

"Once she was with her daughter, she had probably nothing to say to her," put in Mme. de Villeparisis.

"Most certainly she had: if it was only what she calls 'things so slight that nobody else would notice them but you and me.' And anyhow she was with her. And Labruyère tells us that that is everything. 'To be with the people one loves, to speak to them, not to speak to them, it is all the same.' He is right; that is the only form of happiness," added M. de Charlus in a mournful voice, "and that happiness—alas, life is so ill arranged that one very rarely tastes it; Mme. de Sévigné was after all less to be pitied than most of us. She spent a great part of her life with the person whom she loved."

"You forget that it was not 'love' in her case; the person was her daughter."

"But what matters in life is not whom or what one loves," he went on, in a judicial, peremptory, almost a cutting tone; "it is the fact of loving. What Mme. de Sévigné felt for her daughter has a far better claim to rank with the passion that Racine described in *Andromaque* or *Phèdre* than the common-place relations young Sévigné had with his mistresses. It's the same with a mystic's love for his God. The hard and fast lines with which we circumscribe love arise solely from our complete ignorance of life."

"You think all that of *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, do you?" Saint-Loup asked his uncle in a faintly contemptuous tone. "There is more truth in a single tragedy of Racine than in all the dramatic works of Monsieur Victor Hugo," replied M. de Charlus. "People really are overwhelming," Saint-Loup murmured in my ear. "Preferring Racine to Victor, you may say what you like, it's epoch-making!" He was genuinely distressed by his uncle's words, but the satisfaction of saying "you may say what you like" and, better still, "epoch-making" consoled him.

In these reflexions upon the sadness of having to live apart from the person whom one loves (which were to lead my grandmother to say to me that Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew understood certain things quite as well as his aunt, but in a different way, and moreover had something about him that set him far above the average club man) M. de Charlus not only allowed a refinement of feeling to appear such as men rarely shew; his voice itself, like certain contralto voices which have not been properly trained to the right pitch, so that when they sing it sounds like a duet between a young man and a woman, singing alternately, mounted, when he expressed these delicate sentiments, to its higher notes, took on an unexpected sweetness and seemed to be embodying choirs of betrothed maidens, of sisters, who poured out the treasures of their love. But the bevy of young girls, whom M. de Charlus in his horror of every kind of effeminacy would have been so distressed to learn that he gave the impression of sheltering thus within his voice, did not confine themselves to the interpretation, the

modulation of scraps of sentiment. Often while M. de Charlus was talking one could hear their laughter, shrill, fresh laughter of school-girls or coquettes quizzing their partners with all the archness of clever tongues and pretty wits.

He told us how a house that had belonged to his family, in which Marie Antoinette had slept, with a park laid out by Lenôtre, was now in the hands of the Israels, the wealthy financiers, who had bought it. "Israel—at least that is the name these people go by, which seems to me a generic, a racial term rather than a proper name. One cannot tell; possibly people of that sort do not have names, and are designated only by the collective title of the tribe to which they belong. It is of no importance! But fancy, after being a home of the Guermantes, to belong to Israels!!!" His voice rose. "It reminds me of a room in the Chateau of Blois where the caretaker who was shewing me over said: 'This is where Mary Stuart used to say her prayers; I use it to keep my brooms in.' Naturally I wish to know nothing more of this house that has let itself be dishonoured, any more than of my cousin Clara de Chimay after she left her husband. But I keep a photograph of the house, when it was still unspoiled, just as I keep one of the Princess before her large eyes had learned to gaze on anyone but my cousin. A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shews us things that no longer exist. I could give you a copy, since you are interested in that style of architecture," he said to my grandmother. At that moment, noticing that the embroidered handkerchief which he had in his pocket was shewing some coloured threads, he thrust it sharply down out of sight with the scandalised air of a prudish but far from innocent lady concealing attractions which, by an excess of scrupulosity, she regards as indecent. "Would you believe," he went on, "that the first thing the creatures did was to destroy Lenôtre's park, which is as bad as slashing a picture by Poussin? For that alone, these Israels ought to be in prison. It is true," he added with a smile, after a moment's silence, "that there are probably plenty of other reasons why they should be there! In any case, you can imagine the effect, with that architecture behind it, of an English garden."

"But the house is in the same style as the Petit Trianon," said Mme. de Villeparisis, "and Marie Antoinette had an English garden laid out there."

"Which, all the same, ruins Gabriel's front;" replied M. de Charlus. "Obviously, it would be an act of vandalism now to destroy the Hameau. But whatever may be the spirit of the age, I doubt, all the same, whether, in that respect, a whim of Mme. Israel has the same importance as the memory of the Queen."

Meanwhile my grandmother had been making signs to me to go up to bed, in spite of the urgent appeals of Saint-Loup who, to my utter confusion, had alluded in front of M.

de Charlus to the depression that used often to come upon me at night before I went to sleep, which his uncle must regard as betokening a sad want of virility. I lingered a few moments still, then went upstairs, and was greatly surprised when, a little later, having heard a knock at my bedroom door and asked who was there, I heard the voice of M. de Charlus saying dryly:

"It is Charlus. May I come in, sir? Sir," he began again in the same tone as soon as he had shut the door, "my nephew was saying just now that you were apt to be worried at night before going to sleep, and also that you were an admirer of Bergotte's books. As I had one here in my luggage which you probably do not know, I have brought it to help you to while away these moments in which you are not comfortable."

I thanked M. de Charlus with some warmth and told him that, on the contrary, I had been afraid that what Saint-Loup had said to him about my discomfort when night came would have made me appear in his eyes more stupid even than I was.

"No; why?" he answered, in a gentler voice. "You have not, perhaps, any personal merit; so few of us have! But for a time at least you have youth, and that is always a charm. Besides, sir, the greatest folly of all is to laugh at or to condemn in others what one does not happen oneself to feel. I love the night, and you tell me that you are afraid of it. I love the scent of roses, and I have a friend whom it throws into a fever. Do you suppose that I think, for that reason, that he is inferior to me? I try to understand everything and I take care to condemn nothing. After all, you must not be too sorry for yourself; I do not say that these moods of depression are not painful, I know that one can be made to suffer by things which the world would not understand. But at least you have placed your affection wisely, in your grandmother. You see a great deal of her. And besides, that is a legitimate affection, I mean one that is repaid. There are so many of which one cannot say that."

He began walking up and down the room, looking at one thing, taking up another. I had the impression that he had something to tell me, and could not find the right words to express it.

"I have another volume of Bergotte here; I will fetch it for you," he went on, and rang the bell. Presently a page came. "Go and find me your head waiter. He is the only person here who is capable of obeying an order intelligently," said M. de Charlus stiffly. "Monsieur Aimé, sir?" asked the page. "I cannot tell you his name; yes, I remember now, I did hear him called Aimé. Run along, I am in a hurry." "He won't be a minute, sir, I saw him downstairs just now," said the page, anxious to appear efficient. There was an interval of silence. The page returned. "Sir, M. Aimé has gone to bed. But I can take your message." "No, you have only to get him out of bed." "But I can't do that, sir; he

doesn't sleep here." "Then you can leave us alone." "But, sir," I said when the page had gone, "you are too kind; one volume of Bergotte will be quite enough." "That is just what I was thinking." M. de Charlus walked up and down the room. Several minutes passed in this way, then after a prolonged hesitation, and several false starts, he swung sharply round and, his voice once more stinging, flung at me: "Good night, sir!" and left the room. After all the lofty sentiments which I had heard him express that evening, next day, which was the day of his departure, on the beach, before noon, when I was on my way down to bathe, and M. de Charlus had come across to tell me that my grandmother was waiting for me to join her as soon as I left the water, I was greatly surprised to hear him say, pinching my neck as he spoke, with a familiarity and a laugh that were frankly vulgar:

"But he doesn't give a damn for his old grandmother, does he, eh? Little rascal!"

"What, sir! I adore her!"

"Sir," he said, stepping back a pace, and with a glacial air, "you are still young; you should profit by your youth to learn two things; first, to refrain from expressing sentiments that are too natural not to be taken for granted; and secondly not to dash into speech to reply to things that are said to you before you have penetrated their meaning. If you had taken this precaution a moment ago you would have saved yourself the appearance of speaking at cross-purposes like a deaf man, thereby adding a second absurdity to that of having anchors embroidered on your bathing-dress. I have lent you a book by Bergotte which I require. See that it is brought to me within the next hour by that head waiter with the silly and inappropriate name, who, I suppose, is not in bed at this time of day. You make me see that I was premature in speaking to you last night of the charms of youth; I should have done you a better service had I pointed out to you its thoughtlessness, its inconsequence, and its want of comprehension. I hope, sir, that this little douche will be no less salutary to you than your bathe. But don't let me keep you standing: you may catch cold. Good day, sir."

No doubt he was sorry afterwards for this speech, for some time later I received—in a morocco binding on the front of which was inlaid a panel of tooled leather representing in demi-relief a spray of forget-me-not—the book which he had lent me, and I had sent back to him, not by Aimé who was apparently "off duty", but by the lift-boy.

M. de Charlus having gone, Robert and I were free at last to dine with Bloch. And I realised during this little party that the stories too readily admitted by our friend as funny were favourite stories of M. Bloch senior, and that the son's "really remarkable

person" was always one of his father's friends whom he had so classified. There are a certain number of people whom we admire in our boyhood, a father with better brains than the rest of the family, a teacher who acquires credit in our eyes from the philosophy he reveals to us, a schoolfellow more advanced than we are (which was what Bloch had been to me), who despises the Musset of the *Espoir en Dieu* when we still admire it, and when we have reached Leconte or Claudel will be in ecstasies only over:

A Saint-Biaise, à la Zuecca  
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise:

with which he will include:

Padoue est un fort bel endroit  
Où de très grands docteurs en droit. . . .  
Mais j'aime mieux la polenta. . . .  
Passe dans mon domino noir  
La Toppatelle

and of all the *Nuits* will remember only:

Au Havre, devant l'Atlantique  
A Venise, à l'affreux Lido.  
Où vient sur l'herbe d'un tombeau  
Mourir la pâle Adriatique.

So, whenever we confidently admire anyone, we collect from him, we quote with admiration sayings vastly inferior to the sort which, left to our own judgment, we would sternly reject, just as the writer of a novel puts into it, on the pretext that they are true, things which people have actually said, which in the living context are like a dead weight, form the dull part of the work. Saint-Simon's portraits composed by himself (and very likely without his admiring them himself) are admirable, whereas

what he cites as the charming wit of his clever friends is frankly dull where it has not become meaningless. He would have scorned to invent what he reports as so pointed or so coloured when said by Mme. Cornuel or Louis XIV, a point which is to be remarked also in many other writers, and is capable of various interpretations, of which it is enough to note but one for the present: namely, that in the state of mind in which we "observe" we are a long way below the level to which we rise when we create.

There was, then, embedded in my friend Bloch a father Bloch who lagged forty years behind his son, told impossible stories and laughed as loudly at them from the heart of my friend as did the separate, visible and authentic father Bloch, since to the laugh which the latter emitted, not without several times repeating the last word so that his public might taste the full flavour of the story, was added the braying laugh with which the son never failed, at table, to greet his father's anecdotes. Thus it came about that after saying the most intelligent things young Bloch, to indicate the portion that he had inherited from his family, would tell us for the thirtieth time some of the gems which father Bloch brought out only (with his swallow-tail coat) on the solemn occasions on which young Bloch brought someone to the house on whom it was worth while making an impression; one of his masters, a "chum" who had taken all the prizes, or, this evening, Saint-Loup and myself. For instance: "A military critic of great insight, who had brilliantly worked out, supporting them with proofs, the reasons for which, in the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese must inevitably be beaten and the Russians victorious," or else: "He is an eminent gentleman who passes for a great financier in political circles and for a great politician among financiers." These stories were interchangeable with one about Baron de Rothschild and one about Sir Rufus Isaacs, who were brought into the conversation in an equivocal manner which might let it be supposed that M. Bloch knew them personally.

I was myself taken in, and from the way in which M. Bloch spoke of Bergotte I assumed that he too was an old friend. But with him as with all famous people, M. Bloch knew them only "without actually knowing them", from having seen them at a distance in the theatre or in the street. He imagined, moreover, that his appearance, his name, his personality were not unknown to them, and that when they caught sight of him they had often to repress a stealthy inclination to bow. People in society, because they know men of talent, original characters, and have them to dine in their houses, do not on that account understand them any better. But when one has lived to some extent in society, the silliness of its inhabitants makes one too anxious to live, suppose too high a standard of intelligence in the obscure circles in which people know only "without actually knowing". I was to discover this when I introduced the topic of Bergotte. M.

Bloch was not the only one who was a social success at home. My friend was even more so with his sisters, whom he continually questioned in a hectoring tone, burying his face in his plate, all of which made them laugh until they cried. They had adopted their brother's language, and spoke it fluently, as if it had been obligatory and the only form of speech that people of intelligence might use. When we arrived, the eldest sister said to one of the younger ones: "Go, tell our sage father and our venerable mother!" "Puppies," said Bloch, "I present to you the cavalier Saint-Loup, hurler of javelins, who is come for a few days from Doncières to the dwellings of polished stone, fruitful in horses." And, since he was as vulgar as he was literary, his speech ended as a rule in some pleasantry of a less Homeric kind: "See, draw closer your pepla with fair clasps, what is all that that I see? Does your mother know you're out?" And the misses Bloch subsided in a tempest of laughter. I told their brother how much pleasure he had given me by recommending me to read Bergotte, whose books I had loved.

M. Bloch senior, who knew Bergotte only by sight, and Bergotte's life only from what was common gossip, had a manner quite as indirect of making the acquaintance of his books, by the help of criticisms that were apparently literary. He lived in the world of "very nearlies", where people salute the empty air and arrive at wrong judgments. Inexactitude, incompetence do not modify their assurance; quite the contrary. It is the propitious miracle of self-esteem that, since few of us are in a position to enjoy the society of distinguished people, or to form intellectual friendships, those to whom they are denied still believe themselves to be the best endowed of men, because the optics of our social perspective make every grade of society seem the best to him who occupies it, and beholds as less favoured than himself, less fortunate and therefore to be pitied, the greater men whom he names and calumniates without knowing, judges and despises without understanding them. Even in cases where the multiplication of his modest personal advantages by his self-esteem would not suffice to assure a man the dose of happiness, superior to that accorded to others, which is essential to him, envy is always there to make up the balance. It is true that if envy finds expression in scornful phrases, we must translate "I have no wish to know him" by "I have no means of knowing him." That is the intellectual sense. But the emotional sense is indeed, "I have no wish to know him." The speaker knows that it is not true, but he does not, all the same, say it simply to deceive; he says it because it is what he feels, and that is sufficient to bridge the gulf between them, that is to say to make him happy.

Self-centredness thus enabling every human being to see the universe spread out in a descending scale beneath himself who is its lord, M. Bloch afforded himself the luxury of being pitiless when in the morning, as he drank his chocolate, seeing Bergotte's

signature at the foot of an article in the newspaper which he had scarcely opened, he disdainfully granted the writer an audience soon cut short, pronounced sentence upon him, and gave himself the comforting pleasure of repeating after every mouthful of the scalding brew: "That fellow Bergotte has become unreadable. My word, what a bore the creature can be. I really must stop my subscription. How involved it all is, bread and butter nonsense!" And he helped himself to another slice.

This illusory importance of M. Bloch senior did, moreover, extend some little way beyond the radius of his own perceptions. In the first place his children regarded him as a superior person. Children have always a tendency either to depreciate or to exalt their parents, and to a good son his father is always the best of fathers, quite apart from any objective reason there may be for admiring him. Now, such reasons were not altogether lacking in the case of M. Bloch, who was an educated man, shrewd, affectionate towards his family. In his most intimate circle they were all the more proud of him because, if, in "society", people are judged by a standard (which is incidentally absurd) and according to false but fixed rules, by comparison with the aggregate of all the other fashionable people, in the subdivisions of middle class life, on the other hand, the dinners, the family parties all turn upon certain people who are pronounced good company, amusing, and who in "society" would not survive a second evening. Moreover in such an environment where the artificial values of the aristocracy do not exist, their place is taken by distinctions even more stupid. Thus it was that in his family circle, and even among the remotest branches of the tree, an alleged similarity in his way of wearing his moustache and in the bridge of his nose led to M. Bloch's being called "the Duc d'Aumale's double". (In the world of club pages, the one who wears his cap on one side and his jacket tightly buttoned, so as to give himself the appearance, he imagines, of a foreign officer, is he not also a personage of a sort to his comrades?)

The resemblance was the faintest, but you would have said that it conferred a title. When he was mentioned, it would always be: "Bloch? Which one? The Duc d'Aumale?" as people say "Princesse Murat? Which one? The Queen (of Naples)?" And there were certain other minute marks which combined to give him, in the eyes of the cousinhood, an acknowledged claim to distinction. Not going the length of having a carriage of his own, M. Bloch used on special occasions to hire an open victoria with a pair of horses from the Company, and would drive through the Bois de Boulogne, his body sprawling limply from side to side, two fingers pressed to his brow, other two supporting his chin, and if people who did not know him concluded that he was an "old nuisance", they were all convinced, in the family, that for smartness Uncle Solomon could have taught Gramont-Caderousse a thing or two. He was one of those

people who when they die, because for years they have shared a table in a restaurant on the boulevard with its news-editor, are described as "well known Paris figures" in the social column of the *Radical*. M. Bloch told Saint-Loup and me that Bergotte knew so well why he, M. Bloch, always cut him that as soon as he caught sight of him, at the theatre or in the club, he avoided his eye. Saint-Loup blushed, for it had occurred to him that this club could not be the Jockey, of which his father had been chairman. On the other hand it must be a fairly exclusive club, for M. Bloch had said that Bergotte would never have got into it if he had come up now. So it was not without the fear that he might be "underrating his adversary" that Saint-Loup asked whether the club in question were the Rue Royale, which was considered "lowering" by his own family, and to which he knew that certain Israelites had been admitted. "No," replied M. Bloch in a tone at once careless, proud and ashamed, "it is a small club, but far more pleasant than a big one, the Ganaches. We're very strict there, don't you know." "Isn't Sir Rufus Israel's the chairman?" Bloch junior asked his father, so as to give him the opportunity for a glorious lie, never suspecting that the financier had not the same eminence in Saint-Loup's eyes as in his. The fact of the matter was that the Ganaches club boasted not Sir Rufus Israel's but one of his staff. But as this man was on the best of terms with his employer, he had at his disposal a stock of the financier's cards, and would give one to M. Bloch whenever he wished to travel on a line of which Sir Rufus was a director, the result of which was that old Bloch would say: "I'm just going round to the Club to ask Sir Rufus for a line to the Company." And the card enabled him to dazzle the guards on the trains. The misses Bloch were more interested in Bergotte and, reverting to him rather than pursue the subject of the Ganaches, the youngest asked her brother, in the most serious tone imaginable, for she believed that there existed in the world, for the designation of men of talent, no other terms than those which he was in the habit of using: "Is he really an amazing good egg, this Bergotte? Is he in the category of the great lads, good eggs like Villiers and Catullus?" "I've met him several times at dress rehearsals," said M. Nissim Bernard. "He is an uncouth creature, a sort of Schlemihl." There was nothing very serious in this allusion to Chamisso's story but the epithet "Schlemihl" formed part of that dialect, half-German, half-Jewish, the use of which delighted M. Bloch in the family circle, but struck him as vulgar and out of place before strangers. And so he cast a reproving glance at his uncle. "He has talent," said Bloch. "Ah!" His sister sighed gravely, as though to imply that in that case there was some excuse for me. "All writers have talent," said M. Bloch scornfully. "In fact it appears," went on his son, raising his fork, and screwing up his eyes with an air of impish irony, "that he is going to put up for the Academy." "Go on. He hasn't enough to shew them," replied his father, who seemed not to have for the Academy the same contempt as his son and daughters. "He's not

big enough." "Besides, the Academy is a salon, and Bergotte has no polish," declared the uncle (whose heiress Mme. Bloch was), a mild and inoffensive person whose surname, Bernard, might perhaps by itself have quickened my grandfather's powers of diagnosis, but would have appeared too little in harmony with a face which looked as if it had been brought back from Darius's palace and restored by Mme. Dieulafoy, had not (chosen by some collector desirous of giving a crowning touch of orientalism to this figure from Susa) his first name, Nissim, stretched out above it the pinions of an androcephalous bull from Khorsabad. But M. Bloch never stopped insulting his uncle, whether it was that he was excited by the unresisting good-humour of his butt, or that the rent of the villa being paid by M. Nissim Bernard, the beneficiary wished to shew that he kept his independence, and, more important still, that he was not seeking by flattery to make sure of the rich inheritance to come. What most hurt the old man was being treated so rudely in front of the manservant. He murmured an unintelligible sentence of which all that could be made out was: "when the meschores are in the room". "Meschores", in the Bible, means "the servant of God". In the family circle the Blochs used the word when they referred to their own servants, and were always exhilarated by it, because their certainty of not being understood either by Christians or by the servants themselves enhanced in M. Nissim Bernard and M. Bloch their twofold distinction of being "masters" and at the same time "Jews". But this latter source of satisfaction became a source of displeasure when there was "company". At such times M. Bloch, hearing his uncle say "meschores", felt that he was making his oriental side too prominent, just as a light-of-love who has invited some of her sisters to meet her respectable friends is annoyed if they allude to their profession or use words that do not sound quite nice. Therefore, so far from his uncle's request's producing any effect on M. Bloch, he, beside himself with rage, could contain himself no longer. He let no opportunity pass of scarifying his wretched uncle. "Of course, when there is a chance of saying anything stupid, one can be quite certain that you won't miss it. You would be the first to lick his boots if he were in the room!" shouted M. Bloch, while M. Nissim Bernard in sorrow lowered over his plate the ringleted beard of King Sargon. My friend, when he began to grow his beard, which also was blue-black and crimped, became very like his great-uncle.

"What! Are you the son of the Marquis de Marsantes? Why, I knew him very well," said M. Nissim Bernard to Saint-Loup. I supposed that he meant the word "knew" in the sense in which Bloch's father had said that he knew Bergotte, namely by sight. But he went on: "Your father was one of my best friends." Meanwhile Bloch had turned very red, his father was looking intensely cross, the misses Bloch were choking with suppressed laughter. The fact was that in M. Nissim Bernard the love of ostentation

which in M. Bloch and his children was held in check, had engendered the habit of perpetual lying. For instance, if he was staying in an hotel, M. Nissim Bernard, as M. Bloch equally might have done, would have his newspapers brought to him always by his valet in the dining-room, in the middle of luncheon, when everybody was there, so that they should see that he travelled with a valet. But to the people with whom he made friends in the hotel the uncle used to say what the nephew would never have said, that he was a Senator. He might know quite well that they would sooner or later discover that the title was usurped; he could not, at the critical moment, resist the temptation to assume it. M. Bloch suffered acutely from his uncle's lies and from all the embarrassments that they led to. "Don't pay any attention to him, he talks a great deal of nonsense," he whispered to Saint-Loup, whose interest was all the more whetted, for he was curious to explore the psychology of liars. "A greater liar even than the Ithacan Odysseus, albeit Athene called him the greatest liar among mortals," his son completed the indictment. "Well, upon my word!" cried M. Nissim Bernard, "If I'd only known that I was going to sit down to dinner with my old friend's son! Why, I have a photograph still of your father at home, in Paris, and any number of letters from him. He used always to call me 'uncle', nobody ever knew why. He was a charming man, sparkling. I remember so well a dinner I gave at Nice; there were Sardou, Labiche, Augier," "Molière, Racine, Corneille," M. Bloch added with sarcasm, while his son completed the tale of guests with "Plautus, Menander, Kalidasa." M. Nissim Bernard, cut to the quick, stopped short in his reminiscence, and, ascetically depriving himself of a great pleasure, remained silent until the end of dinner.

"Saint-Loup with helm of bronze," said Bloch, "have a piece more of this duck with thighs heavy with fat, over which the illustrious sacrificer of birds has spilled numerous libations of red wine."

As a rule, after bringing out from his store for the entertainment of a distinguished guest his anecdotes of Sir Rufus Israels and others, M. Bloch, feeling that he had succeeded in touching and melting his son's heart, would withdraw, so as not to spoil his effect in the eyes of the "big pot". If, however, there was an absolutely compelling reason, as for instance on the night when his son won his fellowship, M. Bloch would add to the usual string of anecdotes the following ironical reflexion which he ordinarily reserved for his own personal friends, so that young Bloch was extremely proud to see it produced for his: "The Government have acted unpardonably. They have forgotten to consult M. Coquelin! M. Coquelin has let it be known that he is displeased." (M. Bloch prided himself on being a reactionary, with a contempt for theatrical people.)

But the misses Bloch and their brother reddened to the tips of their ears, so much impressed were they when Bloch senior, to shew that he could be regal to the last in

his entertainment of his son's two 'chums', gave the order for champagne to be served, and announced casually that, as a treat for us, he had taken three stalls for the performance which a company from the Opéra-Comique was giving that evening at the Casino. He was sorry that he had not been able to get a box. They had all been taken. However, he had often been in the boxes, and really one saw and heard better down by the orchestra. All very well, only, if the defect of his son, that is to say the defect which his son believed to be invisible to other people, was coarseness, the father's was avarice. And so it was in a decanter that we were served with, under the name of champagne, a light sparkling wine, while under that of orchestra stalls he had taken three in the pit, which cost half as much, miraculously persuaded by the divine intervention of his defect that neither at table nor in the theatre (where the boxes were all empty) would the defect be noticed. When M. Bloch had let us moisten our lips in the flat glasses which his son dignified with the style and tide of "craters with deeply hollowed flanks", he made us admire a picture to which he was so much attached that he had brought it with him to Balbec. He told us that it was a Rubens. Saint-Loup asked innocently if it was signed. M. Bloch replied, blushing, that he had had the signature cut off to make it fit the frame, but that it made no difference, as he had no intention of selling the picture. Then he hurriedly bade us good night, in order to bury himself in the *Journal Officiel*, back numbers of which littered the house, and which, he informed us, he was obliged to read carefully on account of his "parliamentary position" as to the precise nature of which, however, he gave us no enlightenment. "I shall take a muffler," said Bloch, "for Zephyrus and Boreas are disputing to which of them shall belong the fish-teeming sea, and should we but tarry a little after the show is over, we shall not be home before the first flush of Eos, the rosy-fingered. By the way," he asked Saint-Loup when we were outside, and I trembled, for I realised at once that it was of M. de Charlus that Bloch was speaking in that tone of irony, "who was that excellent old card dressed in black that I saw you walking with, the day before yesterday, on the beach?" "That was my uncle." Saint-Loup was ruffled. Unfortunately, a "floater" was far from seeming to Bloch a thing to be avoided. He shook with laughter. "Heartiest congratulations; I ought to have guessed; he has an excellent style, the most priceless dial of an old 'gaga' of the highest lineage." "You are absolutely mistaken; he is an extremely clever man," retorted Saint-Loup, now furious. "I am sorry about that; it makes him less complete. All the same, I should like very much to know him, for I flatter myself I could write some highly adequate pieces about old buffers like that. Just to see him go by, he's killing. But I should leave out of account the caricature side, which really is hardly worthy of an artist enamoured of the plastic beauty of phrases, of his mug, which (you'll forgive me) doubled me up for a moment with joyous laughter, and I should bring into prominence the aristocratic

side of your uncle, who after all has a distinct bovine effect, and when one has finished laughing does impress one by his great air of style. But," he went on, addressing myself this time, "there is also a matter of a very different order about which I have been meaning to question you, and every time we are together, some god, blessed denizen of Olympus, makes me completely forget to ask for a piece of information which might before now have been and is sure some day to be of the greatest use to me. Tell me, who was the lovely lady I saw you with in the Jardin d'Acclimatation accompanied by a gentleman whom I seem to know by sight and a little girl with long hair?" It had been quite plain to me at the time that Mme. Swann did not remember Bloch's name, since she had spoken of him by another, and had described my friend as being on the staff of some Ministry, as to which I had never since then thought of finding out whether he had joined it. But how came it that Bloch, who, according to what she then told me, had got himself introduced to her, was ignorant of her name? I was so much surprised that I stopped for a moment before answering. "Whoever she is," he went on, "hearty congratulations; you can't have been bored with her. I picked her up a few days before that on the Zone railway, where, speaking of zones, she was so kind, as to undo hers for the benefit of your humble servant; I have never had such a time in my life, and we were just going to make arrangements to meet again when somebody she knew had the bad taste to get in at the last station but one." My continued silence did not appear to please Bloch. "I was hoping," he said, "thanks to you, to learn her address, so as to go there several times a week to taste in her arms the delights of Eros, dear to the gods; but I do not insist since you seem pledged to discretion with respect to a professional who gave herself to me three times running, and in the most refined manner, between Paris and the Point-du-Jour. I am bound to see her again, some night."

I called upon Bloch after this dinner; he returned my call, but I was out and he was seen asking for me by Françoise, who, as it happened, albeit he had visited us at Combray, had never set eyes on him until then. So that she knew only that one of "the gentlemen" who were friends of mine had looked in to see me, she did not know "with what object", dressed in a nondescript way, which had not made any particular impression upon her. Now though I knew quite well that certain of Françoise's social ideas must for ever remain impenetrable by me, ideas based, perhaps, partly upon confusions between words, between names which she had once and for all time mistaken for one another, I could not restrain myself, who had long since abandoned the quest for enlightenment in such cases, from seeking—and seeking, moreover, in vain—to discover what could be the immense significance that the name of Bloch had for Françoise. For no sooner had I mentioned to her that the young man whom she had

seen was M. Bloch than she recoiled several paces, so great were her stupor and disappointment. "What! Is that M. Bloch?" she cried, thunderstruck, as if so portentous a personage ought to have been endowed with an appearance which "made you know" as soon as you saw him that you were in the presence of one of the great ones of the earth; and, like some one who has discovered that an historical character is not "up to" the level of his reputation, she repeated in an impressed tone, in which I could detect latent, for future growth, the seeds of a universal scepticism: "What! Is that M. Bloch? Well, really, you would never think it, to look at him." She seemed also to bear me a grudge, as if I had always "overdone" the praise of Bloch to her. At the same time she was kind enough to add: "Well, he may be M. Bloch, and all that. I'm sure Master can say he's every bit as good."

She had presently, with respect to Saint-Loup, whom she worshipped, a disillusionment of a different kind and of less severity: she discovered that he was a Republican. Now for all that, when speaking, for instance, of the Queen of Portugal, she would say with that disrespect which is, among the people, the supreme form of respect: "Amélie, Philippe's sister," Françoise was a Royalist. But when it came to a Marquis; a Marquis who had dazzled her at first sight, and who was for the Republic, seemed no longer real. And she shewed the same ill-humour as if I had given her a box which she had believed to be made of gold, and had thanked me for it effusively, and then a jeweller had revealed to her that it was only plated. She at once withdrew her esteem from Saint-Loup, but soon afterwards restored it to him, having reflected that he could not, being the Marquis de Saint-Loup, be a Republican, that he was just pretending, in his own interest, for with such a Government as we had it might be a great advantage to him. From that moment her coldness towards him, her resentment towards myself ceased. And when she spoke of Saint-Loup she said: "He is a hypocrite," with a broad and friendly smile which made it clear that she "considered" him again just as much as when she first knew him, and that she had forgiven him.

As a matter of fact, Saint-Loup was absolutely sincere and disinterested, and it was this intense moral purity which, not being able to find entire satisfaction in a selfish sentiment such as love, nor on the other hand meeting in him the impossibility (which existed in me, for instance) of finding its spiritual nourishment elsewhere than in himself, rendered him truly capable (just as I was incapable) of friendship.

Françoise was no less mistaken about Saint-Loup when she complained that he had "that sort of" air, as if he did not look down upon the people, but that it was all just a pretence, and you had only to see him when he was in a temper with his groom. It had indeed sometimes happened that Robert would scold his groom with a certain amount of brutality, which proved that he had the sense not so much of the difference

as of the equality between classes and masses. "But," he said in answer to my rebuke of his having treated the man rather harshly, "why should I go out of my way to speak politely to him? Isn't he my equal? Isn't he just as near to me as any of my uncles and cousins? You seem to think that I ought to treat him with respect, as an inferior. You talk like an aristocrat!" he added scornfully.

And indeed if there was a class to which he shewed himself prejudiced and hostile, it was the aristocracy, so much so that he found it as hard to believe in the superior qualities of a man in society as he found it easy to believe in those of a man of the people. When I mentioned the Princesse de Luxembourg, whom I had met with his aunt:

"An old trout," was his comment. "Like all that lot. She's a sort of cousin of mine, by the way."

Having a strong prejudice against the people who frequented it, he went rarely into "Society", and the contemptuous or hostile attitude which he adopted towards it served to increase, among all his near relatives, the painful impression made by his intimacy with a woman on the stage, a connexion which, they declared, would be his ruin, blaming it specially for having bred in him that spirit of denigration, that bad spirit, and for having led him astray, after which it was only a matter of time before he would have dropped out altogether. And so, many easy-going men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain were without compunction when they spoke of Robert's mistress. "Those girls do their job," they would say, "they are as good as anybody else. But that one; no, thank you! We cannot forgive her. She has done too much harm to a fellow we were fond of." Of course, he was not the first to be caught in that snare. But the others amused themselves like men of the world, continued to think like men of the world about politics, about everything. As for him, his family found him "soured". They did not bear in mind that, for many young men of fashion who would otherwise remain uncultivated mentally, rough in their friendships, without gentleness or taste—it is very often their mistress who is their real master, and connexions of this sort the only school of morals in which they are initiated into a superior culture, and learn the value of disinterested relations. Even among the lower orders (who, when it comes to coarseness, so often remind us of the world of fashion) the woman, more sensitive, finer, more leisured, is driven by curiosity to adopt certain refinements, respects certain beauties of sentiment and of art which, though she may fail to understand them, she nevertheless places above what has seemed most desirable to the man, above money or position. Now whether the mistress be a young blood's (such as Saint-Loup) or a young workman's (electricians, for instance, must now be included in our truest order of Chivalry) her lover has too much admiration and respect for her not

to extend them also to what she herself respects and admires; and for him the scale of values is thereby reversed. Her sex alone makes her weak; she suffers from nervous troubles, inexplicable things which in a man, or even in another woman—a woman whose nephew or cousin he was—would bring a smile to the lips of this stalwart young man. But he cannot bear to see her suffer whom he loves. The young nobleman who, like Saint-Loup, has a mistress acquires the habit, when he takes her out to dine, of carrying in his pocket the valerian "drops" which she may need, of ordering the waiter, firmly and with no hint of sarcasm, to see that he shuts the doors quietly and not to put any damp moss on the table, so as to spare his companion those discomforts which himself he has never felt, which compose for him an occult world in whose reality she has taught him to believe, discomforts for which he now feels pity without in the least needing to understand them, for which he will still feel pity when other women than she shall be the sufferers. Saint-Loup's mistress—as the first monks of the middle ages taught Christendom—had taught him to be kind to animals, for which she had a passion, never moving without her dog, her canaries, her love-birds; Saint-Loup looked after them with motherly devotion and treated as brutes the people who were not good to dumb creatures. On the other hand, an actress, or so-called actress, like this one who was living with him,—whether she were intelligent or not, and as to that I had no knowledge—by making him find the society of fashionable women boring, and look upon having to go out to a party as a painful duty, had saved him from snobbishness and cured him of frivolity. If, thanks to her, his social engagements filled a smaller place in the life of her young lover, at the same time, whereas if he had been simply a drawing-room man, vanity or self-interest would have dictated his choice of friends as rudeness would have characterised his treatment of them, his mistress had taught him to bring nobility and refinement into his friendship. With her feminine instinct, with a keener appreciation in men of certain qualities of sensibility which her lover might perhaps, without her guidance, have misunderstood and laughed at them, she had always been swift to distinguish from among the rest of Saint-Loup's friends, the one who had a real affection for him, and to make that one her favourite. She knew how to make him feel grateful to such a friend, shew his gratitude, notice what things gave his friend pleasure and what pain. And presently Saint-Loup, without any more need of her to prompt him, began to think of all these things by himself, and at Balbec, where she was not with him, for me whom she had never seen, whom he had perhaps not yet so much as mentioned in his letters to her, of his own accord would pull up the window of a carriage in which I was sitting, take out of the room the flowers that made me feel unwell, and when he had to say good-bye to several people at once manage to do so before it was actually time for him to go, so as to be left alone and last with me, to make that distinction between them and

me, to treat me differently from the rest. His mistress had opened his mind to the invisible, had brought a serious element into his life, delicacy into his heart, but all this escaped his sorrowing family who repeated: "That creature will be the death of him; meanwhile she's doing what she can to disgrace him." It is true that he had succeeded in getting out of her all the good that she was capable of doing him; and that she now caused him only incessant suffering, for she had taken an intense dislike to him and tormented him in every possible way. She had begun, one fine day, to look upon him as stupid and absurd because the friends that she had among the younger writers and actors had assured her that he was, and she duly repeated what they had said with that passion, that want of reserve which we shew whenever we receive from without and adopt as our own opinions or customs of which we previously knew nothing. She readily professed, like her actor friends, that between Saint-Loup and herself there was a great gulf fixed, and not to be crossed, because they were of different races, because she was an intellectual and he, whatever he might pretend, the born enemy of the intellect. This view of him seemed to her profound, and she sought confirmation of it in the most insignificant words, the most trivial actions of her lover. But when the same friends had further convinced her that she was destroying, in company so ill-suited to her, the great hopes which she had, they said, aroused in them, that her lover would leave a mark on her, that by living with him she was spoiling her future as an artist; to her contempt for Saint-Loup was added the same hatred that she would have felt for him if he had insisted upon inoculating her with a deadly germ. She saw him as seldom as possible, at the same time postponing the hour of a definite rupture, which seemed to me a highly improbable event. Saint-Loup made such sacrifices for her that unless she was ravishingly beautiful (but he had always refused to shew me her photograph, saying: "For one thing, she's not a beauty, and besides she always takes badly. These are only some snapshots that I took myself with my kodak; they would give you a wrong idea of her.") it would surely be difficult for her to find another man who would consent to anything of the sort. I never reflected that a certain obsession to make a name for oneself, even when one has no talent, that the admiration, no more than the privately expressed admiration of people who are imposing on one, can (although it may not perhaps have been the case with Saint-Loup's mistress) be, even for a little prostitute, motives more determining than the pleasure of making money. Saint-Loup who, without quite understanding what was going on in the mind of his mistress, did not believe her to be completely sincere either in her unfair reproaches or in her promises of undying love, had all the same at certain moments the feeling that she would break with him whenever she could, and accordingly, impelled no doubt by the instinct of self-preservation which was part of his love, a love more clear-sighted, possibly, than Saint-Loup himself, making use, too, of a practical capacity for

business which was compatible in him with the loftiest and blindest flights of the heart, had refused to settle upon her any capital, had borrowed an enormous sum so that she should want nothing, but made it over to her only from day to day. And no doubt, assuming that she really thought of leaving him, she was calmly waiting until she had feathered her nest, a process which, with the money given her by Saint-Loup, would not perhaps take very long, but would all the same require a time which must be conceded to prolong the happiness of my new friend—or his misery.

This dramatic period of their connexion, which had now reached its most acute stage, the most cruel for Saint-Loup, for she had forbidden him to remain in Paris, where his presence exasperated her, and had forced him to spend his leave at Balbec, within easy reach of his regiment—had begun one evening at the house of one of Saint-Loup's aunts, on whom he had prevailed to allow his friend to come there, before a large party, to recite some of the speeches from a symbolical play in which she had once appeared in an "advanced" theatre, and for which she had made him share the admiration that she herself professed.

But when she appeared in the room, with a large lily in her hand, and wearing a costume copied from the *Ancilia Domini*, which she had persuaded Saint-Loup was an absolute "vision of beauty", her entrance had been greeted, in that assemblage of club men and duchesses, with smiles which the monotonous tone of her chantings, the oddity of certain words and their frequent recurrence had changed into fits of laughter, stifled at first but presently so uncontrollable that the wretched reciter had been unable to go on. Next day Saint-Loup's aunt had been universally censured for having allowed so grotesque an actress to appear in her drawing-room. A well-known duke made no bones about telling her that she had only herself to blame if she found herself criticised. "Damn it all, people really don't come to see 'turns' like that! If the woman had talent, even; but she has none and never will have any. 'Pon my soul, Paris is not such a fool as people make out. Society does not consist exclusively of imbeciles. This little lady evidently believed that she was going to take Paris by surprise. But Paris is not so easily surprised as all that, and there are still some things that they can't make us swallow."

As for the actress, she left the house with Saint-Loup, exclaiming:

"What do you mean by letting me in for those geese, those uneducated bitches, those dirty corner-boys? I don't mind telling you, there wasn't a man in the room who didn't make eyes at me or squeeze my foot, and it was because I wouldn't look at them that they were out for revenge."

Words which had changed Robert's antipathy for people in society into a horror that was at once deep and distressing, and was provoked in him most of all by those who least deserved it, devoted kinsmen who, on behalf of the family, had sought to persuade Saint-Loup's lady to break with him, a move which she represented to him as inspired by their passion for her. Robert, although he had at once ceased to see them, used to imagine when he was parted from his mistress as he was now, that they or others like them were profiting by his absence to return to the charge and had possibly prevailed over her. And when he spoke of the sensualists who were disloyal to their friends, who sought to seduce their friends' wives, tried to make them come to houses of assignation, his whole face would glow with suffering and hatred.

"I would kill them with less compunction than I would kill a dog, which is at least a well-behaved beast, and loyal and faithful. There are men who deserve the guillotine if you like, far more than poor wretches who have been led into crime by poverty and by the cruelty of the rich."

He spent the greater part of his time in sending letters and telegrams to his mistress. Every time that, while still preventing him from returning to Paris, she found an excuse to quarrel with him by post, I read the news at once in his evident discomposure. Inasmuch as his mistress never told him what fault she found with him, suspecting that possibly if she did not tell him it was because she did not know herself, and simply had had enough of him, he would still have liked an explanation and used to write to her: "Tell me what I have done wrong; I am quite ready to acknowledge my faults," the grief that overpowered him having the effect of persuading him that he had behaved badly.

But she kept him waiting indefinitely for her answers which, when they did come, were meaningless. And so it was almost always with a furrowed brow, and often with empty hands that I would see Saint-Loup returning from the post office, where, alone in all the hotel, he and Françoise went to fetch or to hand in letters, he from a lover's impatience, she with a servant's mistrust of others. (His telegrams obliged him to take a much longer journey.)

When, some days after our dinner with the Blochs, my grandmother told me with a joyful air that Saint-Loup had just been asking her whether, before he left Balbec, she would not like him to take a photograph of her, and when I saw that she had put on her nicest dress on purpose, and was hesitating between several of her best hats, I felt a little annoyed by this childishness, which surprised me coming from her. I even went the length of asking myself whether I had not been mistaken in my grandmother, whether I did not esteem her too highly, whether she was as unconcerned as I had

always supposed in the adornment of her person, whether she had not indeed the very weakness that I believed most alien to her temperament, namely coquetry.

Unfortunately, this displeasure that I derived from the prospect of a photographic "sitting", and more particularly from the satisfaction with which my grandmother appeared to be looking forward to it, I made so apparent that Françoise remarked it and did her best, unintentionally, to increase it by making me a sentimental, gushing speech, by which I refused to appear moved.

"Oh, Master; my poor Madame will be so pleased at having her likeness taken, she is going to wear the hat that her old Françoise has trimmed for her, you must allow her, Master."

I acquired the conviction that I was not cruel in laughing at Françoise's sensibility, by reminding myself that my mother and grandmother, my models in all things, often did the same. But my grandmother, noticing that I seemed cross, said that if this plan of her sitting for her photograph offended me in any way she would give it up. I would not let her; I assured her that I saw no harm in it, and left her to adorn herself, but, thinking that I shewed my penetration and strength of mind, I added a few stinging words of sarcasm, intended to neutralise the pleasure which she seemed to find in being photographed, so that if I was obliged to see my grandmother's magnificent hat, I succeeded at least in driving from her face that joyful expression which ought to have made me glad; but alas, it too often happens, while the people we love best are still alive, that such expressions appear to us as the exasperating manifestation of some unworthy freak of fancy rather than as the precious form of the happiness which we should dearly like to procure for them. My ill-humour arose more particularly from the fact that, during the last week, my grandmother had appeared to be avoiding me, and I had not been able to have her to myself for a moment, either by night or day. When I came back in the afternoon to be alone with her for a little I was told that she was not in the hotel; or else she would shut herself up with Françoise for endless confabulations which I was not permitted to interrupt. And when, after being out all evening with Saint-Loup, I had been thinking on the way home of the moment at which I should be able to go to my grandmother and to kiss her, in vain might I wait for her to knock on the partition between us the three little taps which would tell me to go in and say good night to her; I heard nothing; at length I would go to bed, a little resentful of her for depriving me, with an indifference so new and strange in her, of a joy on which I had so much counted, I would lie still for a while, my heart throbbing as in my childhood, listening to the wall which remained silent, until I cried myself to sleep.

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**SEASCAPE,  
WITH FRIEZE OF GIRLS**

That day, as for some days past, Saint-Loup had been obliged to go to Doncières, where, until his leave finally expired, he would be on duty now until late every afternoon. I was sorry that he was not at Balbec. I had seen alight from carriages and pass, some into the ball-room of the Casino, others into the ice-cream shop, young women who at a distance had seemed to me lovely. I was passing through one of those periods of our youth, unprovided with any one definite love, vacant, in which at all times and in all places—as a lover the woman by whose charms he is smitten—we desire, we seek, we see Beauty. Let but a single real feature—the little that one distinguishes of a woman seen from afar or from behind—enable us to project the form of beauty before our eyes, we imagine that we have seen her before, our heart beats, we hasten in pursuit, and will always remain half-persuaded that it was she, provided that the woman has vanished: it is only if we manage to overtake her that we realise our mistake.

Besides, as I grew more and more delicate, I was inclined to overrate the simplest pleasures because of the difficulties that sprang up in the way of my attaining them. Charming women I seemed to see all round me, because I was too tired, if it was on the beach, too shy if it was in the Casino or at a pastry-cook's, to go anywhere near them. And yet if I was soon to die I should have liked first to know the appearance at close quarters, in reality of the prettiest girls that life had to offer, even although it should be another than myself or no one at all who was to take advantage of the offer. (I did not, in fact, appreciate the desire for possession that underlay my curiosity.) I should have had the courage to enter the ball-room if Saint-Loup had been with me. Left by myself, I was simply hanging about in front of the Grand Hotel until it was time for me to join my grandmother, when, still almost at the far end of the paved "front" along which they projected in a discordant spot of colour, I saw coming towards me five or six young girls, as different in appearance and manner from all the people whom one was accustomed to see at Balbec as could have been, landed there none knew whence, a flight of gulls which performed with measured steps upon the sands—the dawdlers using their wings to overtake the rest—a movement the purpose

of which seems as obscure to the human bathers, whom they do not appear to see, as it is clearly determined in their own birdish minds.

One of these strangers was pushing as she came, with one hand, her bicycle; two others carried golf-clubs; and their attire generally was in contrast to that of the other girls at Balbec, some of whom, it was true, went in for games, but without adopting any special outfit.

It was the hour at which ladies and gentlemen came out every day for a turn on the "front", exposed to the merciless fire of the long glasses fastened upon them, as if they had each borne some disfigurement which she felt it her duty to inspect in its minutest details, by the chief magistrate's wife, proudly seated there with her back to the band-stand, in the middle of that dread line of chairs on which presently they too, actors turned critics, would come and establish themselves, to scrutinise in their turn those others who would then be filing past them. All these people who paced up and down the "front", tacking as violently as if it had been the deck of a ship (for they could not lift a leg without at the same time waving their arms, turning their heads and eyes, settling their shoulders, compensating by a balancing movement on one side for the movement they had just made on the other, and puffing out their faces), and who, pretending not to see so as to let it be thought that they were not interested, but covertly watching, for fear of running against the people who were walking beside or coming towards them, did, in fact, butt into them, became entangled with them, because each was mutually the object of the same secret attention veiled beneath the same apparent disdain; their love—and consequently their fear—of the crowd being one of the most powerful motives in all men, whether they seek to please other people or to astonish them, or to shew them that they despise them. In the case of the solitary, his seclusion, even when it is absolute and ends only with life itself, has often as its primary cause a disordered love of the crowd, which so far overrules every other feeling that, not being able to win, when he goes out, the admiration of his hall porter, of the passers-by, of the cabman whom he hails, he prefers not to be seen by them at all, and with that object abandons every activity that would oblige him to go out of doors.

Among all these people, some of whom were pursuing a train of thought, but if so betrayed its instability by spasmodic gestures, a roving gaze as little in keeping as the circumspect titubation of their neighbours, the girls whom I had noticed, with that mastery over their limbs which comes from perfect bodily condition and a sincere contempt for the rest of humanity, were advancing straight ahead, without hesitation or stiffness, performing exactly the movements that they wished to perform, each of their members in full independence of all the rest, the greater part of their bodies

preserving that immobility which is so noticeable in a good waltzer. They were now quite near me. Although each was a type absolutely different from the others, they all had beauty; but to tell the truth I had seen them for so short a time, and without venturing to look them straight in the face, that I had not yet individualised any of them. Save one, whom her straight nose, her dark complexion pointed in contrast among the rest, like (in a renaissance picture of the Epiphany) a king of Arab cast, they were known to me only, one by a pair of eyes hard, set and mocking; another by cheeks in which the pink had that coppery tint which makes one think of geraniums; and even of these points I had not yet indissolubly attached any one to one of these girls rather than to another; and when (according to the order in which their series met the eye, marvellous because the most different aspects came next one another, because all scales of colours were combined in it, but confused as a piece of music in which I should not have been able to isolate and identify at the moment of their passage the successive phrases, no sooner distinguished than forgotten) I saw emerge a pallid oval, black eyes, green eyes, I knew not if these were the same that had already charmed me a moment ago, I could not bring them home to any one girl whom I might thereby have set apart from the rest and so identified. And this want, in my vision, of the demarcations which I should presently establish between them sent flooding over the group a wave of harmony, the continuous transfusion of a beauty fluid, collective and mobile.

It was not perhaps, in this life of ours, mere chance that had, in forming this group of friends, chosen them all of such beauty; perhaps these girls (whose attitude was enough to reveal their nature, bold, frivolous and hard), extremely sensitive to everything that was ludicrous or ugly, incapable of yielding to an intellectual or moral attraction, had naturally felt themselves, among companions of their own age, repelled by all those in whom a pensive or sensitive disposition was betrayed by shyness, awkwardness, constraint, by what, they would say, "didn't appeal" to them, and from such had held aloof; while they attached themselves, on the other hand, to others to whom they were drawn by a certain blend of grace, suppleness, and physical neatness, the only form in which they were able to picture the frankness of a seductive character and the promise of pleasant hours in one another's company. Perhaps, too, the class to which they belonged, a class which I should not have found it easy to define, was at that point in its evolution at which, whether thanks to its growing wealth and leisure, or thanks to new athletic habits, extended now even to certain plebeian elements, and a habit of physical culture to which had not yet been added the culture of the mind, a social atmosphere, comparable to that of smooth and prolific schools of sculpture, which have not yet gone in for tortured expressions, produces naturally

and in abundance fine bodies with fine legs, fine hips, wholesome and reposeful faces, with an air of agility and guile. And were they not noble and calm models of human beauty that I beheld there, outlined against the sea, like statues exposed to the sunlight upon a Grecian shore?

Just as if, in the heart of their band, which progressed along the "front" like a luminous comet, they had decided that the surrounding crowd was composed of creatures of another race whose sufferings even could not awaken in them any sense of fellowship, they appeared not to see them, forced those who had stopped to talk to step aside, as though from the path of a machine that had been set going by itself, so that it was no good waiting for it to get out of their way, their utmost sign of consciousness being when, if some old gentleman of whom they did not admit the existence and thrust from them the contact, had fled with a frightened or furious, but a headlong or ludicrous motion, they looked at one another and smiled. They had, for whatever did not form part of their group, no affectation of contempt; their genuine contempt was sufficient. But they could not set eyes on an obstacle without amusing themselves by crossing it, either in a running jump or with both feet together, because they were all filled to the brim, exuberant with that youth which we need so urgently to spend that even when we are unhappy or unwell, obedient rather to the necessities of our age than to the mood of the day, we can never pass anything that can be jumped over or slid down without indulging ourselves conscientiously, interrupting, interspersing our slow progress—as Chopin his most melancholy phrase—with graceful deviations in which caprice is blended with virtuosity. The wife of an elderly banker, after hesitating between various possible exposures for her husband, had settled him on a folding chair, facing the "front", sheltered from wind and sun by the band-stand. Having seen him comfortably installed there, she had gone to buy a newspaper which she would read aloud to him, to distract him, one of her little absences which she never prolonged for more than five minutes, which seemed long enough to him but which she repeated at frequent intervals so that this old husband on whom she lavished an attention that she took care to conceal, should have the impression that he was still quite alive and like other people and was in no need of protection. The platform of the band-stand provided, above his head, a natural and tempting springboard, across which, without a moment's hesitation, the eldest of the little band began to run; she jumped over the terrified old man, whose yachting cap was brushed by the nimble feet, to the great delight of the other girls, especially of a pair of green eyes in a "dashing" face, which expressed, for that bold act, an admiration and a merriment in which I seemed to discern a trace of timidity, a shamefaced and blustering timidity which did not exist in the others. "Oh, the poor old

man; he makes me sick; he looks half dead;" said a girl with a croaking voice, but with more sarcasm than sympathy. They walked on a little way, then stopped for a moment in the middle of the road, with no thought whether they were impeding the passage of other people, and held a council, a solid body of irregular shape, compact, unusual and shrill, like birds that gather on the ground at the moment of flight; then they resumed their leisurely stroll along the "front", against a background of sea.

By this time their charming features had ceased to be indistinct and impersonal. I had dealt them like cards into so many heaps to compose (failing their names, of which I was still ignorant) the big one who had jumped over the old banker; the little one who stood out against the horizon of sea with her plump and rosy cheeks, her green eyes; the one with the straight nose and dark complexion, in such contrast to all the rest, another, with a white face like an egg on which a tiny nose described an arc of a circle like a chicken's beak; yet another, wearing a hooded cape (which gave her so poverty-stricken an appearance, and so contradicted the smartness of the figure beneath that the explanation which suggested itself was that this girl must have parents of high position who valued their self-esteem so far above the visitors to Balbec and the sartorial elegance of their own children that it was a matter of the utmost indifference to them that their daughter should stroll on the "front" dressed in a way which humbler people would have considered too modest); a girl with brilliant, laughing eyes and plump, colourless cheeks, a black polo-cap pulled down over her face, who was pushing a bicycle with so exaggerated a movement of her hips, with an air borne out by her language, which was so typically of the gutter and was being shouted so loud, when I passed her (although among her expressions I caught that irritating "live my own life") that, abandoning the hypothesis which her friend's hooded cape had made me construct, I concluded instead that all these girls belonged to the population which frequents the racing-cracks, and must be the very juvenile mistresses of professional bicyclists. In any event, in none of my suppositions was there any possibility of their being virtuous. At first sight—in the way in which they looked at one another and smiled, in the insistent stare of the one with the dull cheeks—I had grasped that they were not. Besides, my grandmother had always watched over me with a delicacy too timorous for me not to believe that the sum total of the things one ought not to do was indivisible or that girls who were lacking in respect for their elders would suddenly be stopped short by scruples when there were pleasures at stake more tempting than that of jumping over an octogenarian.

Though they were now separately identifiable, still the mutual response which they gave one another with eyes animated my self-sufficiency and the spirit of comradeship, in which were kindled at every moment now the interest now the

insolent indifference with which each of them sparkled according as her glance fell on one of her friends or on passing strangers, that consciousness, moreover, of knowing one another intimately enough always to go about together, by making them a 'band apart' established between their independent and separate bodies, as slowly they advanced, a bond invisible but harmonious, like a single warm shadow, a single atmosphere making of them a whole as homogeneous in its parts as it was different from the crowd through which their procession gradually wound.

For an instant, as I passed the dark one with the fat cheeks who was wheeling a bicycle, I caught her smiling, sidelong glance, aimed from the centre of that inhuman world which enclosed the life of this little tribe, an inaccessible, unknown world to which the idea of what I was could certainly never attain nor find a place in it. Wholly occupied with what her companions were saying, this young girl in her polo-cap, pulled down very low over her brow, had she seen me at the moment in which the dark ray emanating from her eyes had fallen on me? In the heart of what universe did she distinguish me? It would have been as hard for me to say as, when certain peculiarities are made visible, thanks to the telescope, in a neighbouring planet, it is difficult to arrive at the conclusion that human beings inhabit it, that they can see us, or to say what ideas the sight of us can have aroused in their minds.

If we thought that the eyes of a girl like that were merely two glittering sequins of mica, we should not be athirst to know her and to unite her life to ours. But we feel that what shines in those reflecting discs is not due solely to their material composition; that it is, unknown to us, the dark shadows of the ideas that the creature is conceiving, relative to the people and places that she knows—the turf of racecourses, the sand of cycling tracks over which, pedalling on past fields and woods, she would have drawn me after her, that little peri, more seductive to me than she of the Persian paradise—the shadows, too, of the home to which she will presently return, of the plans that she is forming or that others have formed for her; and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will. I knew that I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what there was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire; a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be realised, but exhilarating, because what had hitherto been my life, having ceased of a sudden to be my whole life, being no more now than a little part of the space stretching out before me, which I was burning to cover and which was composed of the lives of these girls, offered me that prolongation, that possible multiplication of oneself which is happiness. And no doubt the fact that we had, these girls and I, not one habit—as we had not one idea—in common, was to make it more difficult for me to make friends with them and to please

them. But perhaps, also, it was thanks to those differences, to my consciousness that there did not enter into the composition of the nature and actions of these girls a single element that I knew or possessed, that there came in place of my satiety a thirst—like that with which a dry land burns—for a life which my soul, because it had never until now received one drop of it, would absorb all the more greedily in long draughts, with a more perfect imbibition.

I had looked so closely at the dark cyclist with the bright eyes that she seemed to notice my attention, and said to the biggest of the girls something that I could not hear. To be honest, this dark one was not the one that pleased me most, simply because she was dark and because (since the day on which, from the little path by Tansonville, I had seen Gilberte) a girl with reddish hair and a golden skin had remained for me the inaccessible ideal. But Gilberte herself, had I not loved her principally because she had appeared to me haloed with that aureole of being the friend of Bergotte, of going with him to look at old cathedrals? And in the same way could I not rejoice at having seen this dark girl look at me (which made me hope that it would be easier for me to get to know her first), for she would introduce me to the others, to the pitiless one who had jumped over the old man's head, to the cruel one who had said "He makes me sick, poor old man!" to all of them in turn, among whom, moreover, she had the distinction of being their inseparable companion? And yet the supposition that I might some day be the friend of one or other of these girls, that their eyes, whose incomprehensible gaze struck me now and again, playing upon me unawares, like the play of sunlight upon a wall, might ever, by a miraculous alchemy, allow to interpenetrate among their ineffable particles the idea of my existence, some affection for my person, that I myself might some day take my place among them in the evolution of their course by the sea's edge—that supposition appeared to me to contain within it a contradiction as insoluble as if, standing before some classical frieze or a fresco representing a procession, I had believed it possible for me, the spectator, to take my place, beloved of them, among the god-like hierophants.

The happiness of knowing these girls was, then, not to be realised. Certainly it would not have been the first of its kind that I had renounced. I had only to recall the numberless strangers whom, even at Balbec, the carriage bowling away from them at full speed had forced me for ever to abandon. And indeed the pleasure that was given me by the little band, as noble as if it had been composed of Hellenic virgins, came from some suggestion that there was in it of the flight of passing figures along a road. This fleetingness of persons who are not known to us, who force us to put out from the harbour of life, in which the women whose society we frequent have all, in course of time, laid bare their blemishes, urges us into that state of pursuit in which there is no

longer anything to arrest the imagination. But to strip our pleasures of imagination is to reduce them to their own dimensions, that is to say to nothing. Offered me by one of those procuresses (whose good offices, all the same, the reader has seen that I by no means scorned), withdrawn from the element which gave them so many fine shades and such vagueness, these girls would have enchanted me less. We must have imagination, awakened by the uncertainty of being able to attain our object, to create a goal which hides our other goal from us, and by substituting for sensual pleasures the idea of penetrating into a life prevents us from recognising that pleasure, from tasting its true savour, from restricting it to its own range.

There must be, between us and the fish which, if we saw it for the first time cooked and served on a table, would not appear worth the endless trouble, craft and stratagem that are necessary if we are to catch it, interposed, during our afternoons with the rod, the ripple to whose surface come wavering, without our quite knowing what we intend to do with them, the burnished gleam of flesh, the indefiniteness of a form, in the fluidity of a transparent and flowing azure.

These girls benefited also by that alteration of social values characteristic of seaside life. All the advantages which, in our ordinary environment, extend and magnify our importance, we there find to have become invisible, in fact to be eliminated; while on the other hand the people whom we suppose, without reason, to enjoy similar advantages appear to us amplified to artificial dimensions. This made it easy for strange women generally, and to-day for these girls in particular, to acquire an enormous importance in my eyes, and impossible to make them aware of such importance as I might myself possess.

But if there was this to be said for the excursion of the little band, that it was but an excerpt from the innumerable flight of passing women, which had always disturbed me, their flight was here reduced to a movement so slow as to approach immobility. Now, precisely because, in a phase so far from rapid, faces, no longer swept past me in a whirlwind, but calm and distinct, still appeared beautiful, I was prevented from thinking as I had so often thought when Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage bore me away that, at closer quarters, if I had stopped for a moment, certain details, a pitted skin, drooping nostrils, a silly gape, a grimace of a smile, an ugly figure might have been substituted, in the face and body of the woman, for those that I had doubtless imagined; for there had sufficed a pretty outline, a glimpse of a fresh complexion, for me to add, in entire good faith, a fascinating shoulder, a delicious glance of which I carried in my mind for ever a memory or a preconceived idea, these rapid decipherings of a person whom we see in motion exposing us thus to the same errors as those too rapid readings in which, on a single syllable and without waiting to

identify the rest, we base instead of the word that is in the text a wholly different word with which our memory supplies us. It could not be so with me now. I had looked well at them all; each of them I had seen, not from every angle and rarely in full face, but all the same in two or three aspects different enough to enable me to make either the correction or the verification, to take a "proof" of the different possibilities of line and colour that are hazarded at first sight, and to see persist in them, through a series of expressions, something unalterably material. I could say to myself with conviction that neither in Paris nor at Balbec, in the most favourable hypotheses of what might have happened, even if I had been able to stop and talk to them, the passing women who had caught my eye, had there ever been one whose appearance, followed by her disappearance without my having managed to know her, had left me with more regret than would these, had given me the idea that her friendship might be a thing so intoxicating. Never, among actresses nor among peasants nor among girls from a convent school had I beheld anything so beautiful, impregnated with so much that was unknown, so inestimably precious, so apparently inaccessible. They were, of the unknown and potential happiness of life, an illustration so delicious and in so perfect a state that it was almost for intellectual reasons that I was desperate with the fear that I might not be able to make, in unique conditions which left no room for any possibility of error, proper trial of what is the most mysterious thing that is offered to us by the beauty which we desire and console ourselves for never possessing, by demanding pleasure—as Swann had always refused to do before Odette's day—from women whom we have not desired, so that, indeed, we die without having ever known what that other pleasure was. No doubt it was possible that it was not in reality an unknown pleasure, that on a close inspection its mystery would dissipate and vanish, that it was no more than a projection, a mirage of desire. But in that case I could blame only the compulsion of a law of nature,—which if it applied to these girls would apply to all—and not the imperfection of the object. For it was that which I should have chosen above all others, feeling quite certain, with a botanist's satisfaction, that it was not possible to find collected anywhere rarer specimens than these young flowers who were interrupting at this moment before my eyes the line of the sea with their slender hedge, like a bower of Pennsylvania roses adorning a garden on the brink of a cliff, between which is contained the whole tract of ocean crossed by some steamer, so slow in gliding along the blue and horizontal line that stretches from one stem to the next that an idle butterfly, dawdling in the cup of a flower which the moving hull has long since passed, can, if it is to fly and be sure of arriving before the vessel, wait until nothing but the tiniest slice of blue still separates the questing prow from the first petal of the flower towards which it is steering.

I went indoors because I was to dine at Rivebelle with Robert, and my grandmother insisted that on those evenings, before going out, I must lie down for an hour on my bed, a rest which the Balbec doctor presently ordered me to extend to the other evenings also.

However, there was no need, when one went indoors, to leave the "front" and to enter the hotel by the hall, that is to say from behind. By virtue of an alteration of the clock which reminded me of those Saturdays when, at Combray, we used to have luncheon an hour earlier, now with summer at the full the days had become so long that the sun was still high in the heavens, as though it were only tea-time, when the tables were being laid for dinner in the Grand Hotel. And so the great sliding windows were kept open from the ground. I had but to step across a low wooden sill to find myself in the dining-room, through which I walked and straight across to the lift.

As I passed the office I addressed a smile to the manager, and with no shudder of disgust gathered one for myself from his face which, since I had been at Balbec, my comprehensive study of it was injecting and transforming, little by little, like a natural history preparation. His features had become familiar to me, charged with a meaning that was of no importance but still intelligible, like a script which one can read, and had ceased in any way to resemble these queer, intolerable characters which his face had presented to me on that first day, when I had seen before me a personage now forgotten, or, if I succeeded in recalling him, unrecognisable, difficult to identify with this insignificant and polite personality of which the other was but a caricature, a hideous and rapid sketch. Without either the shyness or the sadness of the evening of my arrival I rang for the attendant, who no longer stood in silence while I rose by his side in the lift as in a mobile thoracic cage propelled upwards along its ascending pillar, but repeated:

"There aren't the people now there were a month back. They're beginning to go now; the days are drawing in." He said this not because there was any truth in it but because, having an engagement, presently, for a warmer part of the coast, he would have liked us all to leave, so that the hotel could be shut up and he have a few days to himself before "rejoining" in his new place. "Rejoin" and "new" were not, by the way, incompatible terms, since, for the lift-boy, "rejoin" was the usual form of the verb "to join". The only thing that surprised me was that he condescended to say "place", for he belonged to that modern proletariat which seeks to efface from our language every trace of the rule of domesticity. A moment later, however, he informed me that in the "situation" which he was about to "rejoin", he would have a smarter "tunic" and a better "salary", the words "livery" and "wages" sounding to him obsolete and unseemly. And as, by an absurd contradiction, the vocabulary has, through thick and

thin, among us "masters", survived the conception of inequality, I was always failing to understand what the lift-boy said. For instance, the only thing that interested me was to know whether my grandmother was in the hotel. Now, forestalling my questions, the lift-boy would say to me: "That lady has just gone out from your rooms." I was invariably taken in; I supposed that he meant my grandmother. "No, that lady; I think she's an employee of yours." As in the old speech of the middle classes, which ought really to be done away with, a cook is not called an employee, I thought for a moment: "But he must be mistaken. We don't own a factory; we haven't any employees." Suddenly I remembered that the title of "employee" is, like the wearing of a moustache among waiters, a sop to their self-esteem given to servants, and realised that this lady who had just gone out must be Françoise (probably on a visit to the coffee-maker, or to watch the Belgian lady's little maid at her sewing), though even this sop did not satisfy the lift-boy, for he would say quite naturally, speaking pityingly of his own class, "with the working man" or "the small person", using the same singular form as Racine when he speaks of "the poor". But as a rule, for my zeal and timidity of the first evening were now things of the past, I no longer spoke to the lift-boy. It was he now who stood there and received no answer during the short journey on which he threaded his way through the hotel, hollowed out inside like a toy, which extended round about us, floor by floor, the ramifications of its corridors in the depths of which the light grew velvety, lost its tone, diminished the communicating doors, the steps of the service stairs which it transformed into that amber haze, unsubstantial and mysterious as a twilight, in which Rembrandt picks out here and there a window-sill or a well-head. And on each landing a golden light reflected from the carpet indicated the setting sun and the lavatory window.

I asked myself whether the girls I had just seen lived at Balbec, and who they could be. When our desire is thus concentrated upon a little tribe of humanity which it singles out from the rest, everything that can be associated with that tribe becomes a spring of emotion and then of reflexion. I had heard a lady say on the "front": "She is a friend of the little Simonet girl" with that self-important air of inside knowledge, as who should say: "He is the inseparable companion of young La Rochefoucauld." And immediately she had detected on the face of the person to whom she gave this information a curiosity to see more of the favoured person who was "a friend of the little Simonet". A privilege, obviously, that did not appear to be granted to all the world. For aristocracy is a relative state. And there are plenty of inexpensive little holes and corners where the son of an upholsterer is the arbiter of fashion and reigns over a court like any young Prince of Wales. I have often since then sought to recall how it first sounded for me there on the beach, that name of Simonet, still quite indefinite as

to its form, which I had failed to distinguish, and also as to its significance, to the designation by it of such and such a person, or perhaps of some one else; imprinted, in fact, with that vagueness, that novelty which we find so moving in the sequel, when the name whose letters are every moment engraved more deeply on our hearts by our incessant thought of them has become (though this was not to happen to me with the name of the "little Simonet" until several years had passed) the first coherent sound that comes to our lips, whether on waking from sleep or on recovering from a swoon, even before the idea of what o'clock it is or of where we are, almost before the word "I", as though the person whom it names were more "we" even than we ourself, and as though after a brief spell of unconsciousness the phase that is the first of all to dissolve is that in which we were not thinking of her. I do not know why I said to myself from the first that the name Simonet must be that of one of the band of girls; from that moment I never ceased to ask myself how I could get to know the Simonet family, get to know them, moreover, through people whom they considered superior to themselves (which ought not to be difficult if the girls were only common little "bounders") so that they might not form a disdainful idea of me. For one cannot have a perfect knowledge, one cannot effect the complete absorption of a person who disdains one, so long as one has not overcome her disdain. And since, whenever the idea of women who are so different from us penetrates our senses, unless we are able to forget it or the competition of other ideas eliminates it, we know no rest until we have converted those aliens into something that is compatible with ourself, our heart being in this respect endowed with the same kind of reaction and activity as our physical organism, which cannot abide the infusion of any foreign body into its veins without at once striving to digest and assimilate it: the little Simonet must be the prettiest of them all—she who, I felt moreover, might yet become my mistress, for she was the only one who, two or three times half-turning her head, had appeared to take cognisance of my fixed stare. I asked the lift-boy whether he knew of any people at Balbec called Simonet. Not liking to admit that there was anything which he did not know, he replied that he seemed to have heard the name somewhere. As we reached the highest landing I told him to have the latest lists of visitors sent up to me.

I stepped out of the lift, but instead of going to my room I made my way farther along the corridor, for before my arrival the valet in charge of the landing, despite his horror of draughts, had opened the window at the end, which instead of looking out to the sea faced the hill and valley inland, but never allowed them to be seen, for its panes, which were made of clouded glass, were generally closed. I made a short "station" in front of it, time enough just to pay my devotions to the view which for once it revealed over the hill against which the back of the hotel rested, a view that contained but a

solitary house, planted in the middle distance, though the perspective and the evening light in which I saw it, while preserving its mass, gave it a sculptural beauty and a velvet background, as though to one of those architectural works in miniature, tiny temples or chapels wrought in gold and enamels, which serve as reliquaries and are exposed only on rare and solemn days for the veneration of the faithful. But this moment of adoration had already lasted too long, for the valet, who carried in one hand a bunch of keys and with the other saluted me by touching his verger's skull-cap, though without raising it, on account of the pure, cool evening air, came and drew together, like those of a shrine, the two sides of the window, and so shut off the minute edifice, the glistening relic from my adoring gaze. I went into my room. Regularly, as the season advanced, the picture that I found there in my window changed. At first it was broad daylight, and dark only if the weather was bad: and then, in the greenish glass which it distended with the curve of its round waves, the sea, set among the iron uprights of my window like a piece of stained glass in its leads, ravelled out over all the deep rocky border of the bay little plumed triangles of an unmoving spray delineated with the delicacy of a feather or a downy breast from Pisanello's pencil, and fixed in that white, unalterable, creamy enamel which is used to depict fallen snow in Gallé's glass.

Presently the days grew shorter and at the moment when I entered my room the violet sky seemed branded with the stiff, geometrical, travelling, effulgent figure of the sun (like the representation of some miraculous sign, of some mystical apparition) leaning over the sea from the hinge of the horizon as a sacred picture leans over a high altar, while the different parts of the western sky exposed in the glass fronts of the low mahogany bookcases that ran along the walls, which I carried back in my mind to the marvellous painting from which they had been detached, seemed like those different scenes which some old master executed long ago for a confraternity upon a shrine, whose separate panels are now exhibited side by side upon the wall of a museum gallery, so that the visitor's imagination alone can restore them to their place on the predella of the reredos. A few weeks later, when I went upstairs, the sun had already set. Like the one that I used to see at Combray, behind the Calvary, when I was coming home from a walk and looking forward to going down to the kitchen before dinner, a band of red sky over the sea, compact and clear-cut as a layer of aspic over meat, then, a little later, over a sea already cold and blue like a grey mullet, a sky of the same pink as the salmon that we should presently be ordering at Rivebelle reawakened the pleasure which I was to derive from the act of dressing to go out to dinner. Over the sea, quite near the shore, were trying to rise, one beyond another, at wider and wider intervals, vapours of a pitchy blackness but also of the polish and consistency of

agate, of a visible weight, so much so that the highest among them, poised at the end of their contorted stem and overreaching the centre of gravity of the pile that had hitherto supported them, seemed on the point of bringing down in ruin this lofty structure already half the height of the sky, and of precipitating it into the sea. The sight of a ship that was moving away like a nocturnal traveller gave me the same impression that I had had in the train of being set free from the necessity of sleep and from confinement in a bedroom. Not that I felt myself a prisoner in the room in which I now was, since in another hour I should have left it and be getting into the carriage. I threw myself down on the bed; and, just as if I had been lying in a berth on board one of those steamers which I could see quite near to me and which, when night came, it would be strange to see stealing slowly out into the darkness, like shadowy and silent but unsleeping swans, I was on all sides surrounded by pictures of the sea.

But as often as not they were, indeed, only pictures; I forgot that below their coloured expanse was hollowed the sad desolation of the beach, travelled by the restless evening breeze whose breath I had so anxiously felt on my arrival at Balbec; besides, even in my room, being wholly taken up with thoughts of the girls whom I had seen go past, I was no longer in a state of mind calm or disinterested enough to allow the formation of any really deep impression of beauty. The anticipation of dinner at Rivebelle made my mood more frivolous still, and my mind, dwelling at such moments upon the surface of the body which I was going to dress up so as to try to appear as pleasing as possible in the feminine eyes which would be scrutinising me in the brilliantly lighted restaurant, was incapable of putting any depth behind the colour of things. And if, beneath my window, the unwearying, gentle flight of sea-martins and swallows had not arisen like a playing fountain, like living fireworks, joining the intervals between their soaring rockets with the motionless white streaming lines of long horizontal wakes of foam, without the charming miracle of this natural and local phenomenon, which brought into touch with reality the scenes that I had before my eyes, I might easily have believed that they were no more than a selection, made afresh every day, of paintings which were shewn quite arbitrarily in the place in which I happened to be and without having any necessary connexion with that place: At one time it was an exhibition of Japanese colour-prints: beside the neat disc of sun, red and round as the moon, a yellow cloud seemed a lake against which black swords were outlined like the trees upon its shore; a bar of a tender pink which I had never seen again after my first paint-box swelled out into a river on either bank of which boats seemed to be waiting high and dry for some one to push them down and set them afloat. And with the contemptuous, bored, frivolous glance of an amateur or a woman hurrying through a picture gallery between two social engagements, I would

say to myself: "Curious sunset, this; it's different from what they usually are but after all I've seen them just as fine, just as remarkable as this." I had more pleasure on evenings when a ship, absorbed and liquefied by the horizon so much the same in colour as herself (an Impressionist exhibition this time) that it seemed to be also of the same matter, appeared as if some one had simply cut out with a pair of scissors her bows and the rigging in which she tapered into a slender filigree from the vaporous blue of the sky. Sometimes the ocean filled almost the whole of my window, when it was enlarged and prolonged by a band of sky edged at the top only by a line that was of the same blue as the sea, so that I supposed it all to be still sea, and the change in colour due only to some effect of light and shade. Another day the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest of which was so filled with innumerable clouds, packed one against another in horizontal bands, that its panes seemed to be intended, for some special purpose or to illustrate a special talent of the artist, to present a "Cloud Study", while the fronts of the various bookcases shewing similar clouds but in another part of the horizon and differently coloured by the light, appeared to be offering as it were the repetition—of which certain of our contemporaries are so fond—of one and the same effect always observed at different hours but able now in the immobility of art to be seen all together in a single room, drawn in pastel and mounted under glass. And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a rosy touch would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be attaching with its wings at the corner of this "Harmony in Grey and Pink" in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master. The pink vanished; there was nothing now left to look at. I rose for a moment and before lying down again drew close the inner curtains. Above them I could see from my bed the ray of light that still remained, growing steadily fainter and thinner, but it was without any feeling of sadness, without any regret for its passing that I thus allowed to die above the curtains the hour at which, as a rule, I was seated at table, for I knew that this day was of another kind than ordinary days, longer, like those arctic days which night interrupts for a few minutes only; I knew that from the chrysalis of the dusk was preparing to emerge, by a radiant metamorphosis, the dazzling light of the Rivebelle restaurant. I said to myself: "It is time"; I stretched myself on the bed, and rose, and finished dressing; and I found a charm in these idle moments, lightened of every material burden, in which while down below the others were dining I was employing the forces accumulated during the inactivity of this last hour of the day only in drying my washed body, in putting on a dinner jacket, in tying my tie, in making all those gestures which were already dictated by the anticipated pleasure of seeing again some woman whom I had noticed, last time, at Rivebelle, who had seemed to be watching me, had perhaps left the table for

a moment only in the hope that I would follow her; it was with joy that I enriched myself with all these attractions so as to give myself, whole, alert, willing, to a new life, free, without cares, in which I would lean my hesitations upon the calm strength of Saint-Loup, and would choose from among the different species of animated nature and the produce of every land those which, composing the unfamiliar dishes that my companion would at once order, might have tempted my appetite or my imagination. And then at the end of the season came the days when I could no longer pass indoors from the "front" through the dining-room; its windows stood open no more, for it was night now outside and the swarm of poor folk and curious idlers, attracted by the blaze of light which they might not reach, hung in black clusters chilled by the north wind to the luminous sliding walls of that buzzing hive of glass.

There was a knock at my door; it was Aimé who had come upstairs in person with the latest lists of visitors.

Aimé could not go away without telling me that Dreyfus was guilty a thousand times over. "It will all come out," he assured me, "not this year, but next. It was a gentleman who's very thick with the General Staff, told me. I asked him if they wouldn't decide to bring it all to light at once, before the year is out. He laid down his cigarette," Aimé went on, acting the scene for my benefit, and shaking his head and his forefinger as his informant had done, as much as to say: "We mustn't expect too much!"—"Not this year, Aimé," those were his very words, putting his hand on my shoulder, "It isn't possible. But next Easter, yes!" And Aimé tapped me gently on my shoulder, saying, "You see, I'm letting you have it exactly as he told me," whether because he was flattered at this act of familiarity by a distinguished person or so that I might better appreciate, with a full knowledge of the facts, the worth of the arguments and our grounds for hope.

It was not without a slight throb of the heart that on the first page of the list I caught sight of the words "Simonet and family." I had in me a store of old dream-memories which dated from my childhood, and in which all the tenderness (tenderness that existed in my heart, but, when my heart felt it, was not distinguishable from anything else) was wafted to me by a person as different as possible from myself. This person, once again I fashioned her, utilising for the purpose the name Simonet and the memory of the harmony that had reigned between the young bodies which I had seen displaying themselves on the beach, in a sportive procession worthy of Greek art or of Giotto. I knew not which of these girls was Mlle. Simonet, if indeed any of them were so named, but I did know that I was loved by Mlle. Simonet and that I was going, with Saint-Loup's help, to attempt to know her. Unfortunately, having on that condition only obtained an extension of his leave, he was obliged to report for duty every day at

Doncières: but to make him forsake his military duty I had felt that I might count, more even than on his friendship for myself, on that same curiosity, as a human naturalist, which I myself had so often felt—even without having seen the person mentioned, and simply on hearing some one say that there was a pretty cashier at a fruiterer's—to acquaint myself with a new variety of feminine beauty. But that curiosity I had been wrong in hoping to excite in Saint-Loup by speaking to him of my band of girls. For it had been and would long remain paralysed in him by his love for that actress whose lover he was. And even if he had felt it lightly stirring him he would have repressed it, from an almost superstitious belief that on his own fidelity might depend that of his mistress. And so it was without any promise from him that he would take an active interest in my girls that we started out to dine at Rivebelle.

At first, when we arrived there, the sun used just to have set, but it was light still; in the garden outside the restaurant, where the lamps had not yet been lighted, the heat of the day fell and settled, as though in a vase along the sides of which the transparent, dusky jelly of the air seemed of such consistency that a tall rose-tree fastened against the dim wall which it streaked with pink veins, looked like the arborescence that one sees at the heart of an onyx. Presently night had always fallen when we left the carriage, often indeed before we started from Balbec if the evening was wet and we had put off sending for the carriage in the hope of the weather's improving. But on those days it was without any sadness that I listened to the wind howling, I knew that it did not mean the abandonment of my plans, imprisonment in my bedroom; I knew that in the great dining-room of the restaurant, which we would enter to the sound of the music of the gipsy band, the innumerable lamps would triumph easily over darkness and chill, by applying to them their broad cauteries of molten gold, and I jumped light-heartedly after Saint-Loup into the closed carriage which stood waiting for us in the rain. For some time past the words of Bergotte, when he pronounced himself positive that, in spite of all I might say, I had been created to enjoy, pre-eminently, the pleasures of the mind, had restored to me, with regard to what I might succeed in achieving later on, a hope that was disappointed afresh every day by the boredom that I felt on setting myself down before a writing-table to start work on a critical essay or a novel. "After all," I said to myself, "possibly the pleasure that its author has found in writing it is not the infallible test of the literary value of a page; it may be only an accessory, one that is often to be found superadded to that value, but the want of which can have no prejudicial effect on it. Perhaps some of the greatest masterpieces were written yawning." My grandmother set my doubts at rest by telling me that I should be able to work and should enjoy working as soon as my health improved. And, our doctor having thought it only prudent to warn me of the grave risks

to which my state of health might expose me, and having outlined all the hygienic precaution that I ought to take to avoid any accident—I subordinated all my pleasures to an object which I judged to be infinitely more important than them, that of becoming strong enough to be able to bring into being the work which I had, possibly, within me; I had been exercising over myself, ever since I had come to Balbec, a scrupulous and constant control. Nothing would have induced me, there, to touch the cup of coffee which would have robbed me of the night's sleep that was necessary if I was not to be tired next day. But as soon as we reached Rivebelle, immediately, what with the excitement of a new pleasure, and finding myself in that different zone into which the exception to our rule of life takes us after it has cut the thread, patiently spun throughout so many days, that was guiding us towards wisdom—as though there were never to be any such thing as to-morrow, nor any lofty aims to be realised, vanished all that exact machinery of prudent hygienic measures which had been working to safeguard them. A waiter was offering to take my coat, whereupon Saint-Loup asked: "You're sure you won't be cold? Perhaps you'd better keep it: it's not very warm in here."

"No, no," I assured him; and perhaps I did not feel the cold; but however that might be, I no longer knew the fear of falling ill, the necessity of not dying, the importance of work. I gave up my coat; we entered the dining-room to the sound of some warlike march played by the gipsies, we advanced between two rows of tables laid for dinner as along an easy path of glory, and, feeling a happy glow imparted to our bodies by the rhythms of the orchestra which rendered us its military honours, gave us this unmerited triumph, we concealed it beneath a grave and frozen mien, beneath a languid, casual gait, so as not to be like those music-hall "mashers" who, having wedded a ribald verse to a patriotic air, come running on to the stage with the martial countenance of a victorious general.

From that moment I was a new man, who was no longer my grandmother's grandson and would remember her only when it was time to get up and go, but the brother, for the time being, of the waiters who were going to bring us our dinner.

The dose of beer—all the more, that of champagne—which at Balbec I should not have ventured to take in a week, albeit to my calm and lucid consciousness the flavour of those beverages represented a pleasure clearly appreciable, since it was also one that could easily be sacrificed, I now imbibed at a sitting, adding to it a few drops of port wine, too much distracted to be able to taste it, and I gave the violinist who had just been playing the two louis which I had been saving up for the last month with a view to buying something, I could not remember what. Several of the waiters, set going among the tables, were flying along at full speed, each carrying on his

outstretched palms a dish which it seemed to be the object of this kind of race not to let fall. And in fact the chocolate *soufflés* arrived at their destination unspilled, the potatoes *à l'anglaise*, in spite of the pace which ought to have sent them flying, came arranged as at the start round the Pauilhac lamb. I noticed one of these servants, very tall, plumed with superb black locks, his face dyed in a tint that suggested rather certain species of rare birds than a human being, who, running without pause (and, one would have said, without purpose) from one end of the room to the other, made me think of one of those macaws which fill the big aviaries in zoological gardens with their gorgeous colouring and incomprehensible agitation. Presently the spectacle assumed an order, in my eyes at least, growing at once more noble and more calm. All this dizzy activity became fixed in a quiet harmony. I looked at the round tables whose innumerable assemblage filled the restaurant like so many planets, as planets are represented in old allegorical pictures. Moreover, there seemed to be some irresistibly attractive force at work among these divers stars, and at each table the diners had eyes only for the tables at which they were not sitting, except perhaps some wealthy amphitryon who, having managed to secure a famous author, was endeavouring to extract from him, thanks to the magic properties of the turning table, a few unimportant remarks at which the ladies marvelled. The harmony of these astral tables did not prevent the incessant revolution of the countless servants who, because instead of being seated like the diners they were on their feet, performed their evolutions in a more exalted sphere. No doubt they were running, one to fetch the *hors d'œuvre*, another to change the wine or with clean glasses. But despite these special reasons, their perpetual course among the round tables yielded, after a time, to the observer the law of its dizzy but ordered circulation. Seated behind a bank of flowers, two horrible cashiers, busy with endless calculations, seemed two witches occupied in forecasting by astrological signs the disasters that might from time to time occur in this celestial vault fashioned according to the scientific conceptions of the middle ages.

And I rather pitied all the diners because I felt that for them the round tables were not planets and that they had not cut through the scheme of things one of those sections which deliver us from the bondage of appearances and enable us to perceive analogies. They thought that they were dining with this or that person, that the dinner would cost roughly so much, and that to-morrow they would begin all over again. And they appeared absolutely unmoved by the progress through their midst of a train of young assistants who, having probably at that moment no urgent duty, advanced processionally bearing rolls of bread in baskets. Some of them, the youngest, stunned by the cuffs which the head waiters administered to them as they passed, fixed

melancholy eyes upon a distant dream and were consoled only if some visitor from the Balbec hotel in which they had once been employed, recognising them, said a few words to them, telling them in person to take away the champagne which was not fit to drink, an order that filled them with pride.

I could hear the twingeing of my nerves, in which there was a sense of comfort independent of the external objects that might have produced it, a comfort which the least shifting of my body or of my attention was enough to make me feel, just as to a shut eye a slight pressure gives the sensation of colour. I had already drunk a good deal of port wine, and if I now asked for more it was not so much with a view to the comfort which the additional glasses would bring me as an effect of the comfort produced by the glasses that had gone before. I allowed the music itself to guide to each of its notes my pleasure which, meekly following, rested on each in turn. If, like one of those chemical industries by means of which are prepared in large quantities bodies which in a state of nature come together only by accident and very rarely, this restaurant at Rivebelle united at one and the same moment more women to tempt me with beckoning vistas of happiness than the hazard of walks and drives would have made me encounter in a year; on the other hand, this music that greeted our ears,—arrangements of waltzes, of German operettas, of music-hall songs, all of them quite new to me—was itself like an ethereal resort of pleasure superimposed upon the other and more intoxicating still. For these tunes, each as individual as a woman, were not keeping, as she would have kept, for some privileged person, the voluptuous secret which they contained: they offered me their secrets, ogled me, came up to me with affected or vulgar movements, accosted me, caressed me as if I had suddenly become more seductive, more powerful and more rich; I indeed found in these tunes an element of cruelty; because any such thing as a disinterested feeling for beauty, a gleam of intelligence was unknown to them; for them physical pleasures alone existed. And they are the most merciless of hells, the most gateless and imprisoning for the jealous wretch to whom they present that pleasure—that pleasure which the woman he loves is enjoying with another—as the only thing that exists in the world for her who is all the world to him. But while I was humming softly to myself the notes of this tune, and returning its kiss, the pleasure peculiar to itself which it made me feel became so dear to me that I would have left my father and mother, to follow it through the singular world which it constructed in the invisible, in lines instinct with alternate languor and vivacity. Although such a pleasure as this is not calculated to enhance the value of the person to whom it comes, for it is perceived by him alone, and although whenever, in the course of our life, we have failed to attract a woman who has caught sight of us, she could not tell whether at that moment we possessed this

inward and subjective felicity which, consequently, could in no way have altered the judgment that she passed on us, I felt myself more powerful, almost irresistible. It seemed to me that my love was no longer something unattractive, at which people might smile, but had precisely the touching beauty, the seductiveness of this music, itself comparable to a friendly atmosphere in which she whom I loved and I were to meet, suddenly grown intimate.

This restaurant was the resort not only of light women; it was frequented also by people in the very best society, who came there for afternoon tea or gave big dinner-parties. The tea-parties were held in a long gallery, glazed and narrow, shaped like a funnel, which led from the entrance hall to the dining-room and was bounded on one side by the garden, from which it was separated (save for a few stone pillars) only by its wall of glass, in which panes would be opened here and there. The result of which, apart from ubiquitous draughts, was sudden and intermittent bursts of sunshine, a dazzling light that made it almost impossible to see the tea-drinkers, so that when they were installed there, at tables crowded pair after pair the whole way along the narrow gully, as they were shot with colours at every movement they made in drinking their tea or in greeting one another, you would have called it a reservoir, a stewpond in which the fisherman has collected all his glittering catch, and the fish, half out of water and bathed in sunlight, dazzle the eye as they mirror an ever-changing iridescence.

A few hours later, during dinner, which, naturally, was served in the dining-room, the lights would be turned on, although it was still quite light out of doors, so that one saw before one's eyes, in the garden, among summer-houses glimmering in the twilight, like pale spectres of evening, alleys whose greyish verdure was pierced by the last rays of the setting sun and, from the lamp-lit room in which we were dining, appeared through the glass—no longer, as one would have said of the ladies who had been drinking tea there in the afternoon, along the blue and gold corridor, caught in a glittering and dripping net—but like the vegetation of a pale and green aquarium of gigantic size seen by a supernatural light. People began to rise from table; and if each party while their dinner lasted, albeit they spent the whole time examining, recognising, naming the party at the next table, had been held in perfect cohesion about their own, the attractive force that had kept them gravitating round their host of the evening lost its power at the moment when, for coffee, they repaired to the same corridor that had been used for the tea-parties; it often happened that in its passage from place to place some party on the march dropped one or more of its human corpuscles who, having come under the irresistible attraction of the rival party, detached themselves for a moment from their own, in which their places were taken

by ladies or gentlemen who had come across to speak to friends before hurrying off with an "I really must fly: I'm dining with M. So-and-So." And for the moment you would have been reminded, looking at them, of two separate nosegays that had exchanged a few of their flowers. Then the corridor too began to empty. Often, since even after dinner there was still a little light left outside, they left this long corridor unlighted, and, skirted by the trees that overhung it on the other side of the glass, it suggested a pleached alley in a wooded and shady garden. Here and there, in the gloom, a fair diner lingered. As I passed through this corridor one evening on my way out I saw, sitting among a group of strangers, the beautiful Princesse de Luxembourg. I raised my hat without stopping. She remembered me, and bowed her head with a smile; in the air, far above her bowed head, but emanating from the movement, rose melodiously a few words addressed to myself, which must have been a somewhat amplified good evening, intended not to stop me but simply to complete the gesture, to make it a spoken greeting. But her words remained so indistinct and the sound which was all that I caught was prolonged so sweetly and seemed to me so musical that it seemed as if among the dim branches of the trees a nightingale had begun to sing. If it so happened that, to finish the evening with a party of his friends whom we had met, Saint-Loup decided to go on to the Casino of a neighbouring village, and, taking them with him, put me in a carriage by myself, I would urge the driver to go as fast as he possibly could, so that the minutes might pass less slowly which I must spend without having anyone at hand to dispense me from the obligation myself to provide my sensibility—reversing the engine, to speak, and emerging from the passivity in which I was caught and held as in the teeth of a machine—with those modifications which, since my arrival at Rivebelle, I had been receiving from other people. The risk of collision with a carriage coming the other way along those lanes where there was barely room for one and it was dark as pitch, the insecurity of the soil, crumbling in many places, at the cliffs edge, the proximity of its vertical drop to the sea, none of these things exerted on me the slight stimulus that would have been required to bring the vision and the fear of danger within the scope of my reasoning. For just as it is not the desire to become famous but the habit of being laborious that enables us to produce a finished work, so it is not the activity of the present moment but wise reflexions from the past that help us to safeguard the future. But if already, before this point, on my arrival at Rivebelle, I had flung irretrievably away from me those crutches of reason and self-control which help our infirmity to follow the right road, if I now found myself the victim of a sort of moral ataxy, the alcohol that I had drunk, by unduly straining my nerves, gave to the minutes as they came a quality, a charm which did not have the result of leaving me more ready, or indeed more resolute to inhibit them, prevent their coming; for while it made me prefer them a thousand times to anything

else in my life, my exaltation made me isolate them from everything else; I was confined to the present, as heroes are or drunkards; eclipsed for the moment, my past no longer projected before me that shadow of itself which we call our future; placing the goal of my life no longer in the realisation of the dreams of that past, but in the felicity of the present moment, I could see nothing now of what lay beyond it. So that, by a contradiction which, however, was only apparent, it was at the very moment in which I was tasting an unfamiliar pleasure, feeling that my life might yet be happy, in which it should have become more precious in my sight; it was at this very moment that, delivered from the anxieties which my life had hitherto contrived to suggest to me, I unhesitatingly abandoned it to the chance of an accident. After all, I was doing no more than concentrate in a single evening the carelessness that, for most men, is diluted throughout their whole existence, in which every day they face, unnecessarily, the dangers of a sea-voyage, of a trip in an aeroplane or motor-car, when there is waiting for them at home the creature whose life their death would shatter, or when there is still stored in the fragile receptacle of their brain that book the approaching publication of which is their one object, now, in life. And so too in the Rivebelle restaurant, on evenings when we just stayed there after dinner, if anyone had come in with the intention of killing me, as I no longer saw, save in a distant prospect too remote to have any reality, my grandmother, my life to come, the books that I was going to write, as I clung now, body and mind, wholly to the scent of the lady at the next table, the politeness of the waiters, the outline of the waltz that the band was playing, as I was glued to my immediate sensation, with no extension beyond its limits, nor any object other than not to be separated from it, I should have died in and with that sensation, I should have let myself be strangled without offering any resistance, without a movement, a bee drugged with tobacco smoke that had ceased to take any thought for preserving the accumulation of its labours and the hopes of its hive.

I ought here to add that this insignificance into which the most serious matters subsided, by contrast with the violence of my exaltation, came in the end to include Mlle. Simonet and her friends. The enterprise of knowing them seemed to me easy now but hardly worth the trouble, for my immediate sensation alone, thanks to its extraordinary intensity, to the joy that its slightest modifications, its mere continuity provoked, had any importance for me; all the rest, parents, work, pleasures, girls at Balbec, weighed with me no more than does a flake of foam in a strong wind that will not let it find a resting place, existed no longer save in relation to this internal power: intoxication makes real for an hour or two a subjective idealism, pure phenomenism; nothing is left now but appearances, nothing exists save as a function of our sublime

self. This is not to say that a genuine love, if we have one, cannot survive in such conditions. But we feel so unmistakably, as though in a new atmosphere, that unknown pressures have altered the dimensions of that sentiment that we can no longer consider it in the old way. It is indeed still there and we shall find it, but in a different place, no longer weighing upon us, satisfied by the sensation which the present affords it, a sensation that is sufficient for us, since for what is not actually present we take no thought. Unfortunately the coefficient which thus alters our values alters them only in the hour of intoxication. The people who had lost all their importance, whom we scattered with our breath like soap-bubbles, will to-morrow resume their density; we shall have to try afresh to settle down to work which this evening had ceased to have any significance. A more serious matter still, these mathematics of the morrow, the same as those of yesterday, in whose problems we shall find ourselves inexorably involved, it is they that govern us even in these hours, and we alone are unconscious of their rule. If there should happen to be, near us, a woman, virtuous or inimical, that question so difficult an hour ago—to know whether we should succeed in finding favour with her—seems to us now a million times easier of solution without having become easier in any respect, for it is only in our own sight, in our own inward sight that we have altered. And she is as much annoyed with us at this moment as we shall be next day at the thought of our having given a hundred francs to the messenger, and for the same reason which in our case has merely been delayed in its operation, namely the absence of intoxication.

I knew none of the women who were at Rivebelle and, because they formed a part of my intoxication just as its reflexions form part of a mirror, appeared to me now a thousand times more to be desired than the less and less existent Mlle. Simonet. One of them, young, fair, by herself, with a sad expression on a face framed in a straw hat trimmed with field-flowers, gazed at me for a moment with a dreamy air and struck me as being attractive. Then it was the turn of another, and of a third; finally of a dark one with glowing cheeks. Almost all of them were known, if not to myself, to Saint-Loup.

He had, in fact, before he made the acquaintance of his present mistress, lived so much in the restricted world of amorous adventure that all the women who would be dining on these evenings at Rivebelle, where many of them had appeared quite by chance, having come to the coast some to join their lovers, others in the hope of finding fresh lovers there, there was scarcely one that he did not know from having spent—or if not he, one or other of his friends—at least one night in their company. He did not bow to them if they were with men, and they, albeit they looked more at him than at anyone else, for the indifference which he was known to feel towards every woman who was not his actress gave him in their eyes an exceptional interest,

appeared not to know him. But you could hear them whispering: "That's young Saint-Loup. It seems he's still quite gone on that girl of his. Got it bad, he has. What a dear boy! I think he's just wonderful; and what style! Some girls do have all the luck, don't they? And he's so nice in every way. I saw a lot of him when I was with d'Orléans. They were quite inseparable, those two. He was going the pace, that time. But he's given it all up now, she can't complain. She's had a good run of luck, that she can say. And I ask you, what in the world can he see in her? He must be a bit of a chump, when all's said and done. She's got feet like boats, whiskers like an American, and her undies are filthy. I can tell you, a little shop girl would be ashamed to be seen in her knickers. Do just look at his eyes a moment; you would jump into the fire for a man like that. Hush, don't say a word; he's seen me; look, he's smiling. Oh, he remembers me all right. Just you mention my name to him, and see what he says!" Between these girls and him I surprised a glance of mutual understanding. I should have liked him to introduce me to them, so that I might ask them for assignations and they give them to me, even if I had been unable to keep them. For otherwise their appearance would remain for all time devoid, in my memory, of that part of itself—just as though it had been hidden by a veil—which varies in every woman, which we cannot imagine in any woman until we have actually seen it in her, and which is apparent only in the glance that she directs at us, that acquiesces in our desire and promises that it shall be satisfied. And yet, even when thus reduced, their aspect was for me far more than that of women whom I should have known to be virtuous, and it seemed to me not to be, like theirs, flat, with nothing behind it, fashioned in one piece with no solidity. It was not, of course, for me what it must be for Saint-Loup who, by an act of memory, beneath the indifference, transparent to him, of the motionless features which affected not to know him, or beneath the dull formality of the greeting that might equally well have been addressed to anyone else, could recall, could see, through dishevelled locks, a swooning mouth, a pair of half-closed eyes, a whole silent picture like those that painters, to cheat their visitors' senses, drape with a decent covering. Undoubtedly, for me who felt that nothing of my personality had penetrated the surface of this woman or that, or would be borne by her upon the unknown ways which she would tread through life, those faces remained sealed. But it was quite enough to know that they did open, for them to seem to me of a price which I should not have set on them had they been but precious medals, instead of lockets within which were hidden memories of love. As for Robert, scarcely able to keep in his place at table, concealing beneath a courtier's smile his warrior's thirst for action—when I examined him I could see how closely the vigorous structure of his triangular face must have been modelled on that of his ancestors' faces, a face devised rather for an ardent bowman than for a delicate student. Beneath his fine skin the bold construction, the feudal architecture were

apparent. His head made one think of those old dungeon keeps on which the disused battlements are still to be seen, although inside they have been converted into libraries.

On our way back to Balbec, of those of the fair strangers to whom he had introduced me I would repeat to myself without a moment's interruption, and yet almost unconsciously: "What a delightful woman!" as one chimes in with the refrain of a song. I admit that these words were prompted rather by the state of my nerves than by any lasting judgment. It was nevertheless true that if I had had a thousand francs on me and if there had still been a jeweller's shop open at that hour, I should have bought the lady a ring. When the successive hours of our life are thus displayed against too widely dissimilar backgrounds, we find that we give away too much of ourselves to all sorts of people who next day will not interest us in the least. But we feel that we are still responsible for what we said to them overnight, and that we must honour our promises.

As on these evenings I came back later than usual to the hotel, it was with joy that I recognised, in a room no longer hostile, the bed on which, on the day of my arrival, I had supposed that it would always be impossible for me to find any rest, whereas now my weary limbs turned to it for support; so that, in turn, thighs, hips, shoulders burrowed into, trying to adhere at every angle to the sheets that covered its mattress, as if my fatigue, like a sculptor, had wished to take a cast of an entire human body. But I could not go to sleep; I felt the approach of morning; peace of mind, health of body were no longer mine. In my distress it seemed that never should I recapture them. I should have had to sleep for a long time if I were to overtake them. But then, had I begun to doze, I must in any event be awakened in a couple of hours by the symphonic concert on the beach. Suddenly I was asleep, I had fallen into that deep slumber in which are opened to us a return to childhood, the recapture of past years, of lost feelings, the disincarnation, the transmigration of the soul, the evoking of the dead, the illusions of madness, retrogression towards the most elementary of the natural kingdoms (for we say that we often see animals in our dreams, but we forget almost always that we are ourselves then an animal deprived of that reasoning power which projects upon things the light of certainty; we present on the contrary to the spectacle of life only a dubious vision, destroyed afresh every moment by oblivion, the former reality fading before that which follows it as one projection of a magic lantern fades before the next as we change the slide), all those mysteries which we imagine ourselves not to know and into which we are in reality initiated almost every night, as we are into the other great mystery of annihilation and resurrection. Rendered more vagabond by the difficulty of digesting my Rivebelle dinner, the successive and

flickering illumination of shadowy zones of my past made of me a being whose supreme happiness would have been that of meeting Legrandin, with whom I had just been talking in my dream.

And then, even my own life was entirely hidden from me by a new setting, like the "drop" lowered right at the front of the stage before which, while the scene shifters are busy behind, actors appear in a fresh "turn". The turn in which I was now cast for a part was in the manner of an Oriental fairy tale; I retained no knowledge of my past or of myself, on account of the intense proximity of this interpolated scenery; I was merely a person who received the bastinado and underwent various punishments for a crime the nature of which I could not distinguish, though it was actually that of having taken too much port wine. Suddenly I awoke and discovered that, thanks to a long sleep, I had not heard a note of the concert. It was already afternoon; I verified this by my watch after several efforts to sit up in bed, efforts fruitless at first and interrupted by backward falls on to my pillow, but those short falls which are a sequel of sleep as of other forms of intoxication, whether due to wine or to convalescence; besides, before I had so much as looked at the time, I was certain that it was past midday. Last night I had been nothing more than an empty vessel, without weight, and (since I must first have gone to bed to be able to keep still, and have been asleep to be able to keep silent) had been unable to refrain from moving about and talking; I had no longer any stability, any centre of gravity, I was set in motion and it seemed that I might have continued on my dreary course until I reached the moon. But if, while I slept, my eyes had not seen the time, my body had nevertheless contrived to calculate it; had measured the hours; not on a dial superficially marked and figured, but by the steadily growing weight of all my replenished forces which, like a powerful clockwork, it had allowed, notch by notch, to descend from my brain into the rest of my body in which there had risen now to above my knees the unbroken abundance of their store. If it is true that the sea was once upon a time our native element, into which we must plunge our cooling blood if we are to recover our strength, it is the same with the oblivion, the mental non-existence of sleep; we seem then to absent ourselves for a few hours from Time, but the forces which we have gathered in that interval without expending them, measure it by their quantity as accurately as the pendulum of the clock or the crumbling pyramid of the sandglass. Nor does one emerge more easily from such sleep than from a prolonged spell of wakefulness, so strongly does everything tend to persist; and if it is true that certain narcotics make us sleep, to have slept for any time is an even stronger narcotic, after which we have great difficulty in making ourselves wake up. Like a sailor who sees plainly the harbour in which he can moor his vessel, still tossed by the waves, I had a quite definite idea of looking at the time and of

getting up, but my body was at every moment cast back upon the tide of sleep; the landing was difficult, and before I attained a position in which I could reach my watch and confront with its time that indicated by the wealth of accumulated material which my stiffened limbs had at their disposal, I fell back two or three times more upon my pillow.

At length I could reach and read it: "Two o'clock in the afternoon!" I rang; but at once I returned to a slumber which, this time, must have lasted infinitely longer, if I was to judge by the refreshment, the vision of an immense night overpassed, which I found on awakening. And yet as my awakening was caused by the entry of Françoise, and as her entry had been prompted by my ringing the bell, this second sleep which, it seemed to me, must have been longer than the other, and had brought me so much comfort and forgetfulness, could not have lasted for more than half a minute.

My grandmother opened the door of my bedroom; I asked her various questions about the Legrandin family.

It is not enough to say that I had returned to tranquillity and health, for it was more than a mere interval of space that had divided them from me yesterday, I had had all night long to struggle against a contrary tide, and now I not only found myself again in their presence, they had once more entered into me. At certain definite and still somewhat painful points beneath the surface of my empty head which would one day be broken, letting my ideas escape for all time, those ideas had once again taken their proper places and resumed that existence by which hitherto, alas, they had failed to profit.

Once again I had escaped from the impossibility of sleeping, from the deluge, the shipwreck of my nervous storms. I feared now not at all the menaces that had loomed over me the evening before, when I was dismantled of repose. A new life was opening before me; without making a single movement, for I was still shattered, although quite alert and well, I savoured my weariness with a light heart; it had isolated and broken asunder the bones of my legs and arms, which I could feel assembled before me, ready to cleave together, and which I was to raise to life merely by singing, like the builder in the fable.

Suddenly I thought of the fair girl with the sad expression whom I had seen at Rivebelle, where she had looked at me for a moment. Many others, in the course of the evening, had seemed to me attractive; now she alone arose from the dark places of my memory. I had felt that she noticed me, had expected one of the waiters to come to me with a whispered message from her. Saint-Loup did not know her and fancied that she was respectable. It would be very difficult to see her, to see her

constantly. But I was prepared to make any sacrifice, I thought now only of her. Philosophy distinguishes often between free and necessary acts. Perhaps there is none to the necessity of which we are more completely subjected than that which, by virtue of an ascending power held in check during the act itself, makes so unfailingly (once our mind is at rest) spring up a memory that was levelled with other memories by the distributed pressure of our indifference, and rush to the surface, because unknown to us it contained, more than any of the others, a charm of which we do not become aware until the following day. And perhaps there is not, either, any act so free, for it is still unprompted by habit, by that sort of mental hallucination which, when we are in love, facilitates the invariable reappearance of the image of one particular person.

This was the day immediately following that on which I had seen file past me against a background of sea the beautiful procession of young girls. I put questions about them to a number of the visitors in the hotel, people who came almost every year to Balbec. They could tell me nothing. Later on, a photograph shewed me why. Who could ever recognise now in them, scarcely and yet quite definitely beyond an age in which one changes so utterly, that amorphous, delicious mass, still wholly infantine, of little girls who, only a few years back, might have been seen sitting in a ring on the sand round a tent; a sort of white and vague constellation in which one would have distinguished a pair of eyes that sparkled more than the rest, a mischievous face, flaxen hair, only to lose them again and to confound them almost at once in the indistinct and milky nebula.

No doubt, in those earlier years that were still so recent, it was not, as it had been yesterday when they appeared for the first time before me, one's impression of the group, but the group itself that had been lacking in clearness. Then those children, mere babies, had been still at that elementary stage in their formation when personality has not set its seal on every face. Like those primitive organisms in which the individual barely exists by itself, consists in the reef rather than in the coral insects that compose it, they were still pressed one against another. Sometimes one pushed her neighbour over, and then a wild laugh, which seemed the sole manifestation of their personal life, convulsed them all at once, obliterating, confounding those indefinite, grinning faces in the congealment of a single cluster, scintillating and tremulous. In an old photograph of themselves, which they were one day to give me, and which I have kept ever since, their infantile troop already presents the same number of participants as, later, their feminine procession; one can see from it that their presence must, even then, have made on the beach an unusual mark which forced itself on the attention; but one cannot recognise them individually in it save by

a process of reasoning, leaving a clear field to all the transformations possible during girlhood, up to the point at which one reconstructed form would begin to encroach upon another individuality, which must be identified also, and whose handsome face, owing to the accessories of a large build and curly hair, may quite possibly have been, once, that wizened and impish little grin which the photograph album presents to us; and the distance traversed in a short interval of time by the physical characteristics of each of these girls making of them a criterion too vague to be of any use, whereas what they had in common and, so to speak, collectively, had at that early date been strongly marked, it sometimes happened that even their most intimate friends mistook one for another in this photograph, so much so that the question could in the last resort be settled only by some detail of costume which one of them could be certain that she herself, and not any of the others, had worn. Since those days, so different from the day on which I had just seen them strolling along the "front", so different and yet so close in time, they still gave way to fits of laughter, as I had observed that afternoon, but to laughter of a kind that was no longer the intermittent and almost automatic laughter of childhood, a spasmodic discharge which, in those days, had continually sent their heads dipping out of the circle, as the clusters of minnows in the Vivonne used to scatter and vanish only to gather again a moment later; each countenance was now mistress of itself, their eyes were fixed on the goal towards which they were marching; and it had taken, yesterday, the indecision and tremulousness of my first impression to make me confuse vaguely (as their childish hilarity and the old photograph had confused) the spores now individualised and disjoined of the pale madrepore.

Repeatedly, I dare say, when pretty girls went by, I had promised myself that I would see them again. As a rule, people do not appear a second time; moreover our memory, which speedily forgets their existence, would find it difficult to recall their appearance; our eyes would not recognise them, perhaps, and in the mean time we have seen new girls go by, whom we shall not see again either. But at other times, and this was what was to happen with the pert little band at Balbec, chance brings them back insistently before our eyes. Chance seems to us then a good and useful thing, for we discern in it as it were rudiments of organisation, of an attempt to arrange our life; and it makes easy to us, inevitable, and sometimes—after interruptions that have made us hope that we may cease to remember—cruel, the retention in our minds of images to the possession of which we shall come in time to believe that we were predestined, and which but for chance we should from the very first have managed to forget, like so many others, with so little difficulty.

Presently Saint-Loup's visit drew to an end. I had not seen that party of girls again on the beach. He was too little at Balbec in the afternoons to have time to bother about them, or to attempt, in my interest, to make their acquaintance. In the evenings he was more free, and continued to take me constantly to Rivebelle. There are, in those restaurants, as there are in public gardens and railway trains, people embodied in a quite ordinary appearance, whose name astonishes us when, having happened to ask it, we discover that this is not the mere inoffensive stranger whom we supposed but nothing less than the Minister or Duke of whom we have so often heard. Two or three times already, in the Rivebelle restaurant, we had—Saint-Loup and I—seen come in and sit down at a table when everyone else was getting ready to go, a man of large stature, very muscular, with regular features and a grizzled beard, gazing, with concentrated attention, into the empty air. One evening, on our asking the landlord who was this obscure, solitary and belated diner, "What!" he exclaimed, "do you mean to say you don't know the famous painter Elstir?" Swann had once mentioned his name to me, I had entirely forgotten in what connexion; but the omission of a particular memory, like that of part of a sentence when we are reading, leads sometimes not to uncertainty but to a birth of certainty that is premature. "He is a friend of Swann, a very well known artist, extremely good," I told Saint-Loup. Whereupon there passed over us both, like a wave of emotion, the thought that Elstir was a great artist, a celebrated man, and that, confounding us with the rest of the diners, he had no suspicion of the ecstasy into which we were thrown by the idea of his talent. Doubtless, his unconsciousness of our admiration and of our acquaintance with Swann would not have troubled us had we not been at the seaside. But since we were still at an age when enthusiasm cannot keep silence, and had been transported into a life in which not to be known is unendurable, we wrote a letter, signed with both our names, in which we revealed to Elstir in the two diners seated within a few feet of him two passionate admirers of his talent, two friends of his great friend Swann, and asked to be allowed to pay our homage to him in person. A waiter undertook to convey this missive to the celebrity.

A celebrity Elstir was, perhaps, not yet at this period quite to the extent claimed by the landlord, though he was to reach the height of his fame within a very few years. But he had been one of the first to frequent this restaurant when it was still only a sort of farmhouse, and had brought to it a whole colony of artists (who had all, as it happened, migrated elsewhere as soon as the farm-yard in which they used to feed in the open air, under a lean-to roof, had become a fashionable centre); Elstir himself had returned to Rivebelle this evening only on account of a temporary absence of his wife, from the house which he had taken in the neighbourhood. But great talent, even

when its existence is not yet recognised, will inevitably provoke certain phenomena of admiration, such as the landlord had managed to detect in the questions asked by more than one English lady visitor, athirst for information as to the life led by Elstir, or in the number of letters that he received from abroad. Then the landlord had further remarked that Elstir did not like to be disturbed when he was working, that he would rise in the middle of the night and take a little model down to the water's edge to pose for him, nude, if the moon was shining; and had told himself that so much labour was not in vain, nor the admiration of the tourists unjustified when he had, in one of Elstir's pictures, recognised a wooden cross which stood by the roadside as you came into Rivebelle.

"It's all right!" he would repeat with stupefaction, "there are all the four beams! Oh, he does take a lot of trouble!"

And he did not know whether a little *Sunrise over the Sea* which Elstir had given him might not be worth a fortune.

We watched him read our letter, put it in his pocket, finish his dinner, begin to ask for his things, get up to go; and we were so convinced that we had shocked him by our overture that we would now have hoped (as keenly as at first we had dreaded) to make our escape without his noticing us. We did not bear in mind for a single instant a consideration which should, nevertheless, have seemed to us most important, namely that our enthusiasm for Elstir, on the sincerity of which we should not have allowed the least doubt to be cast, which we could indeed have supported with the evidence of our breathing arrested by expectancy, our desire to do no matter what that was difficult or heroic for the great man, was not, as we imagined it to be, admiration, since neither of us had ever seen anything that he had painted; our feeling might have as its object the hollow idea of a "great artist", but not a body of work which was unknown to us. It was, at the most, admiration in the abstract, the nervous envelope, the sentimental structure of an admiration without content, that is to say a thing as indissolubly attached to boyhood as are certain organs which have ceased to exist in the adult man; we were still boys. Elstir meanwhile was reaching the door when suddenly he turned and came towards us. I was transported by a delicious thrill of terror such as I could not have felt a few years later, because, while age diminishes our capacity, familiarity with the world has meanwhile destroyed in us any inclination to provoke such strange encounters, to feel that kind of emotion.

In the course of the few words that Elstir had come back to say to us, sitting down at our table, he never gave any answer on the several occasions on which I spoke to him of Swann. I began to think that he did not know him. He asked me, nevertheless, to

come and see him at his Balbec studio, an invitation which he did not extend to Saint-Loup, and which I had earned (as I might not, perhaps, from Swann's recommendation, had Elstir been intimate with him, for the part played by disinterested motives is greater than we are inclined to think in peopled lives) by a few words which made him think that I was devoted to the arts. He lavished on me a friendliness which was as far above that of Saint-Loup as that was above the affability of a mere tradesman. Compared with that of a great artist, the friendliness of a great gentleman, charming as it may be, has the effect of an actor's playing a part, of being feigned. Saint-Loup sought to please; Elstir loved to give, to give himself. Everything that he possessed, ideas, work, and the rest which he counted for far less, he would have given gladly to anyone who could understand him. But, failing society that was endurable, he lived in an isolation, with a savagery which fashionable people called pose and ill breeding, public authorities a recalcitrant spirit, his neighbours madness, his family selfishness and pride.

And no doubt at first he had thought, even in his solitude, with enjoyment that, thanks to his work, he was addressing, in spite of distance, he was giving a loftier idea of himself to those who had misunderstood or hurt him. Perhaps, in those days, he lived alone not from indifference but from love of his fellows, and, just as I had renounced Gilberte to appear to her again one day in more attractive colours, dedicated his work to certain people as a way of approaching them again, by which without actually seeing him they would be made to love him, admire him, talk about him; a renunciation is not always complete from the start, when we decide upon it in our original frame of mind and before it has reacted upon us, whether it be the renunciation of an invalid, a monk, an artist or a hero. But if he had wished to produce with certain people in his mind, in producing he had lived for himself, remote from the society to which he had become indifferent; the practice of solitude had given him a love for it, as happens with every big thing which we have begun by fearing, because we knew it to be incompatible with smaller things to which we clung, and of which it does not so much deprive us as it detaches us from them. Before we experience it, our whole preoccupation is to know to what extent we can reconcile it with certain pleasures which cease to be pleasures as soon as we have experienced it.

Elstir did not stay long talking to us. I made up my mind that I would go to his studio during the next few days, but on the following afternoon, when I had accompanied my grandmother right to the point at which the "front" ended, near the cliffs of Canapville, on our way back, at the foot of one of the little streets which ran down at right angles to the beach, we came upon a girl who, with lowered head like an animal that is being driven reluctant to its stall, and carrying golf-clubs, was walking in front of a person in

authority, in all probability her or her friends' "Miss", who suggested a portrait of Jeffreys by Hogarth, with a face as red as if her favourite beverage were gin rather than tea, on which a dried smear of tobacco at the corner of her mouth prolonged the curve of a moustache that was grizzled but abundant. The girl who preceded her was like that one of the little band who, beneath a black polo-cap, had shewn in an inexpressive chubby face a pair of laughing eyes. Now, the girl who was now passing me had also a black polo-cap, but she struck me as being even prettier than the other, the line of her nose was straighter, the curve of nostril at its base fuller and more fleshy. Besides, the other had seemed a proud, pale girl, this one a child well-disciplined and of rosy complexion. And yet, as she was pushing a bicycle just like the other's, and was wearing the same reindeer gloves, I concluded that the differences arose perhaps from the angle and circumstances in which I now saw her, for it was hardly likely that there could be at Balbec a second girl, with a face that, when all was said, was so similar and with the same details in her accoutrements. She cast a rapid glance in my direction; for the next few days, when I saw the little band again on the beach, and indeed long afterwards when I knew all the girls who composed it, I could never be absolutely certain that any of them—even she who among them all was most like her, the girl with the bicycle—was indeed the one that I had seen that evening at the end of the "front", where a street ran down to the beach, a girl who differed hardly at all, but was still just perceptibly different from her whom I had noticed in the procession.

From that moment, whereas for the last few days my mind had been occupied chiefly by the tall one, it was the one with the golf-clubs, presumed to be Mlle. Simonet, who began once more to absorb my attention. When walking with the others she would often stop, forcing her friends, who seemed greatly to respect her, to stop also. Thus it is, calling a halt, her eyes sparkling beneath her polo-cap, that I see her again to-day, outlined against the screen which the sea spreads out behind her, and separated from me by a transparent, azure space, the interval of time that has elapsed since then, a first impression, faint and fine in my memory, desired, pursued, then forgotten, then found again, of a face which I have many times since projected upon the cloud of the past to be able to say to myself, of a girl who was actually in my room: "It is she!"

But it was perhaps yet another, the one with geranium cheeks and green eyes, whom I should have liked most to know. And yet, whichever of them it might be, on any given day, that I preferred to see, the others, without her, were sufficient to excite my desire which, concentrated now chiefly on one, now on another, continued—as, on the first day, my confused vision—to combine and blend them, to make of them the little world apart, animated by a life in common, which for that matter they doubtless imagined

themselves to form; and I should have penetrated, in becoming a friend of one of them—like a cultivated pagan or a meticulous Christian going among barbarians—into a rejuvenating society in which reigned health, unconsciousness of others, sensual pleasures, cruelty, unintellectuality and joy.

My grandmother, who had been told of my meeting with Elstir, and rejoiced at the thought of all the intellectual profit that I might derive from his friendship, considered it absurd and none too polite of me not to have gone yet to pay him a visit. But I could think only of the little band, and being uncertain of the hour at which the girls would be passing along the front, I dared not absent myself. My grandmother was astonished, too, at the smartness of my attire, for I had suddenly remembered suits which had been lying all this time at the bottom of my trunk. I put on a different one every day, and had even written to Paris ordering new hats and neckties.

It adds a great charm to life in a watering-place like Balbec if the face of a pretty girl, a vendor of shells, cakes or flowers, painted in vivid colours in our mind, is regularly, from early morning, the purpose of each of those leisured, luminous days which we spend upon the beach. They become then, and for that reason, albeit unoccupied by any business, as alert as working-days, pointed, magnetised, raised slightly to meet an approaching moment, that in which, while we purchase sand-cakes, roses, ammonites, we will delight in seeing upon a feminine face its colours displayed as purely as on a flower. But at least, with these little traffickers, first of all we can speak to them, which saves us from having to construct with our imagination their aspects other than those with which the mere visual perception of them furnishes us, and to recreate their life, magnifying its charm, as when we stand before a portrait; moreover, just because we speak to them, we can learn where and at what time it will be possible to see them again. Now I had none of these advantages with respect to the little band. Their habits were unknown to me; when on certain days I failed to catch a glimpse of them, not knowing the cause of their absence I sought to discover whether it was something fixed and regular, if they were to be seen only every other day, or in certain states of the weather, or if there were days on which no one ever saw them. I imagined myself already friends with them, and saying: "But you weren't there the other day?" "Weren't we? Oh, no, of course not; that was because it was a Saturday. On Saturdays we don't ever come, because . . ." If it were only as simple as that, to know that on black Saturday it was useless to torment oneself, that one might range the beach from end to end, sit down outside the pastry-cook's and pretend to be nibbling an éclair, poke into the curiosity shop, wait for bathing time, the concert, high tide, sunset, night, all without seeing the longed-for little band. But the fatal day did not, perhaps, come once a week. It did not, perhaps, of necessity fall on Saturdays.

Perhaps certain atmospheric conditions influenced it or were entirely unconnected with it. How many observations, patient but not at all serene, must one accumulate of the movements, to all appearance irregular, of those unknown worlds before being able to be sure that one has not allowed oneself to be led astray by mere coincidence, that one's forecasts will not be proved wrong, before one elucidates the certain laws, acquired at the cost of so much painful experience, of that passionate astronomy. Remembering that I had not yet seen them on some particular day of the week, I assured myself that they would not be coming, that it was useless to wait any longer on the beach. And at that very moment I caught sight of them. And yet on another day which, so far as I could suppose that there were laws that guided the return of those constellations, must, I had calculated, prove an auspicious day, they did not come. But to this primary uncertainty whether I should see them or not that day, there was added another, more disquieting: whether I should ever set eyes on them again, for I had no reason, after all, to know that they were not about to sail for America, or to return to Paris. This was enough to make me begin to love them. One can feel an attraction towards a particular person. But to release that fount of sorrow, that sense of the irreparable, those agonies which prepare the way for love, there must be—and this is, perhaps, more than any person can be, the actual object which our passion seeks so anxiously to embrace—the risk of an impossibility. Thus there were acting upon me already those influences which recur in the course of our successive love-affairs, which can, for that matter, be provoked, (but then rather in the life of cities) by the thought of little working girls whose half-holiday is we know not on what day, and whom we are afraid of having missed as they came out of the factory; or which at least have recurred in mine. Perhaps they are inseparable from love; perhaps everything that formed a distinctive feature of our first love attaches itself to those that come after, by recollection, suggestion, habit, and through the successive periods of our life gives to its different aspects a general character.

I seized every pretext for going down to the beach at the hours when I hoped to succeed in finding them there. Having caught sight of them once while we were at luncheon, I now invariably came in late for it, waiting interminably upon the "front" for them to pass; devoting all the short time that I did spend in the dining-room to interrogating with my eyes its azure wall of glass; rising long before the dessert, so as not to miss them should they have gone out at a different hour, and chafing with irritation at my grandmother, when, with unwitting malevolence, she made me stay with her past the hour that seemed to me propitious. I tried to prolong the horizon by setting my chair aslant; if, by chance, I did catch sight of no matter which of the girls, since they all partook of the same special essence, it was as if I had seen projected

before my face in a shifting, diabolical hallucination, a little of the unfriendly and yet passionately coveted dream which, but a moment ago, had existed only—where it lay stagnant for all time—in my brain.

I was in love with none of them, loving them all, and yet the possibility of meeting them was in my daily life the sole element of delight, alone made to burgeon in me those high hopes by which every obstacle is surmounted, hopes ending often in fury if I had not seen them. For the moment, these girls eclipsed my grandmother in my affection; the longest journey would at once have seemed attractive to me had it been to a place in which they might be found. It was to them that my thoughts comfortably clung when I supposed myself to be thinking of something else or of nothing. But when, even without knowing it, I thought of them, they, more unconsciously still, were for me the mountainous blue undulations of the sea, a troop seen passing in outline against the waves. Our most intensive love for a person is always the love, really, of something else as well.

Meanwhile my grandmother was shewing, because now I was keenly interested in golf and lawn-tennis and was letting slip an opportunity of seeing at work and hearing talk an artist whom she knew to be one of the greatest of his time, a disapproval which seemed to me to be based on somewhat narrow views. I had guessed long ago in the Champs-Élysées, and had since established to my own satisfaction, that when we are in love with a woman we simply project into her a state of our own soul, that the important thing is, therefore, not the worth of the woman but the depth of the state; and that the emotions which a young girl of no kind of distinction arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the most intimate parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more essential than would be reached by the pleasure that we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work.

I was to end by complying with my grandmother's wishes, all the more reluctantly in that Elstir lived at some distance from the "front" in one of the newest of Balbec's avenues. The heat of the day obliged me to take the tramway which passed along the Rue de la Plage, and I made an effort (so as still to believe that I was in the ancient realm of the Cimmerians, in the country it might be, of King Mark, or upon the site of the Forest of Broceliande) not to see the gimcrack splendour of the buildings that extended on either hand, among which Elstir's villa was perhaps the most sumptuously hideous, in spite of which he had taken it, because, of all that there were to be had at Balbec, it was the only one that provided him with a really big studio.

It was also with averted eyes that I crossed the garden, which had a lawn—in miniature, like any little suburban villa round Paris—a statuette of an amorous gardener, glass balls in which one saw one's distorted reflexion, beds of begonias and a little arbour, beneath which rocking chairs were drawn up round an iron table. But after all these preliminaries hall-marked with philistine ugliness, I took no notice of the chocolate mouldings on the plinths once I was in the studio; I felt perfectly happy, for, with the help of all the sketches and studies that surrounded me, I foresaw the possibility of raising myself to a poetical understanding, rich in delights, of many forms which I had not, hitherto, isolated from the general spectacle of reality. And Elstir's studio appeared to me as the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world in which, from the chaos that is all the things we see, he had extracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas that were hung everywhere about the room, here a wave of the sea crushing angrily on the sand its lilac foam, there a young man in a suit of white linen, leaning upon the rail of a vessel. His jacket and the spattering wave had acquired fresh dignity from the fact that they continued to exist, even although they were deprived of those qualities in which they might be supposed to consist, the wave being no longer able to splash nor the jacket to clothe anyone.

At the moment at which I entered, the creator was just finishing, with the brush which he had in his hand, the form of the sun at its setting.

The shutters were closed almost everywhere round the studio, which was fairly cool and, except in one place where daylight laid against the wall its brilliant but fleeting decoration, dark; there was open only one little rectangular window embowered in honeysuckle, which, over a strip of garden, gave on an avenue; so that the atmosphere of the greater part of the studio was dusky, transparent and compact in the mass, but liquid and sparkling at the rifts where the golden clasp of sunlight banded it, like a lump of rock crystal of which one surface, already cut and polished, here and there, gleams like a mirror with iridescent rays. While Elstir, at my request, went on painting, I wandered about in the half-light, stopping to examine first one picture, then another.

Most of those that covered the walls were not what I should chiefly have liked to see of his work, paintings in what an English art journal which lay about on the reading-room table in the Grand Hotel called his first and second manners, the mythological manner and the manner in which he shewed signs of Japanese influence, both admirably exemplified, the article said, in the collection of Mme. de Guermantes. Naturally enough, what he had in his studio were almost all seascapes done here, at Balbec. But I was able to discern from these that the charm of each of them lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the things represented in it, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was

by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which denote things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with itself.

Sometimes in my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the fastenings of the curtains that shut out the light, in the evening when I was waiting until it should be time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coast-line, or to gaze at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would re-establish between the elements that distinction which in my first impression I had overlooked. In the same way I used, in Paris, in my bedroom, to hear a dispute, almost a riot, in the street below, until I had referred back to its cause—a carriage for instance that was rattling towards me—this noise, from which I now eliminated the shrill and discordant vociferations which my ear had really heard but which my reason knew that wheels did not produce. But the rare moments in which we see nature as she is, with poetic vision, it was from those that Elstir's work was taken. One of his metaphors that occurred most commonly in the seascapes which he had round him was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed every line of demarcation between them. It was this comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multiform and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors.

It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort—in a picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished a few days earlier and at which I now stood gazing my fill—that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself came cranking in among the land, as constantly happened on the Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built the roofs were overtopped (as it had been by mill-chimneys or church-steeple) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression which was strengthened by the sight of other boats, moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the far distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling

waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a particoloured rainbow, to form an unreal, a mystical picture. On the beach in the foreground the painter had arranged that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between earth and ocean. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected their hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing across the middle of the town; women who were gathering shrimps among the rocks had the appearance, because they were surrounded by water and because of the depression which, after the ringlike barrier of rocks, brought the beach (on the side nearest the land) down to sea-level, of being in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, open yet unharmed in the path of a miraculously averted tide. If the whole picture gave this impression of harbours in which the sea entered into the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian, the strength of the marine element was everywhere apparent; and round about the rocks, at the mouth of the harbour, where the sea was rough, you felt from the muscular efforts of the fishermen and the obliquity of the boats leaning over at an acute angle, compared with the calm erectness of the warehouse on the harbour, the church, the houses of the town to which some of the figures were returning while others were coming out to fish, that they were riding bareback on the water, as it might be a swift and fiery animal whose rearing, but for their skill, must have unseated them. A party of holiday makers were putting gaily out to sea in a boat that tossed like a jaunting-car on a rough road; their boatman, blithe but attentive, also, to what he was doing, trimmed the bellying sail, every one kept in his place, so that the weight should not be all on one side of the boat, which might capsize, and so they went racing over sunlit fields into shadowy places, dashing down into the troughs of waves. It was a fine morning in spite of the recent storm. Indeed, one could still feel the powerful activities that must first be neutralised in order to attain the easy balance of the boats that lay motionless, enjoying sunshine and breeze, in parts where the sea was so calm that its reflexions had almost more solidity and reality than the floating hulls, vaporised by an effect of the sunlight, parts which the perspective of the picture dovetailed in among others. Or rather you would not have called them other parts of the sea. For between those parts there was as much difference as there was between one of them and the church rising from the water, or the ships behind the town. Your reason then set to work and made a single element of what was here black beneath a gathering storm, a little farther all of one colour with

the sky and as brightly burnished, and elsewhere so bleached by sunshine, haze and foam, so compact, so terrestrial, so circumscribed with houses that you thought of some white stone causeway or of a field of snow, up the surface of which it was quite frightening to see a ship go climbing high and dry, as a carriage climbs dripping from a ford, but which a moment later, when you saw on the raised and broken surface of the solid plain boats drunkenly heaving, you understood, identical in all these different aspects, to be still the sea.

Although we are justified in saying that there can be no progress, no discovery in art, but only in the sciences, and that the artist who begins afresh upon his own account an individual effort cannot be either helped or hindered by the efforts of all the others, we must nevertheless admit that, in so far as art brings into prominence certain laws, once an industry has taken those laws and vulgarised them, the art that was first in the field loses, in retrospect, a little of its originality. Since Elstir began to paint, we have grown familiar with what are called "admirable" photographs of scenery and towns. If we press for a definition of what their admirers mean by the epithet, we shall find that it is generally applied to some unusual picture of a familiar object, a picture different from those that we are accustomed to see, unusual and yet true to nature, and for that reason doubly impressive to us because it startles us, makes us emerge from our habits and at the same time brings us back to ourselves by recalling to us an earlier impression. For instance, one of these "magnificent" photographs will illustrate a law of perspective, will shew us some cathedral which we are accustomed to see in the middle of a town, taken instead from a selected point of view from which it will appear to be thirty times the height of the houses and to be thrusting a spur out from the bank of the river, from which it is actually a long way off. Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him exactly to this point; he gave special emphasis to certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since his art had been their first interpreter. A river, because of the windings of its course, a bay because of the apparent contact of the cliffs on either side of it, would look as though there had been hollowed out in the heart of the plain or of the mountains a lake absolutely landlocked on every side. In a picture of a view from Balbec painted upon a scorching day in summer an inlet of the sea appeared to be enclosed in walls of pink granite, not to be the sea, which began farther out. The continuity of the ocean was suggested only by the gulls which, wheeling over what, when one looked at the picture, seemed to be solid rock, were as a matter of fact inhaling the moist vapour of the shifting tide. Other laws were discernible in the same canvas, as, at the foot of immense cliffs, the lilliputian grace

of white sails on the blue mirror on whose surface they looked like butterflies asleep, and certain contrasts between the depth of the shadows and the pallidity of the light. This play of light and shade, which also photography has rendered common-place, had interested Elstir so much that at one time he had painted what were almost mirages, in which a castle crowned with a tower appeared as a perfect circle of castle prolonged by a tower at its summit, and at its foot by an inverted tower, whether because the exceptional purity of the atmosphere on a fine day gave the shadow reflected in the water the hardness and brightness of the stone, or because the morning mists rendered the stone as vaporous as the shadow. And similarly, beyond the sea, behind a line of woods, began another sea roseate with the light of the setting sun, which was, in fact, the sky. The light, as it were precipitating new solids, thrust back the hull of the boat on which it fell behind the other hull that was still in shadow, and rearranged like the steps of a crystal staircase what was materially a plane surface, but was broken up by the play of light and shade upon the morning sea. A river running beneath the bridges of a town was caught from a certain point of view so that it appeared entirely dislocated, now broadened into a lake, now narrowed into a rivulet, broken elsewhere by the interruption of a hill crowned with trees among which the burgher would repair at evening to taste the refreshing breeze; and the rhythm of this disintegrated town was assured only by the inflexible uprightness of the steeples which did not rise but rather, following the plumb line of the pendulum marking its cadence as in a triumphal march, seemed to hold in suspense beneath them all the confused mass of houses that rose vaguely in the mist along the banks of the crushed, disjointed stream. And (since Elstir's earliest work belonged to the time in which a painter would make his landscape attractive by inserting a human figure), on the cliff's edge or among the mountains, the road, that half human part of nature, underwent, like river or ocean, the eclipses of perspective. And whether a sheer wall of mountain, or the mist blown from a torrent, or the sea prevented the eye from following the continuity of the path, visible to the traveller but not to us, the little human personage in old-fashioned attire seemed often to be stopped short on the edge of an abyss, the path which he had been following ending there, while, a thousand feet above him in those pine-forests, it was with a melting eye and comforted heart that we saw reappear the threadlike whiteness of its dusty surface, hospitable to the wayfaring foot, whereas from us the side of the mountain had hidden, where it turned to avoid waterfall or gully, the intervening bends.

The effort made by Elstir to strip himself, when face to face with reality, of every intellectual concept, was all the more admirable in that this man who, before sitting down to paint, made himself deliberately ignorant, forgot, in his honesty of purpose,

everything that he knew, since what one knows ceases to exist by itself, had in reality an exceptionally cultivated mind. When I confessed to him the disappointment that I had felt upon seeing the porch at Balbec: "What!" he had exclaimed, "you were disappointed by the porch! Why, it's the finest illustrated Bible that the people have ever had. That Virgin, and all the bas-reliefs telling the story of her life, they are the most loving, the most inspired expression of that endless poem of adoration and praise in which the middle ages extolled the glory of the Madonna. If you only knew, side by side with the most scrupulous accuracy in rendering the sacred text, what exquisite ideas the old carver had, what profound thoughts, what delicious poetry!

"A wonderful idea, that great sheet in which the angels are carrying the body of the Virgin, too sacred for them to venture to touch it with their hands"; (I mentioned to him that this theme had been treated also at Saint-André-des-Champs; he had seen photographs of the porch there, and agreed, but pointed out that the bustling activity of those little peasant figures, all hurrying at once towards the Virgin, was not the same thing as the gravity of those two great angels, almost Italian, so springing, so gentle) "the angel who is carrying the Virgin's soul, to reunite it with her body; in the meeting of the Virgin with Elizabeth, Elizabeth's gesture when she touches the Virgin's Womb and marvels to feel that it is great with child; and the bandaged arm of the midwife who had refused, unless she touched, to believe the Immaculate Conception; and the linen cloth thrown by the Virgin to Saint Thomas to give him a proof of the Resurrection; that veil, too, which the Virgin tears from her own bosom to cover the nakedness of her Son, from Whose Side the Church receives in a chalice the Wine of the Sacrament, while, on His other side the Synagogue, whose kingdom is at an end, has its eyes bandaged, holds a half-broken sceptre and lets fall, with the crown that is slipping from its head, the tables of the old law; and the husband who, on the Day of Judgment, as he helps his young wife to rise from her grave, lays her hand against his own heart to reassure her, to prove to her that it is indeed beating, is that such a trumpery idea, do you think, so stale and common-place? And the angel who is taking away the sun and the moon, henceforth useless, since it is written that the Light of the Cross shall be seven times brighter than the light of the firmament; and the one who is dipping his hand in the water of the Child's bath, to see whether it is warm enough; and the one emerging from the clouds to place the crown upon the Virgin's brow, and all the angels who are leaning from the vault of heaven, between the balusters of the New Jerusalem, and throwing up their arms with terror or joy at the sight of the torments of the wicked or the bliss of the elect! For it is all the circles of heaven, a whole gigantic poem full of theology and symbolism that you have before you there. It is fantastic, mad, divine, a thousand times better than anything you will

see in Italy, where for that matter this very tympanum has been carefully copied by sculptors with far less genius. There never was a time when genius was universal; that is all nonsense; it would be going beyond the age of gold. The fellow who carved that front, you may make up your mind that he was every bit as great, that he had just as profound ideas as the men you admire most at the present day. I could shew you what I mean if we went there together. There are certain passages from the Office of the Assumption which have been rendered with a subtilty of expression that Redon himself has never equalled."

This vast celestial vision of which he spoke to me, this gigantic theological poem which, I understood, had been inscribed there in stone, yet when my eyes, big with desire, had opened to gaze upon the front of Balbec church, it was not these things that I had seen. I spoke to him of those great statues of saints, which, mounted on scaffolds, formed a sort of avenue on either side.

"It starts from the mists of antiquity to end in Jesus Christ," he explained. "You see on one side His ancestors after the spirit, on the other the Kings of Judah, His ancestors after the flesh. All the ages are there. And if you had looked more closely at what you took for scaffolds you would have been able to give names to the figures standing on them. At the feet of Moses you would have recognised the calf of gold, at Abraham's the ram and at Joseph's the demon counselling Potiphar's wife."

I told him also that I had gone there expecting to find an almost Persian building, and that this had doubtless been one of the chief factors in my disappointment. "Indeed, no," he assured me, "it is perfectly true. Some parts of it are quite oriental; one of the capitals reproduces so exactly a Persian subject that you cannot account for it by the persistence of Oriental traditions. The carver must have copied some casket brought from the East by explorers." And he did indeed shew me, later on, the photograph of a capital on which I saw dragons that were almost Chinese devouring one another, but at Balbec this little piece of carving had passed unnoticed by me in the general effect of the building which did not conform to the pattern traced in my mind by the words, "an almost Persian church".

The intellectual pleasures which I enjoyed in this studio did not in the least prevent me from feeling, although they enveloped us as it were in spite of ourselves, the warm polish, the sparkling gloom of the place itself and, through the little window framed in honeysuckle, in the avenue that was quite rustic, the resisting dryness of the sun-parched earth, screened only by the diaphanous gauze woven of distance and of a tree-cast shade. Perhaps the unaccountable feeling of comfort which this summer

day was giving me came like a tributary to swell the flood of joy that had surged in me at the sight of Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour*.

I had supposed Elstir to be a modest man, but I realised my mistake on seeing his face cloud with melancholy when, in a little speech of thanks, I uttered the word "fame". Men who believe that their work will last—as was the case with Elstir—form the habit of placing that work in a period when they themselves will have crumbled into dust. And thus, by obliging them to reflect on their own extinction, the thought of fame saddens them because it is inseparable from the thought of death. I changed the conversation in the hope of driving away the cloud of ambitious melancholy with which unwittingly I had loaded Elstir's brow. "Some one advised me once," I began, thinking of the conversation we had had with Legrandin at Combray, as to which I was glad of an opportunity of learning Elstir's views, "not to visit Brittany, because it would not be wholesome for a mind with a natural tendency to dream." "Not at all;" he replied. "When the mind has a tendency to dream, it is a mistake to keep dreams away from it, to ration its dreams. So long as you distract your mind from its dreams, it will not know them for what they are; you will always be being taken in by the appearance of things, because you will not have grasped their true nature. If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time. One must have a thorough understanding of one's dreams if one is not to be troubled by them; there is a way of separating one's dreams from one's life which so often produces good results that I ask myself whether one ought not, at all costs, to try it, simply as a preventive, just as certain surgeons make out that we ought, to avoid the risk of appendicitis later on, to have all our appendices taken out when we are children."

Elstir and I had meanwhile been walking about the studio, and had reached the window that looked across the garden on to a narrow avenue, a side-street that was almost a country lane. We had gone there to breathe the cooler air of the late afternoon. I supposed myself to be nowhere near the girls of the little band, and it was only by sacrificing for once the hope of seeing them that I had yielded to my grandmother's prayers and had gone to see Elstir. For where the thing is to be found that we are seeking we never know, and often we steadily, for a long time, avoid the place to which, for quite different reasons, everyone has been asking us to go. But we never suspect that we shall there see the very person of whom we are thinking. I looked out vaguely over the country road which, outside the studio, passed quite close to it but did not belong to Elstir. Suddenly there appeared on it, coming along it at a rapid pace, the young bicyclist of the little band, with, over her dark hair, her polo-cap pulled down towards her plump cheeks, her eyes merry and almost importunate;

and on that auspicious path, miraculously filled with promise of delights, I saw her beneath the trees throw to Elstir the smiling greeting of a friend, a rainbow that bridged the gulf for me between our terraqueous world and regions which I had hitherto regarded as inaccessible. She even came up to give her hand to the painter, though without stopping, and I could see that she had a tiny beauty spot on her chin. "Do you know that girl, sir?" I asked Elstir, realising that he could if he chose make me known to her, could invite us both to the house. And this peaceful studio with its rural horizon was at once filled with a surfeit of delight such as a child might feel in a house where he was already happily playing when he learned that, in addition, out of that bounteousness which enables lovely things and noble hosts to increase their gifts beyond all measure, there was being prepared for him a sumptuous repast. Elstir told me that she was called Albertine Simonet, and gave me the names also of her friends, whom I described to him with sufficient accuracy for him to identify them almost without hesitation. I had, with regard to their social position, made a mistake, but not the mistake that I usually made at Balbec. I was always ready to take for princes the sons of shopkeepers when they appeared on horseback. This time I had placed in an interloping class the daughters of a set of respectable people, extremely rich, belonging to the world of industry and business. It was the class which, on first thoughts, interested me least, since it held for me neither the mystery of the lower orders nor that of a society such as the Guermantes frequented. And no doubt if an inherent quality, a rank which they could never forfeit had not been conferred on them, in my dazzled eyes, by the glaring vacuity of the seaside life all round them, I should perhaps not have succeeded in resisting and overcoming the idea that they were the daughters of prosperous merchants. I could not help marvelling to see how the French middle class was a wonderful studio full of sculpture of the noblest and most varied kind. What unimagined types, what richness of invention in the character of their faces, what firmness, what freshness, what simplicity in their features. The shrewd old money-changers from whose loins these Dianas and these nymphs had sprung seemed to me to have been the greatest of statuaries. Before I had time to register the social metamorphosis of these girls—so are these discoveries of a mistake, these modifications of the notion one has of a person instantaneous as a chemical combination—there was already installed behind their faces, so street-arab in type that I had taken them for the mistresses of racing bicyclists, of boxing champions, the idea that they might easily be connected with the family of some lawyer or other whom we knew. I was barely conscious of what was meant by Albertine Simonet; she had certainly no conception of what she was one day to mean to me. Even the name, Simonet, which I had already heard spoken on the beach, if I had been asked to write it down I should have spelt with a double 'n' never dreaming

of the importance which this family attached to there being but one in their name. In proportion as we descend the social scale our snobbishness fastens on to mere nothings which are perhaps no more null than the distinctions observed by the aristocracy, but, being more obscure, more peculiar to the individual, take us more by surprise. Possibly there had been Simonets who had done badly in business, or something worse still even. The fact remains that the Simonets never failed, it appeared, to be annoyed if anyone doubled their 'n'. They wore the air of being the only Simonets in the world with one 'n' instead of two, and were as proud of it, perhaps, as the Montmorency family were of being the premier barons of France. I asked Elstir whether these girls lived at Balbec; yes, he told me, some of them at any rate. The villa in which one of them lived was at that very spot, right at the end of the beach, where the cliffs of Canapville began. As this girl was a great friend of Albertine Simonet, this was another reason for me to believe that it was indeed the latter whom I had met that day when I was with my grandmother. There were of course so many of those little streets running down to the beach, and all at the same angle, that I could not have pointed out exactly which of them it had been. One would like always to remember a thing accurately, but at the time one's vision was clouded. And yet that Albertine and the girl whom I had seen going to her friend's house were one and the same person was a practical certainty. In spite of which, whereas the countless images that have since been furnished me by the dark young golfer, however different they may have been from one another, have overlaid one another (because I now know that they all belong to her), and if I retrace the thread of my memories I can, under cover of that identity, and as though along a tunnelled passage, pass through all those images in turn without losing my consciousness of the same person behind them all, if, on the other hand, I wish to revert to the girl whom I passed that day when I was with my grandmother, I must escape first into freer air. I am convinced that it is Albertine whom I find there, the same girl as her who would often stop dead among her moving comrades, in her walk along the foreground of the sea; but all those more recent images remain separate from that earlier one because I am unable to confer on her retrospectively an identity which she had not for me at the moment in which she caught my eye; whatever assurance I may derive from the law of probabilities, that girl with plump cheeks who stared at me so boldly from the angle of the little street and the beach, and by whom I believe that I might have been loved, I have never, in the strict sense of the words, seen again.

My hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom retained something of the collective charm which had at first disturbed me, combined with the reasons already given to allow me later on, even at the time of my greater—my

second—passion for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and very brief liberty to abstain from loving her. From having strayed among all her friends before it finally concentrated itself on her, my love kept, now and then, between itself and the image of Albertine a certain "play" of light and shade which enabled it, like a badly fitted lamp, to flit over the surface of each of the others before settling its focus upon her; the connexion between the pain which I felt in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem to me necessary; I might perhaps have managed to coordinate it with the image of another person. Which enabled me, in a momentary flash, to banish reality altogether, not only external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognised to be an internal state in which I drew from myself alone the particular quality, the special character of the person whom I loved, everything that rendered her indispensable to my happiness), but even the other reality, internal and purely subjective.

"Not a day passes but one or the other of them comes by here, and looks in for a minute or two," Elstir told me, plunging me in despair when I thought that if I had gone to see him at once, when my grandmother had begged me to do so, I should, in all probability, long since have made Albertine's acquaintance.

She had passed on; from the studio she was no longer in sight. I supposed that she had gone to join her friends on the "front". Could I have appeared there suddenly with Elstir, I should have got to know them all. I thought of endless pretexts for inducing him to take a turn with me on the beach. I had no longer the same peace of mind as before the apparition of the girl in the frame of the little window; so charming until then in its fringe of honeysuckle, and now so drearily empty. Elstir caused me a joy that was tormenting also when he said that he would go a little way with me, but that he must first finish the piece of work on which he was engaged. It was a flower study but not one of any of the flowers, portraits of which I would rather have commissioned him to paint than the portrait of a person, so that I might learn from the revelation of his genius what I had so often sought in vain from the flowers themselves—hawthorn white, and pink, cornflowers, apple-blossom. Elstir as he worked talked botany to me, but I scarcely listened; he was no longer sufficient in himself, he was now only the necessary intermediary between these girls and me; the distinction which, only a few moments ago, his talent had still given him in my eyes was now worthless save in so far as it might confer a little on me also in the eyes of the little band to whom I should be presented by him.

I paced up and down the room, impatient for him to finish what he was doing; I picked up and examined various sketches, any number of which were stacked against the walls. In this way I happened to bring to light a water-colour which evidently belonged

to a much earlier period in Elstir's life, and gave me that particular kind of enchantment which is diffused by works of art not only deliciously executed but representing a subject so singular and so seductive that it is to it that we attribute a great deal of their charm, as if the charm were something that the painter had merely to uncover, to observe, realised already in a material form by nature, and to reproduce in art. That such objects can exist, beautiful quite apart from the painter's interpretation of them, satisfies a sort of innate materialism in us, against which our reason contends and acts as a counterpoise to the abstractions of aesthetics. It was—this water-colour—the portrait of a young woman, by no means beautiful but of a curious type, in a close-fitting mob-cap not unlike a "billy-cock" hat, trimmed with a ribbon of cherry-coloured silk; in one of her mittened hands was a lighted cigarette, while the other held, level with her knee, a sort of broad-brimmed garden hat, nothing more than a fire-screen of plaited straw to keep off the sun. On a table by her side, a tall vase filled with pink carnations. Often (and it was the case here) the singularity of such works is due principally to their having been executed in special conditions for which we do not at first sight make proper allowance, if, for instance, the strange attire of a feminine model is her costume for a masked ball, or conversely the scarlet cloak which an elderly man looks as though he had put on to humour some whim in the painter is his gown as a professor or alderman or his cardinal's cassock. The ambiguous character of the person whose portrait now confronted me arose, without my understanding it, from the fact that she was a young actress of an earlier generation half dressed for a part. But the cap or hat, beneath which the hair stuck out but was cut short, the velvet coat opening without lapels over a white shirt-front, made me hesitate as to the period of the clothes and the sex of the model, so that I did not know what it was exactly that I was holding before my eyes, unless simply the brightest coloured of these scraps of painting. And the pleasure which it afforded me was disturbed only by the fear that Elstir, by delaying further, would make me miss the girls, for the sun was now declining and hung low in the little window. Nothing in this water-colour was merely stated there as a fact and painted because of its utility to the composition, the costume because the young woman must be wearing something, the vase to hold the flowers. The glass of the vase, cherished for its own sake, seemed to be holding the water in which the stems of the carnations were dipped in something as limpid, almost as liquid as itself; the woman's dress encompassed her in a manner that had an independent, a brotherly charm, and, if the works of man can compete in charm with the wonders of nature, as delicate, as pleasing to the touch of the eye, as freshly painted as the fur of a cat, the petals of a flower, the feathers of a dove. The whiteness of the shirt-front, fine as driven rain, with its gay pleats gathered into little bells like lilies of the valley, was starred with bright gleams of light from the room, as

sharply edged and as finely shaded as though they had been posies of flowers stitched on the woven lawn. And the velvet of the coat, brilliant with a milky sheen, had here and there a roughness, a scoring, a shagginess on its surface which made one think of the crumpled brightness of the carnations in the vase. But above all one felt that Elstir, sublimely indifferent to whatever immoral suggestion there might be in this disguise of a young actress for whom the talent with which she would play her part on the stage was doubtless of less importance than the irritant attraction which she would offer to the jaded or depraved senses of some of her audience, had on the contrary fastened upon those ambiguous points as on an aesthetic element which deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasise. Along the lines of the face, the latent sex seemed to be on the point of confessing itself to be that of a somewhat boyish girl, then vanished and farther on reappeared with a suggestion rather of an effeminate youth, vicious and pensive, then fled once more to remain uncapturable. The dreamy sadness in the expression of her eyes, by the mere fact of its contrast with the accessories belonging to the world of love-making and play-acting, was not the least disturbing element in the picture. One imagined moreover that it must be feigned, and that the young person who seemed ready to submit to caresses in this provoking costume had probably thought it effective to enhance the provocation with this romantic expression of a secret longing, an unspoken grief. At the foot of the picture was inscribed "*Miss Sacripant: October, 1872.*" I could not contain my admiration. "Oh, it's nothing, only a rough sketch I did when I was young; it was a costume for a variety show. It's all ages ago now." "And what has become of the model?" A bewilderment provoked by my words preceded on Elstir's face the indifferent, absent-minded air which, a moment later, he displayed there. "Quick, give it to me!" he cried, "I hear Madame Elstir coming, and, though, I assure you, the young person in the billy-cock hat never played any part in my life, still there's no point in my wife's coming in and finding it staring her in the face. I have kept it only as an amusing sidelight on the theatre of those days." And, before putting it away behind the pile, Elstir, who perhaps had not set eyes on the sketch for years, gave it his careful scrutiny. "I must keep just the head," he murmured, "the lower part is really too shockingly bad, the hands are a beginner's work." I was miserable at the arrival of Mme. Elstir, who could only delay us still further. The window-sill was already aglow. Our excursion would be a pure waste of time. There was no longer the slightest chance of our seeing the girls, consequently it mattered now not at all how soon Mme. Elstir left us or how long she stayed. Not that she did stay for any length of time. I found her most tedious; she might have been beautiful, once, at twenty, driving an ox in the Roman Campagna, but her dark hair was streaked with grey and she was common without being simple, because she believed that a

pompous manner and majestic attitudes were required by her statuesque beauty, which, however, advancing age had robbed of all its charm. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity. And it was touching, but at the same time surprising to hear Elstir, whenever he opened his mouth, and with a respectful gentleness, as if merely uttering the words moved him to tenderness and veneration, repeat: "My beautiful Gabrielle!" Later on, when I had become familiar with Elstir's mythological paintings, Mme. Elstir acquired beauty in my eyes also. I understood then that to a certain ideal type illustrated by certain lines, certain arabesques which reappeared incessantly throughout his work, to a certain canon of art he had attributed a character that was almost divine, since the whole of his time, all the mental effort of which he was capable, in a word his whole life he had consecrated to the task of distinguishing those lines as clearly and of reproducing them as faithfully as possible. What such an ideal inspired in Elstir was indeed a cult so solemn, so exacting that it never allowed him to be satisfied with what he had achieved; was the most intimate part of himself; and so he had never been able to look at it from a detached standpoint, to extract emotion from it, until the day on which he encountered it realised outside, apart from himself, in the body of a woman, the body of her who in due course became Mme. Elstir and in whom he had been able (as one is able only with something that is not oneself) to find it meritorious, moving, god-like. How comforting, moreover, to let his lips rest upon that Beauty which hitherto he had been obliged with so great labour to extract from within himself, whereas now, mysteriously incarnate, it offered itself to him in a series of communions, filled with saving grace. Elstir at this period was no longer in that early youth in which we look only to the power of our own mind for the realisation of our ideal. He was nearing the age at which we count on bodily satisfactions to stimulate the forces of the brain, at which the exhaustion of the brain inclining us to materialism and the diminution of our activity to the possibility of influences passively received, begin to make us admit that there may indeed be certain bodies, Certain callings, certain rhythms that are privileged, realising so naturally our ideal that even without genius, merely by copying the movement of a shoulder, the tension of a throat, we can achieve a masterpiece, it is the age at which we like to caress Beauty with our eyes objectively, outside ourselves, to have it near us, in a tapestry, in a lovely sketch by Titian picked up in a second-hand shop, in a mistress as lovely as Titian's sketch. When I understood this I could no longer look without pleasure at Mme. Elstir, and her body began to lose its heaviness, for I filled it with an idea, the idea that she was an immaterial creature, a portrait by Elstir. She was one for me, and for him also I dare say. The facts of life have no meaning for the artist, they are to him merely an opportunity for exposing the naked blaze of his genius. One feels unmistakably, when one sees side by side ten portraits of different people

painted by Elstir, that they are all, first and foremost, Elstirs. Only, after this rising tide of genius, which sweeps over and submerges a man's life, when the brain begins to tire, gradually the balance is upset and, like a river that resumes its course after the counterflow of a spring tide, it is life that once more takes the upper hand. While the first period lasted, the artist has gradually evolved the law, the formula of his unconscious gift. He knows what situations, should he be a novelist—if a painter, what scenes furnish him with the subject matter, which may be anything in the world but, whatever it is, is essential to his researches as a laboratory might be or a workshop. He knows that he has created his masterpieces out of effects of attenuated light, the action of remorse upon consciousness of guilt, out of women posed beneath trees or half-immersed in water, like statues. A day will come when, owing to the exhaustion of his brain, he will no longer have the strength, when provided with those materials which his genius was wont to use, to make the intellectual effort which alone can produce his work, and will yet continue to seek them out, happy when he finds himself in their presence, because of the spiritual pleasure, the allurements to work that they arouse in him; and, surrounding them besides with a kind of hedge of superstition as if they were superior to all things else, as if in them already dwelt a great part of the work of art which they might be said to carry within them ready made, he will confine himself to the company, to the adoration of his models. He will hold endless conversations with the repentant criminals whose remorse, their regeneration formed, when he still wrote, the subject of his novels; he will buy a country house in a district where mists attenuate the light, he will spend long hours gazing at the limbs of bathing women; will collect sumptuous stuffs. And thus the beauty of life, a phase that has to some extent lost its meaning, a stage beyond the boundaries of art at which I had already seen Swann come to rest, was that also which, by a slackening of the creative ardour, idolatry of the forms which had inspired it, desire to avoid effort, must ultimately arrest an Elstir's progress.