blond with a stripe of grey through it and held only by a narrow circlet of flowers, violets mostly, from which hung long flowing veils, with a mauve parasol in her hand and an ambiguous smile about her lips, which to my eyes was full of the Sovereign Lady's kind condescension but was really the provocative pout of the good-time girl sweetly focussed on the men who greeted her. It was a smile that said to some, 'I do remember that day! Wasn't it nice?'; to others, 'I wish we could! Some other time, perhaps?'; and to certain men, 'Yes, all right, if you like! I'll just stay in this line of carriages until there's a gap, then we'll double back to you.' When men whom she did not know were passing, she kept her lips in a lazy smile, which seemed to be looking forward to or remembering a fond friend, and would inspire the comment, 'Isn't she just lovely!'; while for a select few men she reserved a smile that was tart and pinched, frigid and diffident, and meant, 'Oh, yes, you pig, I know you, all right! You and your nasty tongue that you

can't keep under control! I don't go about talking behind your back, do I?' Coquelin the actor would walk past, holding forth to a group of listening friends and waving expansive theatrical greetings to people passing in coaches. But I had eyes for nobody but Mme Swann. I even pretended not to have seen her, because I knew that when her carriage drew level with the clay-pigeon shooting-range she would tell her coachman to pull aside and let her down so that she could walk back the way she had just come. On days when I could pluck up the courage to pass her at close quarters, I would drag Françoise off in that direction. And, sure enough, walking towards us along the foot-path, I would soon catch sight of Mme Swann, the long train of her lilac-coloured dress spread behind her, looking like the popular conception of a Queen, in finery that no other woman wore, glancing down now and then at the handle of her parasol and hardly seeming to notice the passersby, for all the world as though her real concern was just to take some exercise, oblivious to the fact that she was being looked at and that all heads turned as she passed. But at times, when she turned to call her greyhound, she would risk a quick almost imperceptible glance round about.

Even strangers would realise, from something special and exaggerated about her — or perhaps through the sort of telepathic radiation that used to set off a delirium of applause even among an unappreciative audience when La Berma rose to her greatest heights — that she must be well known. They wondered to one another, 'Who can she be?', then enquired of another passer-by; or else, in the hope of finding out later on, they would memorize her outfit so as to be able to give a description of her to some friend more inthe-know than themselves, who would tell them instantly who she was. Other men, pausing in their walk, said, 'You know who that is? That's Mme Swann! You're none the wiser, I see — Odette de Crécy!'

'What? Odette de Crécy! Well, yes, now you mention it, those great mournful eyes of hers. . . Mind you, she's not as young as she used to be. I remember I slept with her on the day when President MacMahon resigned.'

'You'd be well advised not to remind her of that. She's Mme Swann now, the wife of a gentleman who belongs to the Jockey Club and counts the Prince of Wales among his friends. Mind you, she's still a beauty.'

'Yes, but you should have known her in those days! Gad, she was lovely! She lived in the oddest little house, full of Chinese bric-à-brac. I remember we were plagued by the din of paper-boys shouting outside in the street. She eventually made me get up.'

Although I could not hear the comments, what I did pick up, all about her, was the muted thrill of notoriety. My heart throbbed with impatience at the thought that there was still a moment or two to wait before all these people (among whom I was aggrieved to notice the absence of a certain half-caste banker who I felt despised me) could witness this woman, whose name was a byword for beauty, scandalous misconduct and elegance, being greeted by the nondescript young stranger who was ignored by all of them

and could not really be said to know her, but who believed it would not be taken amiss, since his parents were acquainted with her husband and he himself played with her daughter. Then, as she drew level, I doffed my hat to her and gave her such a deep exaggerated bow that she could not help smiling. Onlookers started to laugh. Mme Swann had never seen me in Gilberte's company and did not know my name; to her, like the park-keeper or the boat-hirer by the lake or the ducks to which she sometimes tossed scraps of bread, I was just one of the familiar, nameless, minor characters appearing in her daily walks through the Bois, as devoid of distinguishing features as an extra on stage.

There were other days when, not having seen her along the Allée des Acacias, I came on her in the Allée de la Reine-Marguerite, the haunt of women who prefer to be alone, or who are trying to look as though they prefer to be alone. She, however, was never alone for long, but was soon joined by some gentleman friend or other, usually wearing a grey topper, who was a complete stranger to me and who would stroll with her, chatting, for a long time, while their carriages followed at a distance.

That same complex diversity of the Bois de Boulogne (which makes it such an artificial place and gives it, in the zoological or mythological sense, the character of a Garden) struck me again this very year† as I walked through it on my way to Trianon. It was one of those mornings in early November when, to the Parisian cooped up in buildings, the unwitnessed spectacle of autumn's sudden ending presents a constant temptation and the simultaneous impossibility of succumbing to it, infecting him with its nostalgic fever, giving him a compulsive craving for falling leaves that can be strong enough to keep him awake at nights. For a month past, the shuttered seclusion of my room had been visited by those leaves as my longing conjured them up and they obtruded between my mind and whatever object I attempted to concentrate on, spinning about like those yellow specks which, no matter what we may be looking at, sometimes dance in front of our eyes. That morning I could no longer hear the rain falling as it had done over the previous days; and, seeing a smile of fine weather play at the edges of my drawn curtains as though about a closed mouth which can no longer keep to itself some secret happiness, it had occurred to me that I could actually go and look at those yellow leaves with the light streaming through them and displaying their beauty at its best; so, no more able to resist my impulse to go and look at trees than I had been to resist my yearning for Balbec and the sea long ago when the wind used to bluster down

The year referred to in this coda, added to Swann as a P.S. just before publication, is 1912 (JG).

my bedroom chimney, I had left the house to walk to Trianon via the Bois de Boulogne. It was the time and the season when the Bois seems to be at its most multifarious, not just because it is separated into more numerous segments but also because it is subdivided in different ways. Even in the more open tracts where one's eye takes in broad sweeps of the landscape, here and there, standing in front of a dark distant mass of trees which were already bare or had not yet lost their summer leaves, a double row of flame-tinted horse-chestnuts looked like the first detail touched in on a new canvas by a painter, a tree-lined, spot-lit corner ready for the strolling group of minor characters to be painted in later.

In the background, among woods still covered in green, stood one single, undersized tree, squat, pollarded and obstinate, its unsightly red head dishevelled by the wind. Here and there, the autumnal Maytime of the leaves had only just begun, and despite the earliness of the hour the leaves of a Virginia creeper were already in full bloom, glowing like the miracle of a winter-flowering pink hawthorn. The whole of the Bois gave the impression of artificiality and temporariness that one has in a park or a nursery where, in readiness for some festivity or for a horticultural reason, the trees of ordinary varieties which have not yet been transplanted find set up among themselves two or three precious specimens, tricked out in fantastic foliage, which seem to clear a space round about, freshen the air and brighten the day. So it was the time of year when the Bois de Boulogne reveals the greatest number of different species and brings together in a heterogeneous whole more disparate parts than at any other season. It was also the time of day: in places where trees had not yet lost their leaves, they appeared to start undergoing a chemical transformation at the part where they were touched by the morning sunlight, still almost horizontal, as it would be again only a few hours later in the early dusk, when it is turned on like lamplight, sheds on the foliage its remote glow and artificial warmth and ignites the topmost leaves of a tree that stands as the colourless and incombustible candelabrum of its own blazing tip. At one point, the light gave a brick-like thickness to the chestnut leaves and cemented them crudely against the sky like yellow Persian masonry veined with blue; at another, it prised them away from the sky as they clutched at it with their wide-spread golden fingers. Half-way up a tree smothered in Virginia creeper, it had grafted and brought into bloom a huge cluster of what looked like sudden red flowers, dazzlingly indistinguishable but possibly a new variety of carnation. The different sections of the Bois, which summer blends into one dense unvariegated mass of greenery, were now set apart from one another. The entrances to nearly all of these sections were visible through clearer tracts of woodland, or else were marked by an oriflamme of gorgeous foliage. As though they were set out in different colours on a map, one could distinguish Armenonville, the Pré Catelan, Madrid, the race-course and the foreshores of the Lake. Here and there, some pointless artefact stood out, an imitation grotto or a windmill, the trees

standing aside to make room for it or a lawn holding it out on its lush green platform. One had the feeling that the Bois was not a mere wood, that it was a function of some purpose foreign to the life of the trees of which it was composed; the euphoria I now felt was not caused just by my witnessing the admirable spectacle of autumn, but by a desire. There is much joy in such moments, when one is aware of a pleasure but also momentarily unable to locate the cause of it or even to realise that it does not originate in anything outside oneself. There I was, gazing at the trees with an unrequited tenderness that went beyond them and focussed without my knowing it on the masterpieces of feminine beauty for which they still serve as a brief setting, a few hours each day. I was making my way towards the Allée des Acacias. I walked through coppices which the morning sunlight had cut into new segments, pruning some trees, grafting others together, forming others into clumps. The subtle light drew two trees towards itself and with its great scissors of sunbeams and shadow it sliced away half of the trunk and branches of each one, wove the two remaining halves into a single column of shade outlined by sunshine or else made of them a glowing phantom, a tremulous illusion, caught in a black web of shadows. Whenever a ray of sunlight gilded the highest branches, they sparkled wetly and seemed to have just surfaced out of the liquid deep-green atmosphere in which the whole coppice still stood submerged, as though under the sea. For the trees went on living with a vitality of their own, which, once they had lost all their leaves, shone all the more brightly from the green velvet sheaths round their trunks or from the white glow of the mistletoe berries sprinkled in the tops of the poplars, as perfectly spherical as the sun and moon in Michelangelo's Creation. Nevertheless, having been constrained for so many years to cohabit with women, these trees reminded me of the dryads, the lovely ladies of the world who flitted brightly among them, covered by their branches and subject like them to the influence of the seasons; they reminded me of those happy trusting times in my youth when I used to haunt this spot, hungering for a glimpse of those momentary masterpieces of elegant femininity created among the unknowing accessories of the trees. But the type of beauty that the pines and acacias in the Bois de Boulogne made me yearn for (these trees being more voluptuously suggestive in that respect than the horse-chestnuts and lilacs that I was on my way to see at Trianon) had never been resolved into mementoes of some historical period, extraneous to my mind, captured in works of art or expressed in a little temple dedicated to Love with gold-webbed leaves littered about it. I walked down by the shore of the Lake, then made my way to the clay-pigeon range. The notion of perfection I carried in my mind had once been associated with a high-sprung victoria and its pair of slender horses, as fierce and frisky as wasps, with eyes as bloodshot as the eyes of Diomedes' cruel horses; and now, with a longing for what I had once loved that was as irresistible as the desire that had made me haunt these roads so many years

before, it was those same horses I wanted to set eyes on again, as Mme Swann's huge coachman, under the watchful eye of the diminutive groom with his child-like cherub's face, struggled to contain the waspish flutter and fury of their thrashing steel wings. But there was nothing to be seen now, alas, except motor-cars driven by moustachioed mechanics, with tall footmen by their sides. I wanted my own two eyes to be confronted with women's tiny hats, so low-set and slim that they looked like mere wreaths about their brows, to see whether they still had the charm that was apparent to the eyes of memory. But all the women's hats were now immense creations laden with fruit and flowers and variegated birds. Instead of the beautiful dresses that had made Mme Swann look like a Queen, there were now filmy printed silks from Liberty's strewn with gaudy flowers like wallpaper and topped by Greco-Saxon tunics that draped them into Tanagra-like folds or Directory styles. Gentlemen who might have strolled with Mme Swann along the Allée de la Reine-Marguerite no longer wore the grey toppers I remembered. In fact, they wore nothing at all on their heads. I found in myself no belief to invest in these new elements of the spectacle, no trust that would give them density, unity and life. They flitted past me, aimless and devoid of conviction, empty of any beauty that my eyes might have attempted, as in the past, to shape into a pleasing composite. These women were ordinary nondescript persons, whose elegance struck no spark of faith in me, whose dress and appearance seemed of no importance. But a belief that has died is outlived by a fetishistic attachment to the old things once animated by its spirit, an attachment whose power waxes so as to conceal the waning of our own ability to endow new things with reality, as though the springs of the divine were to be found, not in ourselves, but in mere things, and our present disbelief were the outcome of a contingent cause, the death of the Gods.

I thought, 'Good Heavens, how ghastly! How on earth can anyone think these motor-cars are as smart as the old carriages and pairs? I may be too old for my time, but I know I was not made for a world in which women go about encumbered by dresses that are not even made out of cloth! What's the point of coming here to walk about among these trees if there's nothing left of all those who used to gather under the delicate autumn glow of the leaves, if vulgarity and folly have replaced the exquisite things that were once to be found among the branches? What horrors! My only consolation will be to think of the women I used to know, now that all elegance is dead and gone.' How would any of these people looking at such frightful creatures in hats smothered in vegetable gardens or aviaries even be capable of appreciating what was once so charming in the sight of Mme Swann in a simple lilac-coloured bonnet or a little hat topped by a single erect iris? Would I ever have been able to make them understand the excitement I had felt on winter mornings at meeting Mme Swann as she took her walk. wearing her otter-skin coat and the merest beret in which two partridge

feathers were stuck like blades, but carrying on her person a suggestion of the artificial warmth of her house in the posy of violets pressed to her bosom, which flaunted their touch of living indigo at the grey skies, the freezing air and the naked branches of the trees, and shared with the blooms standing in vases and flower-pots in her sitting-room, by the blazing fire, beside her silk-covered sofa, and looking out through her closed windows at the falling snow, the same charming habit of considering weather and time of year to be a mere extraneous setting for real life, which they lived in human company, breathing the atmosphere of that especial woman? Nor would it have helped me even if the fashions had remained the same as in former times. Because of the interdependence on one another of the different parts of a single memory, because memory balances them against one another in groupings that we are not at liberty to tamper with, among which we cannot pick and choose, I also wished I could see in the evening in the company of one of those women, sit sipping tea with her in a drawing-room with dark-painted walls (like those still to be seen in Mme Swann's house the year after the ending of this part of my story) and, while the November twilight glowed with the golden warmth, the red-hot blaze, the pink and white flicker of chrysanthemums, share moments like those I had once experienced at a time when (as will be seen) I had never managed to discover the pleasures for which I yearned.† Now however, even though I knew those past moments would lead to nothing, they seemed in retrospect to have contained a charm that sufficed unto itself. I wished I could relive them as I now remembered them to have been. But, sad to say, nowadays drawingrooms were all decorated in Louis XVI style, their uniform whiteness punctuated here and there with blue hydrangeas. In any case, nobody now came back to town until very late in the season. Mme Swann would have been staying at somebody's château in the country, from which she would have written to tell me not to expect her back in Paris before February, long after chrysanthemum-time, if I had asked her to reincarnate for me a memory which I realised belonged to a year in a remote past that I could never recover, if I had asked her to reassemble the disparate elements of a desire in myself which had by now become as unattainable as the very pleasure it had once sought after but never managed to enjoy. In fact, not only the fashions but the women themselves would have had to be the same ones who, in the past, had intrigued me by the things they wore, because in the days when I still had a capacity for belief my imagination had individualized them and haloed each of them with legend. But now, alas, I did see some of those very women in the Allée des Acacias - the Myrtlegrove - and they were aged and awful, the merest shadows of their former selves, fitful shades that flitted among the Virgilian woodland, in a forlorn

[†] The reader may well be confused hereabouts. This whole coda makes more sense if read in its original place — in the next section of the *Recherche* — from which Proust transferred it just before publication of *Swann* in late 1913 (JG).

and febrile search for something or someone. And long after they had melted away among the trees, I still stood there making my futile scrutiny of the empty avenues. The sun had gone in and, with the disappearance of the notion that this place was the Elysium of Women, the world of nature had once more taken possession of the Bois: above the imitation windmill the sky was real and grey; wind ruffled the surface of the Lake, just like water in a lake; large birds flew quickly over the Bois, as though it was a mere wood, and one after the other alighted with raucous calls in the great oaks which, under their druidical crowns and with a majestic Dodonaic grandeur, seemed to proclaim the inhuman emptiness of this desanctified forest and helped me to see more clearly the contradiction inherent in any attempt to rediscover in reality the worlds of memory - for they are worlds which must be for ever devoid of the charm imparted to them partly by memory itself and partly by the fact that they cannot ever be grasped through the senses. The reality I had once known no longer existed. All it took to change that avenue into something else was for Mme Swann not to turn up at the same time as before, looking exactly as she had once been. Places we used to know are not situated solely in the world of space; that is merely where the mind puts them, for the sake of convenience. They were never anything more than a slender slice of reality, surrounded by the mass of contiguous impressions which composed our total life at a particular time. The memory of a certain impression is nothing other than one's regret for a certain moment; and houses, thoroughfares and paths through the wood are, alas, as fleeting as the years.



HE IDEA of attempting a new English version of Du côté de chez Swann arose out of the dismay I felt on first reading the old Scott Moncrieff. This feeling was compounded by my discovery of the uniform mediocrity of other translations from French that came my way, and by the belief that translation was too important to be left to professionals. In translating the first part of Proust, I have tried to preserve his combination of semantic clarity and syntactical complexity. My version may not please all readers; but if some of them judge that it comes closer to Proust, and to real English, than its competitors, they will please me'.

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