MARCEL PROUST

TIME REGAINED

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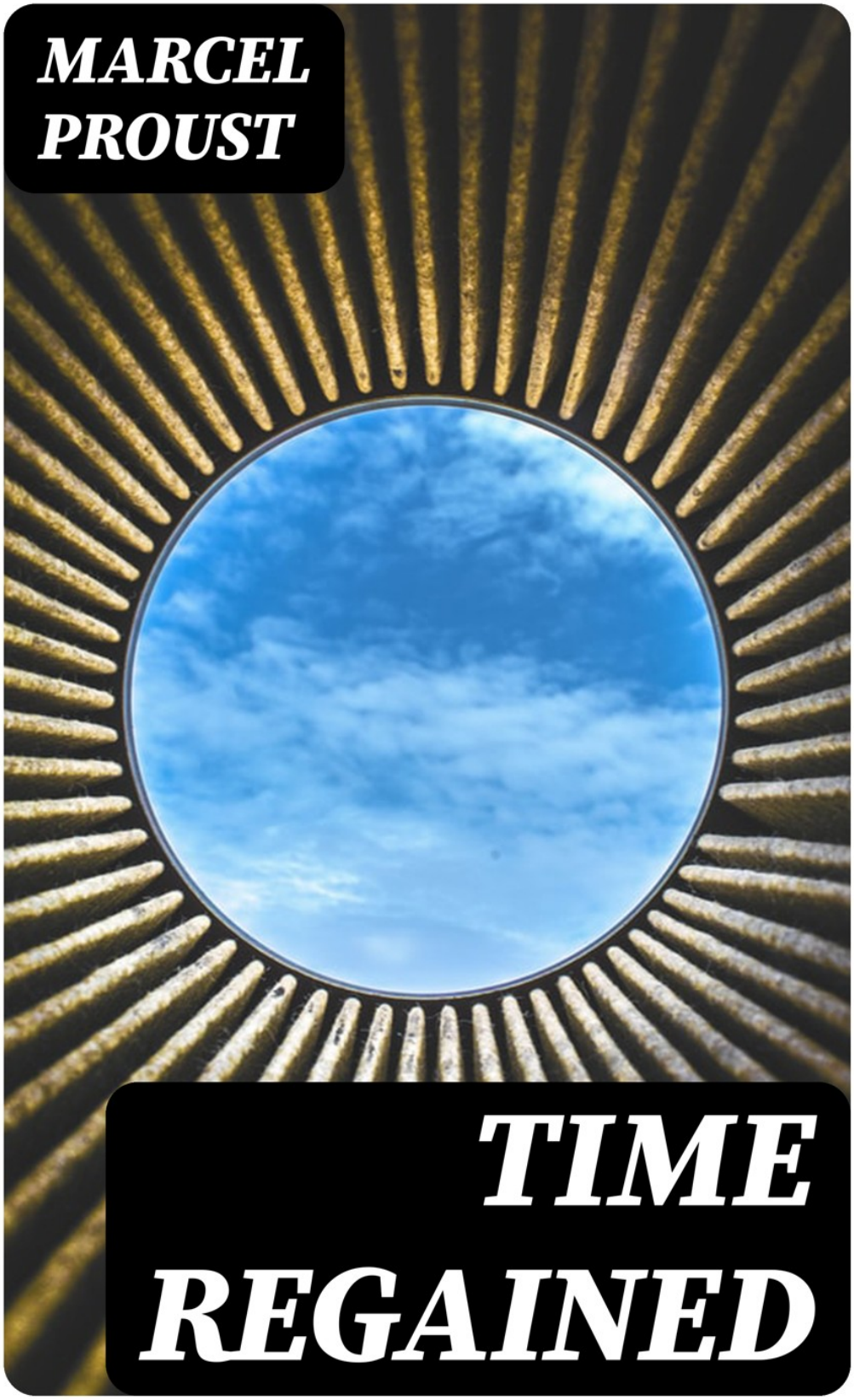

TIME REGAINED

Marcel Proust

Time Regained

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"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past. . . ."

"Oui, si le souvenir grâce à l'oubli, n'a pu contracter aucun lien, jeter aucun chaînon entre lui et la minute présente, s'il est resté à sa place, à sa date, s'il a gardé ses distances, son isolement dans le creux d'une vallée, où à la pointe d'un sommet, il nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau, précisément parce que c'est un air qu'on a respiré autrefois, cet air plus pur que les poètes ont vainement essayé de faire régner dans le Paradis et qui ne pourrait donner cette sensation profonde de renouvellement que s'il avait été respiré déjà, car les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus."

TRANSLATOR'S DEDICATION

To the memory of my friend

CHARLES SCOTT MONCRIEFF

Marcel Proust's incomparable translator

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Baffled by the phrases on page 244 of the volume of the French edition: 'La vie humaine et pensante. . . dans une forteresse,' an appeal to my friend Aldous Huxley brought me the reading I have almost integrally adopted. Both of us are conscious that this rendering is only approximate, the obscurity being only partly due to the elliptical nature of the passage. My belief is that there has either been an editorial misreading of Proust's manuscript or a mistake on the part of the printer, neither of which occurrences are infrequent in the series.

I have also gratefully to acknowledge valuable emendations of the text suggested by Mr. A. G. Chater.

STEPHEN HUDSON

Chapter I.
Tansonville

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Tansonville seemed little more than a place to rest in between two walks or a refuge during a shower. Rather too countrified, it was one of those rural dwellings where every sitting-room is a cabinet of greenery, and where the roses and the birds out in the garden keep you company in the curtains; for they were old and each rose stood out so clearly that it might have been picked like a real one and each bird put in a cage, unlike those pretentious modern decorations in which, against a silver background, all the apple trees in Normandy are outlined in the Japanese manner, to trick the hours you lie in bed. I spent the whole day in my room, the windows of which opened upon the beautiful verdure of the park, upon the lilacs of the entrance, upon the green leaves of the great trees beside the water and in the forest of Méséglise. It was a pleasure to contemplate all this, I was saying to myself: "How charming to have all this greenery in my window" until suddenly in the midst of the great green picture I recognised the clock tower of the Church of Combray toned in contrast to a sombre blue as though it were far distant, not a reproduction of the clock tower but its very self which, defying time and space, thrust itself into the midst of the luminous greenery as if it were engraved upon my window-pane. And if I left my room, at the end of the passage, set towards me like a band of scarlet, I perceived the hangings of a little sitting-room which though only made of muslin, were of a scarlet so vivid that they would catch fire if a single sun-ray touched them.

During our walks Gilberte alluded to Robert as though he were turning away from her but to other women. It was true that his life was encumbered with women as masculine attachments encumber that of women-loving men, both having that character of forbidden fruit, of a place vainly usurped, which unwanted objects have in most houses.

Once I left Gilberte early and in the middle of the night, while still half-asleep, I called Albertine. I had not been thinking or dreaming of her, nor had I mistaken her for Gilberte. My memory had lost its love for Albertine but it seems there must be an involuntary memory of the limbs, pale and sterile imitation of the other, which lives longer as certain mindless animals or plants live longer than man. The legs, the arms are full of blunted memories; a reminiscence germinating in my arm had made me seek the bell behind my back, as I used to in my room in Paris and I had called Albertine, imagining my dead friend lying beside me as she so often did at evening when we fell asleep together, counting the time it would take Françoise to reach us, so that Albertine might without imprudence pull the bell I could not find.

Robert came to Tansonville several times while I was there. He was very different from the man I had known before. His life had not coarsened him as it had M. de Charlus, but, on the contrary, had given him more than ever the easy carriage of a cavalry officer although at his marriage he had resigned his commission. As gradually M. de Charlus had got heavier, Robert (of course he was much younger, yet one felt he was bound to approximate to that type with age like certain women who resolutely sacrifice their faces to their figures and never abandon Marienbad, believing, as they cannot hope to keep all their youthful charms, that of the outline to represent best the others) had

become slimmer, swifter, the contrary effect of the same vice. This velocity had other psychological causes; the fear of being seen, the desire not to seem to have that fear, the feverishness born of dissatisfaction with oneself and of boredom. He had the habit of going into certain haunts of ill-fame, where as he did not wish to be seen entering or coming out, he effaced himself so as to expose the least possible surface to the malevolent gaze of hypothetical passers-by, and that gust-like motion had remained and perhaps signified the apparent intrepidity of one who wants to show he is unafraid and does not take time to think.

To complete the picture one must reckon with the desire, the older he got, to appear young, and also the impatience of those who are always bored and *blasés*, yet being too intelligent for a relatively idle life, do not sufficiently use their faculties. Doubtless the very idleness of such people may display itself by indifference but especially since idleness, owing to the favour now accorded to physical exercise, has taken the form of sport, even when the latter cannot be practised, feverish activity leaves boredom neither time nor space to develop in.

He had become dried up and gave friends like myself no evidence of sensibility. On the other hand, he affected with Gilberte an unpleasant sensitiveness which he pushed to the point of comedy. It was not that Robert was indifferent to Gilberte; no, he loved her. But he always lied to her and this spirit of duplicity, if it was not the actual source of his lies, was constantly emerging. At such times he believed he could only extricate himself by exaggerating to a ridiculous degree the real pain he felt in giving pain to her. When he arrived at Tansonville he was obliged, he said, to leave the next morning on business with a certain gentleman of those parts, who was expecting him in Paris and who, encountered

that very evening near Combray, unhappily revealed the lie, Robert, having failed to warn him, by the statement that he was back for a month's holiday and would not be in Paris before. Robert blushed, saw Gilberte's faint melancholy smile, and after revenging himself on the unfortunate culprit by an insult, returned earlier than his wife and sent her a desperate note telling her he had lied in order not to pain her, for fear that when he left for a reason he could not tell her, she should think that he had ceased to love her; and all this, written as though it were a lie, was actually true. Then he sent to ask if he could come to her room, and there, partly in real sorrow, partly in disgust with the life he was living, partly through the increasing audacity of his successive pretences, he sobbed and talked of his approaching death, sometimes throwing himself on the floor as though he were ill. Gilberte, not knowing to what extent to believe him, thought him a liar on each occasion, but, disquieted by the presentiment of his approaching death and believing in a general way that he loved her, that perhaps he had some illness she knew nothing about, did not dare to oppose him or ask him to relinquish his journeys. I was unable to understand how he came to have Morel received as though he were a son of the house wherever the Saint-Loups were, whether in Paris or at Tansonville.

Françoise, knowing all that M. de Charlus had done for Jupien and Robert Saint-Loup for Morel, did not conclude that this was a trait which reappeared in certain generations of the Guermantes, but rather—seeing that Legrandin much loved Théodore—came to believe, prudish and narrow-minded as she was, that it was a custom which universality made respectable. She would say of a young man, were it Morel or Théodore: "He is fond of the gentleman who is interested in him and who has so much helped him." And as

in such cases it is the protectors who love, who suffer, who forgive, Françoise did not hesitate between them and the youths they debauched, to give the former the *beau role*, to discover they had a "great deal of heart". She did not hesitate to blame Théodore who had played a great many tricks on Legrandin, yet seemed to have scarcely a doubt as to the nature of their relationship, for she added, "The young man understands he's got to do his share as he says: 'take me away with you, I will be fond of you and pet you,' and, *ma foi*, the gentleman has so much heart that Théodore is sure to find him kinder than he deserves, for he's a hot head while the gentleman is so good that I often say to Jeannette (Theodore's fiancée), 'My dear, if ever you're in trouble go and see that gentleman, he would lie on the ground to give you his bed, he is too fond of Théodore to throw him out and he will never abandon him'." It was in the course of one of these colloquies that, having inquired the name of the family with whom Théodore was living in the south, I suddenly grasped that he was the person unknown to me who had asked me to send him my article in the *Figaro* in a letter the calligraphy of which was of the people but charmingly expressed.

In the same fashion Françoise esteemed Saint-Loup more than Morel and expressed the opinion, in spite of the ignoble behaviour of the latter, that the marquis had too good a heart ever to desert him unless great reverses happened to himself.

Saint-Loup insisted I should remain at Tansonville and once let fall, although plainly he was not seeking to please me, that my visit was so great a happiness for his wife that she had assured him, though she had been wretched the whole day, that she was transported with joy the evening I unexpectedly arrived, that, in fact, I had miraculously saved

her from despair, "perhaps from something worse." He begged me to try and persuade her that he loved her, assuring me that the other woman he loved was less to him than Gilberte and that he intended to break with her very soon. "And yet," he added, in such a feline way and with so great a longing to confide that I expected the name of Charlie to pop out at any moment, in spite of himself, like a lottery number, "I had something to be proud of. This woman, who has proved her devotion to me and whom I must sacrifice for Gilberte's sake, never accepted attention from a man, she believed herself incapable of love; I am the first. I knew she had refused herself to everyone, so much so that when I received an adorable letter from her, telling me there could be no happiness for her without me, I could not resist it. Wouldn't it be natural for me to be infatuated with her, were it not intolerable for me to see poor little Gilberte in tears? Don't you think there is something of Rachel in her?" As a matter of fact, it had struck me that there was a vague resemblance between them. This may have been due to a certain similarity of feature, owing to their common Jewish origin, which was little marked in Gilberte, and yet when his family wanted him to marry, drew Robert towards her. The likeness was perhaps due also to Gilberte coming across photographs of Rachel and wanting to please Robert by imitating certain of the actress's habits, such as always wearing red bows in her hair, a black ribbon on her arm and dyeing her hair to appear dark. Then, fearing her sorrows affected her appearance, she tried to remedy it by occasionally exaggerating the artifice. One day, when Robert was to come to Tansonville for twenty-four hours, I was amazed to see her come to table looking so strangely different from her present as well as from her former self, that I was as

bewildered as if I were facing an actress, a sort of Theodora. I felt that in my curiosity to know what it was that was changed about her, I was looking at her too fixedly. My curiosity was soon satisfied when she blew her nose, for in spite of all her precautions, the assortment of colours upon the handkerchief would have constituted a varied palette and I saw that she was completely painted. To this was due the bleeding appearance of her mouth which she forced into a smile, thinking it suited her, while the knowledge that the hour was approaching when her husband ought to arrive without knowing whether or not he would send one of those telegrams of which the model had been wittily invented by M. de Guermantes: "Impossible to come, lie follows," paled her cheeks and ringed her eyes.

"Ah, you see," Robert said to me with a deliberately tender accent which contrasted with his former spontaneous affection, with an alcoholic voice and the inflection of an actor. "To make Gilberte happy! What wouldn't I do to secure that? You can never know how much she has done for me." The most unpleasant of all was his vanity, for Saint-Loup, flattered that Gilberte loved him, without daring to say that he loved Morel, gave her details about the devotion the violinist pretended to have for him, which he well knew were exaggerated if not altogether invented seeing that Morel demanded more money of him every day. Then confiding Gilberte to my care, he left again for Paris. To anticipate somewhat (for I am still at Tansonville), I had the opportunity of seeing him once again in society, though at a distance, when his words, in spite of all this, were so lively and charming that they enabled me to recapture the past. I was struck to see how much he was changing. He resembled his mother more and more, but the proud and well-bred manner he inherited from her and which she

possessed to perfection, had become, owing to his highly accomplished education, exaggerated and stilted; the penetrating look common to the Guermantes, gave him, from a peculiar animal-like habit, a half-unconscious air of inspecting every place he passed through. Even when motionless, that colouring which was his even more than it was the other Guermantes', a colouring which seemed to have a whole golden day's sunshine in it, gave him so strange a plumage, made of him so rare a creature, so unique, that one wanted to own him for an ornithological collection; but when, besides, this bird of golden sunlight put itself in motion, when, for instance, I saw Robert de Saint-Loup at a party, he had a way of throwing back his head so joyously and so proudly, under the golden plumage of his slightly ruffled hair, the movement of his neck was so much more supple, proud and charming than that of other men, that, between the curiosity and the half-social, half-zoological admiration he inspired, one asked oneself whether one had found him in the Faubourg Saint-Germain or in the Jardin des Plantes and whether one was looking at a *grand seigneur* crossing a drawing-room or a marvellous bird walking about in its cage. With a little imagination the warbling no less than the plumage lent itself to that interpretation. He spoke in what he believed the *grand-siècle* style and thus imitated the manners of the Guermantes, but an indefinable trifle caused them to become those of M. de Charlus. "I must leave you an instant," he said during that party, when M. de Marsantes was some distance away, "to pay court to my niece a moment." As to that love of which he never ceased telling me, there were others besides Charlie, although he was the only one that mattered to him. Whatever kind of love a man may have, one is always wrong about the number of

his *liaisons*, because one interprets friendships as *liaisons*, which is an error of addition, and also because it is believed that one proved *liaison* excludes another, which is a different sort of mistake. Two people may say, "I know X's mistress," and each be pronouncing a different name, yet neither be wrong. A woman one loves rarely suffices for all our needs, so we deceive her with another whom we do not love. As to the kind of love which Saint-Loup had inherited from M. de Charlus, the husband who is inclined that way generally makes his wife happy. This is a general law, to which the Guermantes were exceptions, because those of them who had that taste wanted people to believe they were women-lovers and, advertising themselves with one or another, caused the despair of their wives. The Courvoisiers acted more sensibly. The young Vicomte de Courvoisier believed himself the only person on earth and since the beginning of the world to be tempted by one of his own sex. Imagining that the preference came to him from the devil, he fought against it and married a charming woman by whom he had several children. Then one of his cousins taught him that the practice was fairly common, even went to the length of taking him to places where he could satisfy it. M. de Courvoisier only loved his wife the more for this and redoubled his uxorious zeal so that the couple were cited as the best *ménage* in Paris. As much could not be said for Saint-Loup, because Robert, not content with invertion, caused his wife endless jealousy by running after mistresses without getting any pleasure from them.

It is possible that Morel, being exceedingly dark, was necessary to Saint-Loup, as shadow is to sunlight. In this ancient family, one could well imagine a *grand seigneur*, blonde, golden, intelligent, dowered with every prestige, acquiring and retaining in the depths of his being, a secret

taste, unknown to everyone, for negroes. Robert, moreover, never allowed conversation to touch his peculiar kind of love affair. If I said a word he would answer, with a detachment that caused his eye-glass to fall, "Oh! I don't know, I haven't an idea about such things. If you want information about them, my dear fellow, I advise you to go to someone else. I am a soldier, nothing more. I'm as indifferent to matters of that kind as I am passionately interested in the Balkan Wars. Formerly the history of battles interested you. In those days I told you we should again witness typical battles, even though the conditions were completely different, such, for instance, as the great attempt of envelopment by the wing in the Battle of Ulm. Well, special as those Balkan Wars may be, Lullé Burgas is again Ulm, envelopment by the wing. Those are matters you can talk to me about. But I know no more about the sort of thing you are alluding to than I do about Sanscrit." On the other hand, when he had gone, Gilberte referred voluntarily to the subjects Robert thus disdained when we talked together. Certainly not in connection with her husband, for she was unaware, or pretended to be unaware, of everything. But she enlarged willingly upon them when they concerned other people, whether because she saw in their case a sort of indirect excuse for Robert or whether, divided like his uncle between a severe silence on these subjects and an urge to pour himself out and to slander, he had been able to instruct her very thoroughly about them. Amongst those alluded to, no one was less spared than M. de Charlus; doubtless this was because Robert, without talking to Gilberte about Morel, could not help repeating to her in one form or another what had been told him by the violinist who pursued his former benefactor with his hatred. These conversations which Gilberte affected, permitted me to ask her if in similar

fashion Albertine, whose name I had for the first time heard on her lips when the two were school friends, had the same tastes. Gilberte refused to give me this information. For that matter, it had for a long time ceased to afford me the slightest interest. Yet I continued to concern myself mechanically about it, just like an old man who has lost his memory now and then wants news of his dead son.

Another day I returned to the charge and asked Gilberte again if Albertine loved women. "Oh, not at all," she answered. "But you formerly said that she was very bad form." "I said that? You must be mistaken. In any case, if I did say it—but you are mistaken—I was on the contrary speaking of little love affairs with boys and, at that age, those don't go very far."

Did Gilberte say this to hide that she herself, according to Albertine, loved women and had made proposals to her, or (for others are often better informed about our life than we think) did Gilberte know that I had loved and been jealous of Albertine and (others being apt to know more of the truth than we believe, exaggerating it and so erring by excessive suppositions, while we were hoping they were mistaken through lack of any supposition at all) did she imagine that I was so still, and was she, out of kindness, blind-folding me which one is always ready to do to jealous people? In any case, Gilberte's words, since the "bad form" of former days leading to the certificate of moral life and habits of to-day, followed an inverse course to the affirmations of Albertine, who had almost come to avowing half-relationship with Gilberte herself. Albertine had astonished me in this, as had also what Andrée told me, for, respecting the whole of that little band, I had at first, before knowing its perversity, convinced myself that my suspicions were unjustified, as happens so often when one discovers an innocent girl,

almost ignorant of the realities of life, in a milieu which one had wrongly supposed the most depraved. Afterwards I retraced my steps in the contrary sense, accepting my original suspicions as true. And perhaps Albertine told me all this so as to appear more experienced than she was and to astonish me with the prestige of her perversity in Paris, as at first by the prestige of her virtue at Balbec. So, quite simply, when I spoke to her about women who loved women, she answered as she did, in order not to seem to be unaware of what I meant, as in a conversation one assumes an understanding air when somebody talks of Fourier or of Tobolsk without even knowing what these names mean. She had perhaps associated with the friend of Mlle. Vinteuil and with Andrée, isolated from them by an air-tight partition and, while they believed she was not one of them, she only informed herself afterwards (as a woman who marries a man of letters seeks to cultivate herself) in order to please me, by enabling herself to answer my questions, until she realised that the questions were inspired by jealousy when, unless Gilberte was lying to me, she reversed the engine. The idea came to me, that it was because Robert had learnt from her in the course of a flirtation of the kind that interested him, that she, Gilberte, did not dislike women, that he married her, hoping for pleasures which he ought not to have looked for at home since he obtained them elsewhere. None of these hypotheses were absurd, for in the case of women such as Odette's daughter or of the girls of the little band there is such a diversity, such an accumulation of alternating tastes, that if they are not simultaneous, they pass easily from a *liaison* with a woman to a passion for a man, so much so that it becomes difficult to define their real and dominant taste. Thus Albertine had sought to please me in order to make me marry her but she

had abandoned the project herself because of my undecided and worrying disposition. It was in this too simple form that I judged my affair with Albertine at a time when I only saw it from the outside.

What is curious and what I am unable wholly to grasp, is that about that period all those who had loved Albertine, all those who would have been able to make her do what they wanted, asked, entreated, I would even say, implored me, failing my friendship, at least, to have some sort of relations with them. It would have been no longer necessary to offer money to Mme. Bontemps to send me Albertine. This return of life, coming when it was no longer any use, profoundly saddened me, not on account of Albertine whom I would have received without pleasure if she had been brought to me, not only from Touraine but from the other world, but because of a young woman whom I loved and whom I could not manage to see. I said to myself that if she died or if I did not love her any more, all those who would have been able to bring her to me would have fallen at my feet. Meanwhile, I attempted in vain to work upon them, not being cured by experience which ought to have taught me, if it ever taught anyone anything, that to love is a bad fate like that in fairy stories, against which nothing avails until the enchantment has ceased.

"I've just reached a point," Gilberte continued, "in the book which I have here where it speaks of these things. It's an old Balzac I'm raking over to be on equal terms with my uncles, *La Fille aux yeux d'Or*, but it's incredible, a beautiful nightmare. Maybe a woman can be controlled in that way by another woman, but never by a man." "You are mistaken, I knew a woman who was loved by a man who veritably succeeded in isolating her; she could never see anyone and only went out with trusted servants." "Indeed! How that

must have horrified you who are so kind. Just recently Robert and I were saying you ought to get married, your wife would cure you and make you happy." "No, I've got too bad a disposition." "What nonsense." "I assure you I have. For that matter I have been engaged, but I could not marry."

I did not want to borrow *La Fille aux yeux d'Or* from Gilberte because she was reading it, but on the last evening that I stayed with her, she lent me a book which produced a lively and mingled impression upon me. It was a volume of the unpublished diary of the Goncourts. I was sad that last evening, in going up to my room, to think that I had never gone back one single time to see the Church of Combray which seemed to be awaiting me in the midst of greenery framed in the violet-hued window. I said to myself, "Well, it must be another year, if I do not die between this and then," seeing no other obstacle but my death and not imagining that of the church, which, it seemed to me, must last long after my death as it had lasted long before' my birth. When, before blowing out my candle, I read the passage which I transcribe further on, my lack of aptitude for writing—presaged formerly during my walks on the Guermantes side, confirmed during the visit of which this was the last evening, those eyes of departure, when the routine of habits which are about to end is ceasing and one begins to judge oneself—seemed to me less regrettable; it was as though literature revealed no profound truth while at the same time it seemed sad that it was not what I believed it. The infirm state which was to confine me in a sanatorium seemed less regrettable to me if the beautiful things of which books speak were no more beautiful than those I had seen. But, by a strange contradiction, now that this book spoke of them, I longed to see them. Here are the pages which I read until fatigue closed my eyes.

"The day before yesterday, who should drop in here, to take me to dinner with him but Verdurin, the former critic of the *Revue*, author of that book on Whistler in which truly the doings, the artistic atmosphere of that highly original American are often rendered with great delicacy by that lover of all the refinements, of all the prettinesses of the thing painted which Verdurin is. And while I dress myself to follow him, every now and then, he gives vent to a regular recitation, like the frightened spelling out of a confession by Fromentin on his renunciation of writing immediately after his marriage with 'Madeleine', a renunciation which was said to be due to his habit of taking morphine, the result of which, according to Verdurin, was that the majority of the habitués of his wife's salon, not even knowing that her husband had ever written, spoke to him of Charles Blanc, St. Victor, St. Beuve, and Burty, to whom they believed him completely inferior. 'You Goncourt, you well know, and Gautier knew also that my "Salons" was a very different thing from those pitiable "Maîtres d'autrefois" believed to be masterpieces in my wife's family.' Then, by twilight, while the towers of the Trocadéro were lit up with the last gleams of the setting sun which made them look just like those covered with currant jelly of the old-style confectioners, the conversation continues in the carriage on our way to the Quai Conti where their mansion is, which its owner claims to be the ancient palace of the Ambassadors of Venice and where there is said to be a smoking-room of which Verdurin talks as though it were the drawing-room, transported just as it was in the fashion of the *Thousand and One Nights*, of a celebrated Palazzo, of which I forget the name, a Palazzo with a well-head representing the crowning of the Virgin which Verdurin asserts to be absolutely the finest of

Sansovinos and which is used by their guests to throw their cigar ashes into. And, *ma foi*, when we arrive, the dull green diffusion of moonlight, verily like that under which classical painting shelters Venice and under which the silhouetted cupola of the Institute makes one think of the Salute in the pictures of Guardi, I have somewhat the illusion of being beside the Grand Canal, the illusion reinforced by the construction of the mansion, where from the first floor, one does not see the quay, and by the effective remark of the master of the house, who affirms that the name of the Rue du Bac—I am hanged if I had ever thought of it—came from the ferry upon which the religious of former days, the Miramiones, went to mass at Notre Dame. I took to reloving the whole quarter where I wandered in my youth when my Aunt de Courmont lived there on finding almost contiguous to the mansion of Verdurin, the sign of 'Petit Dunkerque', one of those rare shops surviving otherwise than vignetted in the chalks and rubbings of Gabriel de St. Aubin in which that curious eighteenth century individual came in and seated himself during his moments of idleness to bargain about pretty little French and foreign 'trifles' and the newest of everything produced by Art as a bill-head of the 'Petit Dunkerque' has it, a bill-head of which I believe we alone, Verdurin and I, possess an example and which is one of those shuttle-cock masterpieces of ornamented paper upon which, in the reign of Louis XV accounts were delivered, with its title-head representing a raging sea swarming with ships, a sea with waves which had the appearance of an illustration in the *Edition des Fermiers Généraux de l'Huître et des Plaideurs*. The mistress of the house, who places me beside her, says amiably that she has decorated her table with nothing but Japanese chrysanthemums but these chrysanthemums are disposed in vases which are the rarest

works of art, one of them of bronze upon which petals of red copper seemed to be the living efflorescence of the flower. There is Cottard the doctor, and his wife, the Polish sculptor Viradobetski, Swann the collector, a Russian *grande dame*, a Princess with a golden name which escapes me, and Cottard whispers in my ear that it is she who had shot point blank at the Archduke Rudolf. According to her I have an absolutely exceptional literary position in Galicia and in the whole north of Poland, a girl in those parts never consenting to promise her hand without knowing if her betrothed is an admirer of La Faustin.

"'You cannot understand, you western people,' exclaims by way of conclusion the princess who gives me the impression, *ma foi*, of an altogether superior intelligence, 'that penetration by a writer into the intimate life of a woman.' A man with shaven chin and lips, with whiskers like a butler, beginning with that tone of condescension of a secondary professor preparing first form boys for the Saint-Charlemagne, that is Brichot, the university don. When my name was mentioned by Verdurin he did not say a word to show that he knew our books, which means for me anger, discouragement aroused by this conspiracy the Sorbonne organises against us, bringing contradiction and hostile silence even into the charming house where I am being entertained. We proceed to table and there is then an extraordinary procession of plates which are simply masterpieces of the art of the porcelain-maker. The connoisseur, whose attention is delicately tickled during the dainty repast, listens all the more complacently to the artistic chatter—while before him pass plates of Yung Tsching with their nasturtium rims yielding to the bluish centre with its rich flowering of the water-iris, a really decorative passage with its dawn-flight of kingfishers and

cranes, a dawn with just that matutinal tone which I gaze at lazily when I awake daily at the Boulevard Montmorency—Dresden plates more finical in the grace of their fashioning, whether in the sleepy anemia of their roses turning to violet in the crushed wine-lees of a tulip or with their rococo design of carnation and myosotis. Plates of Sèvres trellissed by the delicate vermiculation of their white fluting, verticillated in gold or bound upon the creamy plane of their *pâte tendre* by the gay relief of a golden ribbon, finally a whole service of silver on which are displayed those Lucinian myrtles which Dubarry would recognise. And what is perhaps equally rare is the really altogether remarkable quality of the things which are served in it, food delicately manipulated, a stew such as the Parisians, one can shout that aloud, never have at their grandest dinners and which reminds me of certain *cordons bleus* of Jean d'Heurs. Even the *foie gras* has no relation to the tasteless froth which is generally served under that name, and I do not know many places where a simple potato salad is thus made with potatoes having the firmness of a Japanese ivory button and the patina of those little ivory spoons with which the Chinese pour water on the fish that they have just caught. A rich red bejewelling is given to the Venetian goblet which stands before me by an amazing Léoville bought at the sale of M. Montalivet and it is a delight for the imagination and for the eye, I do not fear to say it, for the imagination of what one formerly called the jaw, to have served to one a brill which has nothing in common with that kind of stale brill served on the most luxurious tables which has received on its back the imprint of its bones during the delay of the journey, a brill not accompanied by that sticky glue generally called *sauce blanche* by so many of the chefs in great houses, but by a veritable *sauce blanche* made out of

butter at five francs the pound; to see this brill in a wonderful Tching Hon dish graced by the purple rays of a setting sun on a sea which an amusing band of lobsters is navigating, their rough tentacles so realistically pictured that they seem to have been modelled upon the living carapace, a dish of which the handle is a little Chinaman catching with his line a fish which makes the silvery azure of his stomach an enchantment of mother o' pearl. As I speak to Verdurin of the delicate satisfaction it must be for him to have this refined repast amidst a collection which no prince possesses at the present time, the mistress of the house throws me the melancholy remark: 'One sees how little you know him,' and she speaks of her husband as a whimsical oddity, indifferent to all these beauties, 'an oddity' she repeats, 'that's the word, who has more gusto for a bottle of cider drunk in the rough coolness of a Norman farm.' And the charming woman, in a tone which is really in love with the colours of the country, speaks to us with overflowing enthusiasm of that Normandy where they have lived, a Normandy which must be like an enormous English park, with the fragrance of its high woodlands *à la* Lawrence, with its velvet cryptomeria in their enamelled borders of pink hortensia, with its natural lawns diversified by sulphur-coloured roses falling over a rustic gateway flanked by two intertwined pear-trees resembling with its free-falling and flowering branches the highly ornamental insignia of a bronze applique by Gauthier, a Normandy which must be absolutely unsuspected by Parisians on holiday, protected as it is by the barrier of each of its enclosures, barriers which the Verdurins confess to me they did not commit the crime of removing. At the close of day, as the riot of colour was sleepily extinguished and light only came from the sea curdled almost to a skim-milk blue. 'Ah! Not the sea you

know—' protests my hostess energetically in answer to my remark that Flaubert had taken my brother and me to Trouville, 'That is nothing, absolutely nothing. You must come with me, without that you will never know'—they would go back through real forests of pink-tulle flowers of the rhododendrons, intoxicated with the scent of the gardens, which gave her husband abominable attacks of asthma. 'Yes,' she insisted, 'it is true, real crises of asthma.' Afterwards, the following summer, they returned, housing a whole colony of artists in an admirable dwelling of the Middle Ages, an ancient cloister leased by them for nothing, and *ma foi*, listening to this woman who after moving in so many distinguished circles, had yet kept some of that freedom of speech of a woman of the people, a speech which shows you things with the colour imagination gives to them, my mouth watered at the thought of the life which she confessed to living down there, each one working in his cell or in the salon which was so large that it had two fireplaces. Everyone came in before luncheon for altogether superior conversation interspersed with parlour games, reminding me of those evoked by that masterpiece of Diderot, his letters to Mlle. Volland. Then after luncheon everyone went out, even on days of sunny showers, when the sparkling of the raindrops luminously filtering through the knots of a magnificent avenue of centenarian beechtrees which offered in front of the gates the vista of growth dear to the eighteenth century, and shrubs bearing drops of rain on their flowering buds suspended on their boughs, lingering to watch the delicate dabbling of a bullfinch enamoured of coolness, bathing itself in the tiny nymphembourg basin shaped like the corolla of a white rose. And as I talk to Mme. Verdurin of the landscapes and of the flowers down there, so delicately pastelled by Elstir:

'But it is I who made all that known to him,' she exclaims with an indignant lifting of the head, 'everything, you understand; wonder-provoking nooks, all his themes; I threw them in his face when he left us, didn't I, Auguste? All those themes he has painted. Objects he always knew, to be fair, one must admit that. But flowers he had never seen; no, he did not know the difference between a marsh-mallow and a hollyhock. It was I who taught him, you will hardly believe me, to recognise the jasmine.' And it is, one must admit, a strange reflection that the painter of flowers, whom the connoisseurs of to-day cite to us as the greatest, superior even to Fantin-Latour, would perhaps never have known how to paint jasmine without the woman who was beside me. 'Yes, upon my word, the jasmine; all the roses he produced were painted while he was staying with me, if I did not bring them to him myself. At our house we just called him "M. Tiche". Ask Cottard or Brichot or any of them if he was ever treated here as a great man. He would have laughed at it himself. I taught him how to arrange his flowers; at the beginning he had no idea of it. He never knew how to make a bouquet. He had no natural taste for selection. I had to say to him, "No, do not paint that; it is not worth while, paint this." Oh! If he had listened to us for the arrangement of his life as he did for the arrangement of his flowers, and if he had not made that horrible marriage!' And abruptly, with eyes fevered by their absorption in a reverie of the past, with a nerve-racked gesture, she stretched forth her arms with a frenzied cracking of the joints from the silk sleeves of her bodice, and twisted her body into a suffering pose like some admirable picture which I believe has never been painted, wherein all the pent-up revolt, all the enraged susceptibilities of a friend outraged in her delicacy and in her womanly modesty can be read. Upon that she talks to

us about the admirable portrait which Elstir made for her, a portrait of the Collard family, a portrait given by her to the Luxembourg when she quarrelled with the painter, confessing that it was she who had given him the idea of painting the man in evening dress in order to obtain that beautiful expanse of linen, and she who chose the velvet dress of the woman, a dress offering support in the midst of all the fluttering of the light shades of the curtains, of the flowers, of the fruit, of the gauze dresses of the little girls like ballet-dancers' skirts. It was she, too, who gave him the idea of painting her in the act of arranging her hair, an idea for which the artist was afterwards honoured, which consisted, in short, in painting the woman, not as though on show, but surprised in the intimacy of her everyday life. 'I said to him, "When a woman is doing her hair or wiping her face, or warming her feet, she knows she is not being seen, she executes a number of interesting movements, movements of an altogether Leonardo-like grace."' But upon a sign from Verdurin, indicating that the arousing of this state of indignation was unhealthy for that highly-strung creature which his wife was, Swann drew my admiring attention to the necklace of black pearls worn by the mistress of the house and bought by her quite white at the sale of a descendant of Mme. de La Fayette to whom they had been given by Henrietta of England, pearls which had become black as the result of a fire which destroyed part of the house in which the Verdurins were living in a street the name of which I can no longer remember, a fire after which the casket containing the pearls was found but they had become entirely black. 'And I know the portrait of those pearls on the very shoulders of Mme. de La Fayette, yes, exactly so, their portrait,' insisted Swann in the face of the somewhat wonderstruck exclamations of the guests. 'Their

authentic portrait, in the collection of the Duc de Guermantes. A collection which has not its equal in the world,' he asserts and that I ought to go and see it, a collection inherited by the celebrated Duc who was the favourite nephew of Mme. de Beausergent his aunt, of that Mme. de Beausergent who afterwards became Mme. d'Hayfeld, sister of the Marquise de Villeparisis and of the Princess of Hanover. My brother and I used to be so fond of him in old days when he was a charming boy called Basin, which as a matter of fact, is the first name of the Duc. Upon that, Doctor Cottard, with that delicacy which reveals the man of distinction, returns to the history of the pearls and informs us that catastrophes of that kind produce in the mind of people distortions similar to those one remarks in organic matter and relates in really more philosophical terms than most physicians can command, how the footman of Mme. Verdurin herself, through the horror of this fire where he nearly perished, had become a different man, his hand-writing having so changed that on seeing the first letter which his masters, then in Normandy, received from him, announcing the event, they believed it was the invention of a practical joker. And not only was his handwriting different, Cottard asserts that from having been a completely sober man he had become an abominable drunkard whom Mme. Verdurin had been obliged to discharge. This suggestive dissertation continued, on a gracious sign from the mistress of the house, from the dining-room into the Venetian smoking-room where Cottard told me he had witnessed actual duplications of personality, giving as example the case of one of his patients whom he amiably offers to bring to see me, in whose case Cottard has merely to touch his temples to usher him into a second life, a life in which he remembers nothing of the other, so much