

OUR LOVE

(Notre Amour)

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PART ONE

I

When I entered the court of the college, I immediately observed the look, the beauty of a young boy. He was with the son of the friend I accompanied and it is because of him that the headmaster seemed to escort me. 'I am delighted to show our house to the author of *Amitiés particulières (Special Friendships)*', this good priest had said to me. 'But special friendships do not exist in our place. We obtained this result by a very simple means: by having confidence in the students, by enlarging the discipline. Imagine that we allow the big boys to smoke!' And he had lead us to the recreation court.

While my friend embraced his son, the other boy, a few steps away from us, did not stop looking at me. He wanted to say to me that he had got to know my name through his friend, that he had passionately read the book, of which the memory had drawn me here, and that he poured the consequences on me again. He had himself sat down in profile, in order to not attract attention, but his green eye sparkled, protected from his long brown hair. His complexion was pink and dim, his nose fine and straight, his well-defined lips added to the softness of his face. A red, cashmere sweater was tightly wrapped around his chest, and his hands, tucked into his pockets, held the arch of his black trousers at the bottom of his back. An imperceptible smile seemed to allude to secrets that we already shared.

‘You will have seen it, seen with your own eyes,’ the headmaster exclaimed, pointing at students: ‘they are smoking! Ah, these nice children!’ And he dragged us along to the park, my friend and me. ‘Don’t judge me naïve,’ he continued: ‘the clandestine habit of smoking with two was the opportunity for habits that were clandestine as well and by far sadder. If you suppress one of them, you suppress the other ones.’ ‘We needed to think of this,’ I said. ‘The heroes of your book were smoking in a conservatory. This detail touched me. What dramas would be avoided with a little bit of common sense!’ I shook my head approvingly. However, the love of smoking was not always to blame for the special friendships. On the road, I told my friend the recent tragedy about which a young man from Bretagne had informed me and who, having had a natural college as a theatre, clergymen as artisans and a child as a victim, reminded me of the story that I had romanticized. But

probably one is more capable in a college at the Ile-de-France, where there is the permission to smoke.

The first leaves unfolded themselves on the branches, the sun mohaired the water piece, the breeze brought us the scent of youth and of hope. I retraced my footsteps to the court: I liked to confirm the significance of a look and to show that I understood. Wasn't the sound of the bell going to abolish my calculations? Down there, the silhouette in the red sweater stood out. I quickened my steps, though the conversation rolled on about Teilhard de Chardin. My friend's son came back towards us. The other one was seen in front, leaning against a tree, always his hands in his pockets. His green look seized me with the same force. A hidden joy floated from it: he had received my answer.

II

During the return, my excitement amused my friend. To him it seemed justified by this visit, made at the risk of a walk. Despite our intimacy, I could not admit to him that I had decided upon a friend of his son. How many novels of this genre had I lived in some minutes or in some hours! But, most often, this look, which established a complicity between a man and a boy, has as a comment the English sonnet "Lost opportunities": "My name is What could have been. My names are also Never again, Too late, Goodbye." If I believed in the reality of the novel today, it is because I never captured a look like that: it was not the one of opportunity, but of fate.

I did not forget the abyss that separated me from an unknown boy, detained in a college. However, a chance remained to see him again. I owed it to the headmaster, just like I owed him this encounter: he had suggested me to assist at Mass next Tuesday. ‘There also, we have changed a lot of things,’ he had said to me. ‘The religious methods of your youth ~ and mine ~ were miserable, and I am not surprised that they often produced the opposite effect of what people were looking for. Now, no more compulsory Mass during the week: who wants to, will go. On Sundays, Communion who wants it. No more flowers on the altars: these bouquets, these perfumes inspired sensuality. Quite right; a bit of incense and not these clouds, where our young souls daydreamed. Consequently, more of these painful scenes which have inspired you to such beautiful... historical pages.’ The word “historical,” pronounced by him with irony, marked the distance between the dark era where one was smoking in the conservatory, and the enlightened times where one is smoking in the court. One would have said that it did not save me anything to be drawn into the game, and, in fact, next Sunday, I would play double or quit. ‘It’s Palm Sunday,’ he had concluded, ‘you come in handily.’ I did not ask him if there were still palms.

I was certain of the victory: Love was on our side. This boy even had the same age as this god ~ the age which the Greek named so well “the hour”: the hour of the flower which opened itself up, of the fruit which is ripe. At the expense of this appearance, all the creatures whom I loved or desired, were “without appearance,” as Plato said; they were without look, in comparison. By the way, the other looks, I had provoked them. This one had badgered and conquered me. For the moral of the good fathers, for the law of the world, it was me, the guilty

one, because I was, of how many radiances ! the best, and it is me who had been induced in temptation. My book, sure, had initially played the part of the tempter, but one can say of the tastes that have been awakened by literature or by art like vocations: 'You would not search for me, if you had not found me.' After having searched all my life, I eventually deserved to have found. A similar contest of circumstances had not produced itself in vain. The faith that I had lacked to go and discover the little Belgian of *Jeunes proies* (*Young Preys*), I would have it to conquer this boy. By crossing the threshold of this college, it had often seemed to me that something extraordinary was waiting for me here: it was someone.

However, if there are the eloquent looks, not followed by encounters, there are the intoxicating encounters without a next day. It is the fate of love that I have determined the impossible. It is not, if it finds thousands of ways to practice itself, and it is, if it cannot sing itself, neither live itself. After the luminous antiquity, this love has expressed itself distinguishedly only by a Michelangelo and a Shakespeare, while our era has all in all the Calvinist confessions of guilt by André Gide, the ergastularian lyricism by Genêt and the texts which are not to be published, like *Hombres* (*Men*) by Verlaine and the *Livre blanc* (*White Book*) by Cocteau. These modern works have the wrong to describe acts and not sentiments. I did not imagine singing the adventure that I would hope to live, but I put it from now on under the protection of the gods that I adore and in the grace of whom I intend to die: Apollo and Priapus.

Priapus is the god of boys. It is he who, by revealing to them the solitary pleasures, presides at their second birth ~ their real birth into life. It is he who, by a brother's hand, a cousin's, a friend's, let them learn about mutual love, when it is not an uncle's, a godfather's, a family friend's, a confessor's, a teacher's, a servant's or a stranger's in a public place. In the early days, this charitable care for the royal children was reserved to the cardinal-prime ministers (Mazarin with Louis XIV, Fleury with Louis XV). A few boys were initiated by a girl or a woman. Venus, of whom Priapus was the son, as was Cupid, presented herself, when, according to the Greek proverb "the little goat has become a billy." And that is all right, because Priapus is the god of boys of whom Tibulle asks him the secret to seduce them, because "his competence seduces all the beautiful ones."

Seducing them is less difficult than loving them and than being loved.

Les Amitiés particulières were bathed in the lightness of Apollo, but Priapus resided on the verge. His statue was veiled behind a curtain of lilies. The blink that I had received from the boy with the green eyes, was the blink of *Les Amitiés particulières*, but corrected by Priapus.

These truths reminded me, in contrast, of the words of His Reverend Father about the benevolences of tobacco, smoked in public. I had doubts about his naïveté, for other reasons than this. We had visited the dormitory after the court, and I had noticed the strange position of the beds: they were not face to face, on each side of the central aisle, but turned against the wall. This invention of the good fathers honoured their obsession with impurity better. For lack of being able to prevent

the calls from neighbour to neighbour, they had put an end here to arranged on arranged. Our guide had made me notice that the superintendant's room did not possess a small hinged window onto the dormitory and he had concluded in these terms, 'One purifies everything by trust.' The position of the beds proved that his trust had its limits, but to a certain point he followed the advice of the *Don Leon*, hero of the pederastic poem, attributed to Byron: "Close, close the eyes, oh pedagogues! ~ Do not watch too close the sleep of your students." I imagined the boy in the red sweater undressing this night in the dormitory, and thinking of me in front of the wall. This wall, we were to break it down.

The swaying of the car accompanied my reflections and my friend's peaceful speeches. In a loud voice, I had made some concerning the dormitory. I added one about the cacophonies of morality and education, 'Everything has been summarized by this word of Voltaire, "The *Bucoliques* ~ pederasty taught to youth." One teaches it without teaching it, because one would be ashamed to censor Virgil, but one does, as if no schoolboy could be Alexis or Corydon.' 'These verses by Virgil did not influence my habits,' my friend said. 'So far, my son also resisted them. Undoubtedly, it is to take away from them the forbidden fruit, that they are being kept on the programme. You laugh about the good fathers, but they are on the right way. On the day that they will talk about your books, like has been done already in the lyceums, they will take away from you a part of your harmful effects.'

'Maybe you are right. The real educators go ahead of the problems and the interests of youth, instead of flying for them. Lately, in a

worldly institution in the neighbourhood, the philosophy teacher gave as a choice, in French class, a psychological course either of the *Amitiés particulières*, or of the *Liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous liaisons*). Out of thirty-five students, thirty-one chose my book. And it is a mixed course. 'The truth is in operation. Nothing will stop it..., ' as Zola said.'

In the dormitories of the big boys, the headmaster showed us with conceit the photograph of father Teilhard de Chardin, pinned onto the walls. 'His works are in bad odour with Rome,' he said to us, 'but we permit our children to read them and even to admire them. That is part of our liberal principles.' We held up this trick of the Church, which served itself for this Jesuit to flirt with the young or to discuss with the scientists, but which disapproves of it in order not to shock the hypocrites. 'I know someone,' I said, 'to whom father Teilhard de Chardin learned *rosa* "the rose"... and scientifically defined the ideal: 'The residue that still exists in the melting pot of a sincere soul, when it has become conscious of itself.' 'Admirable definition of faith!' 'And of pederasty.' 'You return everything to that.' 'I return everything to love and for me, it is Greek. Pederasty is the most inexhaustible form of love, because it is the love of youth. Even Don Juan would not be in love with all women, while a pederast is theoretically in love with all boys.

'Sweethearts with no amount who are never enough!'

Voltaire said. Don Juan can end up renouncing women and become a monk; a real pederast stands in the breach until his last day. Gide would not have had the courage to connect the Nobel prize with his *Corydon*, but he declared that it was the most important one of his works.' 'Don't you believe he was a bit senile then?' 'A pederast is never senile, for his life is a continuous battle, in which one has to conquer or die. The homosexual who is not a pederast, and leads, in principle, a calmer existence, because he is being tolerated by the laws, equally enjoys a prolongation of youth, which the eugenicists explain in their own way. I have known only one senile homosexual: the late cardinal... Still his senility was sublimated and almost sanctified by homosexuality. He was eighty-four years old at the death of Pius XII, which is more than Gide, whose works he had made put on the Index. At the conclave, he astonished his colleagues by asking them to vote for Merry del Val. This cardinal, who had been his very special friend in his youth, and after that, Secretary of State of the holy Pius X, was dead and buried since a long time. They exerted themselves to refresh the memory of ..., but he answered with stubbornness that he would vote for Rafael ~ Christian name of his sweetheart ~ that Rafael was the most dignified one, that the Holy Ghost was in favour of Rafael and that Rafael would be chosen. Well, ... he had to pronounce *urbi et orbi* and the result of the election on the balcony of the Saint Peter. If, in his insanity, he announced Merry del Val, it would be the greatest homosexual scandal of the Christian era. And that is what happened. But one had put a false microphone in front of him and while he introduced the name of Merry del Val into nothing, they blared Roncalli's name into a real microphone. It is notorious that nobody recognized the cardinal's voice... That's how we have had John XXIII, instead of Rafael I. This

pope or antipope of Greek love is a good forerunner for the continuation of the twentieth century.

III

I was dreaming, waiting for sleep ~ I was dreaming my most beautiful dream and I swore to myself to fulfill it. I invoked a small statue of Love which was at the head of my bed. Companion of my occupations and my journeys, this nice gilt bronze from the Renaissance did not leave me. I saw a copy of the *Love of Thespies* in it, which had charmed my youth. Now it had taken the form of a boy to whom I could dedicate Asclepiad's epigram: "If they would give you wings and if you would hold bow and arrows, it is not Love whom they would tell Cypris' son, it is you."

Despite everything, I was obliged to remember that I had a liaison with a girl from Reims. Was I going to make a new wheat of *Jeunes proies*? The boy with the green eyes and the number one hero of this book, who had benefited from a funeral spell around a child's corpse, had nothing in common; but the young girl from Reims was as seductive as the young Belgian # 2. However, this second episode had served me as a lesson for the future and I did not propose a journey to Greece any more to my young women readers. This one had come back from Lesbos and from Cnide as well. She was wisely married and since then, only occupied herself with her husband and her children. The girl from Reims had introduced herself under other signs. She had a failed suicide

attempt at the start of vague university studies and had found the taste of living again in my books.

While writing her story to me, just before summer began, she added that she left for Switzerland, where she would spend the month of July with her nanny ~ her father was a widower. I had thought it my duty to comfort her. We exchanged, blow by blow, three or four letters, of which each ran on for a very long time. Eventually, she asked me if I could call her one night on the telephone: she would have been “happy to hear my voice.” I loved voices too much to not be curious for hers, which stimulated me by an almost childish tone. Thus, while copying myself, I renewed Georges’ scene when he was making love by telephone, in *la Fin des ambassades (the End of the embassies)*.

My piece of work had described a conversation of this sort about the Parisian road-system; ours took place above the borders. The distance which separated us, aroused the lust of our words. The elongated silence where they resounded, the deafening echo that prolonged them, made me admire the improved system of telecommunications and of these devices, so often horrible, that one can change them in “Mercury’s gallants.”

If Georges and Françoise had burst out in laughter at their second attempt, we were less casual. We liked the game so much that we repeated it a couple of times. Shall I say that these strange nights, spent between lake Lemman and l’Étoile, ended with a visit to Sodom? The girl ignored the existence of this metropole and I guided her to the doors. I murmured to her: ‘Sodom, besides, it is Athens, Sparta, Babylon,

Alexandria, Rome, London, New York...' 'And Montreux, because.. I am there,' she said in a weak voice.

I had to leave Paris on the first of August, and she returned to the country on the last day of July. She came to see me between two trains. I received her in the middle of my suitcases. Her face had a certain grace, worth her voice, but I did not like her decolourized hair, her painted nails, the cigarette in her beak, and her vulgar taste for whisky. Once again I measured the trap of love relations, founded on the exercises of the pen and on the disabilities of imagination. I knew that she was there for only one hour, which was too much or not enough. One hour of face to face, after three hours of whispering between Paris and Montreux! It is the opposite of what should have been.

By far, we were *isolated like in a black wood*: the pleasure had been reduced to the essence. Today, obliged to get used to our respective persons, we had to proceed by all means to an adjustment. A man provokes things with a boy, because he is "of his sort." 'Move on, move on, ladies, you are not of my sort,' a pederast of the early days said to the girls. 'You bring me a leg-of-mutton-sleeve without sleeves,' the marquis de Villette said to his chamberlain who brought him a girl instead of a boy.

'I would reside too close to the enemy,'

a “Roman knight” said in an epigram to a little girl who offered him “the reverse of the medal.” In spite of the liberties that we have taken, my darling and I, I considered the fatal accomplishment of certain acts like a forced labour. But by means of turning around her, I decided to finish it: I put my lips on hers, which smelled like whisky.

Oh, surprise! She threw me a tongue, round and fleshy, a tongue of which I would never have presumed the size and the strength in a mouth so small, and endowed with such a tender voice. This unexpected rape, this reversal of roles, chased away my concealments and she guessed it. Continuing her role of Victorious Venus, she opened my shirt, touched my chest, caressed my back, loosened my belt and paid me off quickly. When I wanted to occupy myself with her, she smiled: ‘Don’t bother.’

She sat down in an arm chair, smoked a cigarette, took a draught of whisky: ‘Ah!... you will not be able to call me like in Montreux; my father watches me a lot. These country families!... You will write me *poste restante*. Tonight, in my bed, I shall think of you.’ She looked at her watch and asked me to call a cab.

Started on the top of Paphos, our relations were dedicated to elapse. Naples, Capri softened the look of this keen one. However, in Fiesole, in the friendly house which is one of my home ports, I received a letter from her that had been a new whiplash. She told me that she had had to stay in bed as the result of a sprain; she had been paid a visit by a young cousin of thirteen years old and had enjoyed herself by tempting him with her propositions and her ways of behaving. She soon established that he was excited; but he had crossed his legs to hide his agitation. ‘I

was taken by such a mad joy,' she said, 'that I pressed my face into the cushion. Then I mused on what was our favourite distraction and asked him point-blank ~ his point was burning, believe me! ~ if he knew the use of it. After quite some hesitation, he confessed to me that he dedicated himself to it every evening. You can guess in which state I was ~ and he as well. I forgot to tell you that he looks exactly like an angel.'

If I had not liked this feminine roar of laughter in front of Priapus, I had tasted the conclusion, worth of *the Art of being a grandfather*:

What a promise on the bottom of the smiles of angels!

For me, their smile is a "promise of happiness," definition of beauty, according to Stendhal. He who does not have his source and his end in the senses, is not happy, but the charm of childhood is to promise before being able to keep. Still does it keep with pleasure, at an age which the good people do not guess. The author of *Lolita* surprised while exposing the existence of "nymphets." The satyrics were the small companions of the satyrs, Pan's children, and, if the occasion were offered, the Lolito's would push aside the Lolita's.

... What would become of the families,

If the hearts of young boys

Were made like those of the girls?

The knight de Boufflers, who was a pederast, seems to pose a question there, which he had resolved: the hearts of boys are as passionate as those of girls and their bodies more precocious and more strenuous. In the area in which the girl from Reims wrote this letter to me, I would have hesitated between her and her cousin. If he were of my physical “sort,” she was of my ethical “sort.” She even represented something more complete, despite de Villette’s word. Today, all girls and all boys in the world have been obscured by one look: the look of Love.

IV

Pueri Hebraeorum (A Hebrew young man)... Since how many years have these words, sung by heavenly voices, not struck my ear? They reminded me of the time when I went to the Easter ceremonies with my father and mother, and of the more further time of my college, where, like in this one, Palm Sunday was followed by the holidays. I looked for the images of Saint Claude, in order to replace Georges and Alexander by the man who I was and by the boy who served Mass ~ the boy for whom I had come back. The headmaster stuck to his role: he had placed me in the dress circle and a god had put this boy in the choir. There were no

flowers on the altar anymore, but the most beautiful of the flowers was budding at the foot of the altar.

This already had allowed me to pick a look which sanctioned my conquest. A transparent radiance showed the delicacy of his waist. In the low neckline of the collar, a red tie was glittering, and he put the top of his fingers on it while uniting his hands. I was sure that he wore this garish tie especially for me, after the symbolism of *Amitiés particulières*, because my friend's son knew that I would be there. The day of the Lord was the day of Love. My chair was the seat of Bacchus' high priest in the theatre of Athens: on each of the marble armrests, a Love with huge wings, a Love this boy's age, bended its knee to excite a fighting cock. I ignored how things were going to happen, but they obeyed to the laws of harmony which had been determined beforehand.

From time to time, I saw the headmaster's eye on me. He spied on the progress of my return to the 'God of my youth.' I did not think myself obliged to pretend murmurings and kept an academic attitude. Nevertheless, even if I belonged to another religion, I would taste every refinement that Catholicism gives to Greek love. For some plays, which would have been provoked elsewhere by other motives, what training college of Alexises and of Corydons is a religious college! It is not only because of the possible fathers of Trennes, for the education by laymen has its people; but because of the clergymen being approximately the only men to really occupy themselves with boys, and the fact of really occupying themselves with boys, creates amorous relations between men and boys and, what is the most peculiar, between boys. It goes without saying, in most of the cases, these relations remain on a spiritual level,

but is Greek love anything else than a virile spirituality, which sometimes exceeds the attraction of the bodies and sometimes succumbs to it?

Pueri Hebraeorum... I left the chapel, a Palm branch in my hand. It was the golden branch which would open forbidden doors for me. However, I did not forget the word of the ancient fabulist: 'The gods were favourable to us, but fate was the opposite to us.' Would I have a means to approach this boy and to put a note into his hand on which I had written my address and my telephone number? The headmaster addressed himself to us and apologized for taking away my friend from me for a few moments to have a business conversation: the hour of fate had rung.

I had observed the chapel; everybody was gone, except my choirboy. I approached, mounted the stairs with difficulty: he finished putting out the wax candles with a calculated slowness, as if he expected me. He had left his radiance. He was alone. At the sound of my pace, he turned his head lively and smiled at me. I moved up at the side, so that I could not be seen from the outside, and gave him a sign to come near. He came, redder than his tie, but in a determined way that I admired. 'Good morning!' I said, shaking his hand. He introduced himself. His Christian name, his name were *soft and resonant as those of loved ones*. His voice was warm, well-pitched, a bit melodious. Our eyes penetrated each other. 'We do agree, don't we?' I said. He confirmed. I gave him the note. 'You live in Paris?' 'No, in X, near Versailles... After having read your book, I wanted to write to you and I looked for your address in the telephone book, but it was not in there.' I listened with delight to this explanation. 'I love you,' I murmured. 'You know what

that means, to love?’ ‘Yes, I do,’ he said. ‘Since that I’m a man, I have asked life for a boy to love for life. You make me hit the goal of my life.’ I was not more surprised than he about my words. His hand was in mine: he pressed my fingers. ‘Is it in my honour that you have put on a red tie?’ He smiled, ‘And it is for you that I served Mass.’ ‘We don’t play *les Amitiés particulières*.’ ‘I know, but one has to read it.’ To mark this encounter by another symbolic gesture, I offered him the silk handkerchief that I had in my pocket. He put down a kiss on it. Then I took him in my arms, behind the door leaf, and returned on his lips his kiss on the handkerchief.

PART TWO

I

Much too early, I spied the entrances of the subway under the Place de l’Étoile. He had rung me shyly, on Easter Monday, and we had decided to see each other the next day. I feared that, at the last moment, he would have hesitated to take the plunge.

My heart beat to break itself. In the middle of the crowd, a thin silhouette, dressed in clear gray, detached itself. He did not have a coat, for the softness of spring had begun, but he held an umbrella, like a small gentleman. He had noticed me, blushed like in the chapel, and hurried towards me. Our first good day outside the college. Our first

smile in freedom. We descended my avenue, talking about indifferent things. In full daylight, I saw the grain of his skin, the down of his cheeks, the curve of his eyelashes. I thought it a proof of good taste that he had not put on a red tie again: he did need to display our banner; but his almond green tie reminded of the colour of his eyes. He evaporated a light fern perfume, like a memory of sweet lavender of the two heroes whom he loved.

Soon we had arrived. He pushed the gate, followed the lane, mounted the steps. There was nothing more than a high wall to separate him from an event that would change his life and maybe mine as well.

I opened my door, I shut it again. We entered my office. 'Today you are with me,' I said to him, 'because you are mine forever.' I advanced an arm chair to him and installed myself opposite him. With pleasure I saw the glance that he cast around the room, making it clear to me that he loved the ancient things and the antique art. 'I surrendered myself to you like I surrendered myself to no one,' I resumed. 'And the only thing I know about you is your name. Love, real love, does not need any references. Yet, satisfy my curiosity a little.'

The first thing that he said to me was the most important one: he left college and had been admitted again as a non-resident at the college de X, where he had done almost all his studies. 'One has to believe in the gods!' I cried out. I went to search for the statuette of Love in my room and gave it to him to kiss it: 'It's he who arranged everything. We are under his protection. You have established it on Palm Sunday.' 'Into the bargain, I was delighted to cheat the headmaster and the whole association.' 'You did not cheat them: you accomplished your duties and

you kept your feelings to yourself. Today, you don't cheat your family who believe you are with a friend, and you will not cheat them in the things that concern only you... and me. Apart from that, you should love your parents longer only for having made you as you are. Without wanting to, they have put you outside the common and into a world that is miraculous, when one avoids what is dangerous.' 'They are intelligent. The proof: it is my mother who made me read your book.' He spoke these words without a smile.

His father, a bank manager, had had an argument with the authorities of the college about a question of interests and, angry, had decided to withdraw him immediately: 'We are not very practising, but he had expected that a year in a religious "kit" would do me good.' This time, a smile accompanied his comment, 'He has been right, hasn't he?... But if you had arrived eight days later...' 'Not eight days, but half an hour! The great things in life keep to coincidences as lightly and as providentially.' His mother, who adored him, and his sister, three years older than him, joined his gladness about his return into the father's house. 'Beware!' I said, 'your sister will be your spy.' 'Do not fear anything: she does not occupy herself with my affairs, she has her girlfriends and her flirts.' 'Don't forget that our love, our happiness depends on our secret. You don't have the age of liberty yet, even if you have intelligent parents. Don't give them suspicions. We should not grieve the people who love us. We shall not see each other as often as we would want to and even as we could, for carefulness is necessary. But time is our ally and Love is our god... Today, it is the first day of Love.' 'The second one,' he said. 'The first one was the one of our first kiss.' Charmed, I watched him from the corner of my eye, 'I have not

embraced you yet.’ He rose to sit down on the carpet, next to me. “Our first kiss,’ I resumed, ‘we exchanged it in a chapel. That was not a sacrilege, but a consecration.’ He had closed his eyes, with his head turned round on his shoulders. I kept observing him for a few minutes, then bent down to him. His mouth came towards mine. His body came towards my hand.

II

A letter! He had drawn our initials on the back of the envelope on each side of the flap. On the left, the Christian names; on the right, the names, united with each other by an arrow with two points. On the envelope itself, he had only calligraphed my name, as if to preserve my Christian name in his heart. The handwriting was closed, firm, small enough; the capitals and the descenders of a rare elegance. I was delighted by this all and by his idea to remind himself to me, but I was anxious for what I was going to read. I found it imprudent to touch a new keyboard. I reflected on the young readers who express their emotions to me by neatly plagiarizing the letters of my books, without their knowledge. It is true that none of them had been capable to write to me what would have been possible. But I forgave him in advance: he had wanted to transport *les Amitiés particulières* into life. I imagined the notes of love that I had received and threw myself on this stream of the Tender which returned from so far to water my grounds.

“My Beloved,

I’m only thinking of you and I’m only thinking of seeing you again. My gestures are dictated by you. Your words, like your sweet image, are engraved in me. I would like to be with you during all the days of the holiday. Our separation exasperates me, but I know that we will be compensated again for that by a friendship (a love) without end.

At this moment, I am in my bed and I have your precious handkerchief in my left hand. At night I put it under my pajamas and during daytime against my heart.

What a lovely afternoon it has been! One moment we were talking to each other, the other we were hearing the desires of our souls (and of our bodies) rising within us.

I cannot believe that a happiness like this happens to me. I think that I am the toy of a dream. But when I carry your handkerchief to my lips or to my eyes, I do not doubt anymore and my happiness is complete.

Your fondness is the only thing that lives, excites me and sets me on fire.

To your body and soul forever.”

The last two words were underlined. And there was this postscript: ‘I will always have your first kiss on my mouth.’

So much as I had feared a disappointment, so complete was my joy. I had created a being, according to my ideal. But as this being had the genius of love, he had made his own what he had received from me. If he had taken from *Amitiés particulières* Alexander's "always" ~ the most beautiful word of love ~ it was to reflect the spirit with it and to confirm the feeling with it. Just like I had conquered him by words, of which he had succeeded to see the human truth, he had accomplished to conquer me by words, where the god that was in him, appeared.

I loved the softness and the harmony of his style, which gave evidence of a precocious taste for good reading matters. I loved these amplifications, which shrouded confessions or hopes. I equally loved his way of beginning a new paragraph to bring out certain sentences, like poetic *enjambements*.

I was happier than I had ever been. After the day of the souls (and of the bodies), it was the one of the spirits. Apart from that, isn't it his spirit which brought me the gift of his soul and of his body? Yes, me too, for the first time, I gave myself with my entire body, with my entire spirit, with my entire soul. When people are interested in adolescence, they do not ignore that it offers hardly any spiritual approximations. This is one of the motives which brings uncertainty with it, or which softens the sadness of not being able to determine it: one has quickly made the outline of the bodies, whether they be charming. Only my girl from Reims had endured well, maybe thanks to the distance, but she did not even hold the benefit of the pen: a boy degraded her with that. This body, which was so charming, this soul, which was so ardent, this spirit,

which was so precocious, assured me that this really was the boy “to love for life.”

Beyond the ideal that he embodied, he elevated himself to the height of the archetype. But it was an archetype in the flesh. Thus, he made me understand platonism, which certainly rested on love of the bodies, and on love of the souls as well. In order to hide secrets, which were not made for the trivial, one only spoke of the soul and one threw a chaste or a disapproving veil on the body. But the body participated in the games of the spirit. Plato delivers us his secret, besides his chaste lascivious dialogues, in his epigrams, all pederastic. I quoted to myself the most beautiful one from it, in memory of this kiss which reminded me of the postscript: ‘My soul, when I embraced Agathon, was on my lips. It had come there, the unhappy one, to pass into him.’

III

The pregnant fullness... On the pillow, a smile enlightened his face ~ the smile of pleasures he had shared, the smile of kisses we did not count anymore. He crouched himself against me, saying, ‘My darling, my darling!’

His flattering appearance, his spinning, suggested to me another term, ‘You are my cat.’ He started laughing. ‘Do you know that I adore cats? I have got a very small one. His name is Patrocle.’ ‘Definitely, you have nothing vulgar. I bet that never a cat has been called Patrocle.’

‘We are translating *l’Iliade*. I have been interested by the friendship of Achilles and Patrocle. Considering myself rather like Achilles, I have baptized Patrocle my companion.’ He folded his eyes to add, ‘He is even my bed companion.’ ‘You have guessed the tie that united Achilles to Patrocle, but which has not been revealed by *l’Iliade*. The Greek friendship, like ours, does not have any restrictions. In *Amours (Loves)* by Lucien de Samosate, translated by your servant, Achilles, who wept over Patrocle’s death, regrets “the pious trade of his thighs.” It’s a verse, drawn from a lost tragedy.’

He still smiled, ‘Patrocle loves to sleep on my thighs. He mounts them, as soon as I am sitting at the table or at my desk.’ ‘I adore cats and I have had one who has been my passion. We prove that they are the loved ones of *passionate lovers* and of *stern scholars*.’ ‘That is you, the stern scholar?’ ‘A great work condemns to a certain sternness; you will see that I am a rather good moral teacher.’

To show it to him, I enquired if he did not abuse the *sin that one commits without any company*. He indulged himself in it twice or three times a week. That was less than the cousin of the young girl from Reims. ‘From now on, I will not need it anymore,’ he said with a smile.

I went to search for sweets and refreshments. As he had told me that he loved tea, I put the kettle on. I displayed a place-mat on the tray and some napkins, embroidered with roses, which I had bought in his honour. Because I imitate the new Church by not putting flowers on my altars, it was an occasion to tell him that the rose was the flower of Greek love. A lover sent roses to his beloved one. ‘Here they are!’ he said, covering his head with a napkin. He added, ‘My sister possesses

medical books, dealing with sexual questions, and I have read them. What a difference between these things and love!’ He enlarged his eyes like he had done in the chapel, and repeated, ‘Love...!’ He proceeded, ‘The pastors revealed to me that, what would attract me, was a sin; my sister’s books, that it was a perversion; *les Amitiés particulières*, finally, that it was love.’

He looked malicious, ‘I’m sure that Georges and Alexander would have been impure after their years of pure love, for it is not possible to control the natural desires. What do you think of that?’ ‘If father Lauzon had not entered the shed, when the two friends rolled themselves there on the straw, I believe that the crystal of their purity would have burst itself on that day. Which makes this story a love story...’ ‘Authentic, isn’t it?’ ‘Certainly!... it is that Georges, who was impure, has purified himself because of Alexander. Love obliges one to become the other. So it was normal that Georges became Alexander with a view to please him, but it was also normal that Alexander became Georges. Apart from that, he would not have loved him. As he ignored Georges’ world, even when he pretended to have an idea of it (“the things that you do not need to know...”), he gave him a proof of mad and sublime love by killing himself.’

‘I have wept about Alexander’s death,’ he said. ‘Aren’t you embarrassed that so many boys weep over these pages? Boys and girls... my sister, for instance. Dad only occupies himself with finances and hunting, but mum is also one of your admirers. Yesterday she talked about you during dinner and inside myself I smiled. And I felt happy about this smile.’

I admired him as much as I loved him. It is really in him that *childhood mixed itself with maturity*. Like me, he was born what he was. But he thought more naturally what had made us, which I would not have thought at his age. I would not have had his liberty of spirit and gestures. Nevertheless, while I had imagined at first that he was my creation, I did not see in him a youthful and improved image of myself: I loved him, because he was Love. And because he was Love, he was my master.

So, could I be surprised of his answer, when I asked him who had taught him... “the things you need to know”? He looked surprised, ‘I did,’ he said. ‘You all alone?’ ‘I all alone. One day, when I was almost twelve, I felt something; I occupied myself with it. And that was that. I understood then what I have seen doing, a complete child, at the communal school, where my father had put me one year ~ “to form me” ~ and, for the rest, I have seen doing it then by the small ones of the secondary school. That consisted of introducing to themselves the rule in the trouser leg, while looking like learning their lessons or doing one’s duty. The frolicings of my friends have intrigued me, without making me curious.’

It seemed to me that this “game of the rule” was unknown to the students of the early days and I praised those of the Atomic Age for having transformed the symbol of the virtues and of the scholastic discipline into an instrument of pleasure. From now on, the rule must be hung up on the full equipment of human desires, with the whip of the flagellants and the dildo of the lesbians.

‘Later on,’ he continued, ‘I surprised boys who exchanged a caress beneath their desks. One Thursday, during a walk in the open air, I found two boys in full exercise behind a hedge. I did not stop... nor did they. The guts they had!’ ‘Impudence is not the privilege of the small Frenchmen. The son of one of my friends, a student at an elegant English college, confessed to me that many of his fellow-students, lords’ sons or others, masturbated quietly in full study. This already happened in Roman schools, if we believe Juvénal about that.’ ‘They won’t make us translate this text in class.’ ‘Certainly, but you will only see disguised translations everywhere, like classic authors for the most part. The act of these students, contemporary or Roman, ~ in Greek, literally, “to secretly weaken oneself” ~ is being translated into “to take an effeminate attitude” in the *Life of Apollo of Tyane* of the La Pléiade collection. God knows if it is about the virile act *par excellence!* Our Aliborons of all breeds conspire to hide the real face of antiquity to young people. At the English universities they do respect Greek and Latin, maybe because the Greek-Latin customs have been spread there more.’

When I announced to him that the time to leave was approaching, he threw himself upon me with a kind of frenzy, ‘No, I don’t want to leave you.’ ‘We only *seem* to leave each other.’ ‘And my holiday is over! Maybe I won’t even have my Sundays off. How can I leave?’ His repeated efforts seemed intended to conquer me and to convince me. Never a flexible body like that had been so solid. Never more tender youth had shown such strength.

IV

I received this new letter from him:

“My love,

I am always bored by not seeing you. I also write you this word, and the idea that you will touch this paper, pleases me.

Last Sunday, I arrived at 8:30 am. My parents were not there yet. Fortunately.

I found my school again. In the court I often reflect on another court.

Yesterday, at the French explanation, we had a page from the book *Remorques (Trailers)* (?). The only thing that I retained about the author, is his Christian name (Roger).

Tomorrow, we will make the French composition and I will try to be the first. That would be a nice comeback among my old friends. At the next editing, I will tell you the subject, in order that you talk about it, if you have the time. How I would like to read your text out loud! for the best is being read in class.

I have begun with *Mademoiselle de Murvill (Miss de Murville)*, which delights me. Has the young Claude Photin been inspired to you by someone?

As a result of your descriptions, I would like to walk with you through the country, hand in hand. You know, in ..., where I go on holiday, there are places of solitude, forests, picturesque locations, and it would be marvelous to go there together in very fine weather.

Here, you made me long to be alone. Before we knew (loved) each other, I only went out with friends. Now, it is a real torture for me to be in their company and it is my pleasure to stroll, while dreaming of you.

Thousands of kisses...

P.S. Next Sunday, we will exchange our blood."

My girl's letters, I could have composed them all. This boy's letters had a grace and a power that only were his. I would not have changed a word without destroying them. Each of his sentences expressed his qualities and his virtues. The handwriting was even firmer than the first time: the perspective of the mystical episode of *Amitiés particulières* that he wanted to make relive, seemed to give him more energy. He only used one of these amplifications that he seemed to be fond of, but it was, like the ones before, the image of his chastity. His relative curiosity in the small character of my second novel, proved his interest in my past: "Claude Photin" had been one of the pale announcers of the archetype. The stamp represented smiling eyes, with this caption: "Clarify yourself better." It was the first time that I noticed this stamp. And it was at the moment when I bathed in the light of Love.

I let myself be stunned by his dream about ideal walks and *what more boyish the idylle has*. But I knew well that, if the impossible love cannot be this way in secret, it will stay this way in public. Last Sunday, in my enthusiasm, I had planned to spend my holiday on the small beach of Vendée. Thus, I could have had an excuse to get to know him and to connect myself with his relatives. That could have given me a foot in the place. On second thoughts, I expected this project to be careless and unnecessary as well. We were dedicated to be alone for a long time. I did not complain about it: no face would place itself between us.

What he said to me at the moment of his return, was an appeal to caution. The first time, I had accompanied him in a cab to the *Gare des Invalides*, where he took his suburb train. The other day, the cabs being unfindable as a result of a downpour, he had to make use of the underground. I regretted my disgust of cars, which forbade me to have one. To resist these difficulties, I had subscribed to a company of radio cabs. Thus, I was sure to be able to remove even to the boundaries of his residence: we would be together for three quarters of an hour more.

It was not the only thing in everyday life in which he intervened: he continued to improve my trousseau. For his delicate skin, I bought the softest terry towelling towels and, bored by the lily white whiteness of my family sheets, I piled the finest blue sheets, rose sheets, orange sheets in my closet. I failed to have embroidered our two monograms in it, but this pastiche of marriage seemed ridiculous to me. We were not “married,” like I hear say sometimes to male couples. We did not try, from then on, to imitate the famous “couples” ~ Oscar Wilde and

Douglas, Verlaine and Rimbaud. He was not an adolescent in search for scandal or for Parnassus. We loved each other.

V

We were on my bed, torso's naked, our backs leaning against the cushion. I was first, carving his left arm with a razorblade. He bent over to suck the blood, as soon as a drop appeared. Then, he held his arm towards me, but the fear of hurting him prevented me from supporting with enough strength. He took the blade and, by one stab, made a thin, red ray stream. I enjoyed the bitter taste of this young blood. Moved, we stayed immobile for a moment, one against the other. This rite abolished my years and brought his age closer to me by a kind of regeneration.

I went to look for a small bandage to tape to his arm. When I came back, he had pulled the sheets over his head ~ my first blue sheets. I stretched out close to him underneath this poetic canopy. 'Look how beautiful this is!' he said. 'We are in heaven.' His nudity, which was far from heavenly, was even more attractive in this cerulean blue. I took advantage of it.

Then, I spoke to him of the blue Grotto Cave of Capri, where Tiberius was swimming with his favourites. This name of Capri pleased him, on the strength of some titles of movies or songs. He had not read my *Exilé (Exile)*, nor several others of my books that were lacking in his

family library. I would offer them to him successively, the only present which was allowed to me. He would say that he had bought them. It is on books that he spent the biggest part of his pocket-money.

As our love was coming from a book, just like this scene of the exchange of blood, I was keen on giving him the high references of this love. Did not I have to continue my role as a pedagogue? It was proving to him that Xenophon's word is always true: 'The pederast is part of pedagogy.'

I opened the sonnets, composed by Michelangelo to the glory of the young Tommaso de Cavalieri, and translated the masterpiece to him, '... With your mark within me, I go everywhere without fear, ~ Like the one who has on himself charms or arms...'

I said to him that I could apply these words literally: from then on, he would be the secret weapon, the invisible harness, the magic charm, which would make me brave in my career. 'Everything is struggle,' I added, '~ struggle between light and darkness, between beauty and ugliness, between love and hate, between intelligence and stupidity, between truth and hypocrisy, in short, between everything that you represent and what the biggest part of society represents.'

I made him see that the Italian commentator of Michelangelo's poems called "absurd slander" what is especially so known about his tastes. "The anger of conformism," I said, 'does not admit that a great man could be pederastic, while pederasty or, in a much broader way, homosexuality, ~ sorry for this barbaric term ~ have illustrated all areas. This prejudice does not date back to today. I have jumped at this

sentence of the very libertine Brantôme: “Never a bastard nor catamite was brave but Julius Cæsar.” Did he ignore ancient history, the history of the Middle Ages and the history of his time? To repeat this folly, one should further ignore modern history. How many marshalls...!’ Smiling, he interrupted me, ‘It is you whom I love. I make fun of Cæsar and of marshalls.’ ‘Don’t make fun of Napoleon, of Frederick of Prussia, of Alexander of Macedonia... We must place heroic characters on the façade animation of our existence, not only to show to a vain people “the great ancients,” but because a love, against which society is united, obliges us to cultivate a certain heroism. The mere fact to accept this love in our early youth is already a victory on prejudiced imbeciles. This assertion of principle, wouldn’t it be against itself, has later been called to renew itself constantly. The idiots talk about the “franco-freemasonry of homosexuals,” but what is it in comparison with the freemasonry of anti-homosexuals? Verlaine, who sang about pederasty, was right to say that *it is the love of the strong and of the strong*. So it is natural that it would have been practiced by Michelangelo.

To the greatest artist of modern times, add Shakespeare, of whom you will read the famous pederastic sonnets (“My friend and I are nothing but a...”) and a third “great one,” Goethe, who wrote: “I love boys, but I prefer a girl.” The restriction does not diminish the merit of the confession. He precises, ~ what ranges him doubly on the same side of the barricade, “And when I have enough of the girl, I treat her like a boy.” ‘~ Oh!’ he said, shocked. And he shut my mouth with a kiss.

VI

“My darling,

Last Sunday, during the trip back, I must have looked awkward to you, but I did not feel well. I replied to you at random. Was it the nerve exhaustion? the warmth? It was so warm in that cab where the driver was talking about accidents!

Again I took a glance at certain of my sister's books ~ “the books of perversions.” And I also opened and closed again soon a pornographic-existentialistic novel which she bought. I thought of what you read to me and of what you told me. That made me forget so many multi-coloured follies and primary bestialities.

You will me tell about the love of the Great Alexander and of Ephestion.

To your body and soul forever.

Your darling child.

P.S. Next Thursday at five o'clock I will telephone you.”

I was sensible for his delicacy: he apologized for things I had not noticed. In my joy of this wandering to his quarters, how would I have noticed that he “did not feel well”? I had pressed his burning hand without realizing “that it was warm in that cab.” And it was his warmth that penetrated me, when he pressed the palm of his hand against mine

or caressed my fingers as if to mould them. I guessed now what the cause of his fever and his trouble was: the exchange of our blood, though accomplished in a real symbolic way, had struck his imagination. Maybe this is what inspired him for his moving autograph: “Your darling child.” The term, which he had given me so softly, decorated both of us. But, despite the title he gave to himself, I refused to consider my love for him as an ambiguous fatherhood. I did not imagine a “marriage,” and neither would I imitate these adoptive fathers, mocked by a Latin epigram, who “say, during the day, ‘my son’, and at night, ‘my darling’.”

He asked me to talk to him about Alexander and Ephestion, to chase the memory of these elucubrations, mentioned so well by him primary. I found his reaction against a literature, recommended by the *intelligentsia* of the ugliness and which would disgust pederasty, like the drunken outcasts disgusted drunkenness, of the best sort.

It is the second time that he called me. So many things had happened, since this Easter Monday, where he was still intimidated at the end of the wire! However, as nothing came after his hello, I thought of an interval and murmured, ‘Are you there?’ ~ ‘Yes.’ I had recommended him never to telephone me from his quarters, but he spoke so low that I doubted that. He reassured me: he was in the post office, in a booth. “The door is well-closed?” He gave me as evidence the sound of this door which he opened and closed again. ‘Now I know that we are tête-à-tête. I can contemplate you and say to you that I love you. I only live for you.’ The tone of this sentence did not make a simple echo. ‘I speak to you with your blood and you speak to me with my

blood.’ I stopped myself, hearing his silence. Finally, he said, in a lowered voice ~ the voice which he had in bed, ‘My darling!’ It seemed to me that he plucked off this word of love on his lips, but I was jealous that he delivered it to an anonymous instrument, in a public booth. I was more reserved with him than with my girl from Reims. ‘On the telephone,’ I said, ‘our moments will always be limited. It’s me who is going to break down... One... two... three.’ But I held the device and did, ‘Hello!’ A silver hello answered me. Again I started to count, ‘One... two...’ I let this ‘two’ endure, repeated it and added, hanging up, ‘Three.’

“My darling,

Phoning you yesterday, I did your number again four times before succeeding with it. My hands trembled, I was nervous, impatient. Oh, yes, impatient! Impatient to hear your voice, impatient to hear the voice of the Beloved. Apart from that, I could not have hung up the device and you understood well. At the horrible click I started crying, but of joy and happiness.

In French class, we studied a passage of a book of yours. Our teacher read the “Visit to the Acropolis” to us, extract of *Ambassades* (*Embassies*). Another sign of the gods: I was interrogated to explain this text and was given a B for it.

In Latin, we translated a text from Caesar.

Thousands of kisses. See you next Sunday at three pm.

To Your Body and Soul Forever.”

One trait accentuated Caesar, like an illusion to our last intentions. The initial of “Dimanche” (“Sunday”) was a capital and what a capital it was! The big line which curved it, looked like a flag. A capital as well, it adorned the four principal words of the final formula. I was not surprised to benefit from it, because I was the direct object of “forever”; but if the soul had a right to it, the body had as well.

He continued not putting my first name on his envelopes and, if he slipped it in a letter referring to a third party, he never pronounced it. Me too, I never pronounced his, as it was an unspeakable secret. He did not need a name, nor a first name: he was He.

VII

I did not go any further to his encounter than the Étoile, for he did not arrive by underground anymore. He had told me that he would take a cab to lose no time. I had proposed to him to pay his expenses, like meeting his fantasies without drawing the attention of his family. He answered me that he did not need money, his father being very generous. ‘Oh well,’ I said, ‘I’ll set you in gold.’

On his first visit, I asked him for a photograph, which he brought to me last Sunday and which went back for a year. It was already in a

gold frame which he adored. He had himself made a new one and drew it out of his wallet. He was in profile on it, with a charming smile of youth and of joy, but I did not find without elegance the one where he was more of a child, though he did not like it. 'I have the look of a chicken that leaves the egg,' he said. 'It is the look that you had in the recreation court: the look of someone who is waiting.' He showed the recent image: 'Here I'm no longer waiting: you arrived.' 'This photograph will also have its frame. It will make the antithesis of the former one. You will sparkle on my right and on my left, on each of my bed head frames. You make me even more invincible...'

Which one to prefer in him: his desire or his pleasure? He made of each of them something spiritual, where Priapus had as a father not Bacchus, but Apollo. With him, I would have even wanted to surmount the desire, so much did he swamp me even more with pleasure. His kisses were, on their own, a lust. I did not get tired of them and he did not get tired of giving them to me. One would have believed that the kiss was invented by him and for him. 'I searched what the taste of your saliva was,' I said to him: 'it tastes like myrtle. It is your natural perfume and this should be the perfume of Love, because the myrtle was dedicated to Venus. I discovered this little tree, when I was in Greece.'

We went back to *Ambassades*. When he repeated the compliments of his teacher about my style to me, I gave them back and asked him if he made himself a draft of his letters. 'I only did once,' he said. 'It was so bad that I started again with the letter I worked on. I did not re-read myself and, undoubtedly, there are spelling mistakes in it, for which I apologize.' 'You know how to write, because you listen to your heart.

You have jumped onto this secret frequency which immediately distinguishes a race of spirits by the choice and the collection of words.’ ‘For a writer, what is to know how to write?’ ‘That is knowing when one must open the *Littré* (Dictionary of the French language. JS)’ ‘And what is the way to perfect oneself in the art of writing?’ ‘To only read the great authors, but to read them with an open eye, like Voltaire did with Corneille. I read and re-read Voltaire in the same way: in *Candide*, which is the masterpiece of French prose, there are fifty omissions. But one needs to be able to find them.’ He looked at me with admiration: ‘You correct Voltaire?’ ‘I have said it to you: to know how to write, one needs to know how to read... and especially not read. On one single page of no matter whom of our academics, there are more mistakes than in the entire *Candide*. Let’s not talk about the other ones.’ ‘A friend of mum’s said to her that *la Mort d’une mère* (*the Death of a mother*) was one of your most beautiful books and I am going to buy it.’ ‘I’ll present it to you next Sunday.’ ‘Why? I am happy to enter the school library and to say your name.’

I thanked him for his kindness and his diligence, but I expressed a regret, ‘You will not read the only book that I would like to write and that would be the history of our love. This would be “the literary masterpiece of the XXth century,” because, according to Flaubert, this masterpiece will be pederastic; but happiness does not write itself: it lives itself.’ ‘You already wrote it, this masterpiece! It is called *les Amitiés particulières*. Gide promised it immortality.’ ‘A “special friendship” may be the adventure of no matter what man in his youth, while, for us, it is only the starting point. The love which I called impossible, is the point of arrival. But impossible is neither French nor Greek. We belong to

the furthest past, for this love, made glorious by the Greek, has flowered through all ancient times. And we belong to the centuries to come, for one day it will be as free as it was in the early days. Meanwhile, people can only live it in the catacombs, but we live it there in the light of the Acropolis.'

VIII

"My darling,

Today we have made the Latin composition. The texts were for the version: "The sincere tears of the actor Polus in the role of Electra," after Aulu-Gelle, and for the theme: "Prohibition for Roman women to drink wine," by Pliny the Ancient. This theme and this version were without difficulties for me. I almost regretted it, for it would have been sweet for me to enlighten my trouble while thinking of you, my love! Oh yes, my love, my adored one!

The blood that we exchanged, makes my happiness more complete.

My slender, precious love, I kiss your palpitating eyes.

To immerse myself in the faith and the religion which are ours, I have bought the burning sonnets of Shakespeare to the count of Pembroke and I will read them, like you read the ones, no less worshipping, of Michelangelo to Tommaso de' Cavalieri. I will

strengthen myself by re-reading the pages of Georges and of Alexander, of which I don't say the author's name.

To your body and soul forever.”

The orchestra of his youthful lyric accompanied my pace. All that concerned us, remained present in his memory. In the letter that had followed our exchange of blood, he did not make any allusion to it, even if the memory had troubled him. And he talked again about it today. Last Sunday, he made me see the small scar, like Alexander to Georges in the greenhouse of the college. And I, I made him see the precious blade which stained two more drops of blood.

On the Sunday after that, he considered, from behind my curtain, the house on the other side of the street, ‘How I would love to live over there!’ he said. ‘I would observe you from my window.’ ‘Yes, but it would be more difficult for you to cross my door.’

The smiling photograph was in place in my room, like the former one. At the foot of the first one, I had put the letters with the note. I re-read some sentences of it, before I went to sleep: it was my evening prayer. I said to him that I looked forward to see the amount of his messages grow. He made a gesture which went towards the ceiling and towards the sky, ‘Within five or six years, there will be a top like this!’

The curtains were orange, but he preferred them to be blue. We took the orange curtains away instantly. He dedicated himself to me in blue.

He took the small sculpture of Love and gave it three kisses: on the face, in the middle of the body, on the back. About the third kiss, I asked him if he knew ~ and would he have known from another person than me? ~ what the Romans called “the small crown of boys.” He guessed it, but added chastely, ‘Oh!’ that these too precise details inspired him. ‘And do you know,’ I added, ‘how the students at the Sorbonne translate this expression, in a text by Apuleius, which they will not let you translate in class anymore? It is about a horny servant who, having exhausted the narrator of the story, offers him to restore him *puerile corollarium*: “a supplement of childlike sweetness,” it has been said in *the Greek and Latin Romans* by la Pléiade, which prints the translation of the French universities. That’s the way Latin is translated in our country in the XXth century.’ ~ ‘Our Latin!’ he said.

I did advise him no less than to buy a translation of the *Satyricon*, masterpiece of pederasty: ‘Teachers at grammar schools say to me that they see this book in the hands of a number of boys, like *les Amitiés particulières*, thanks to the cheap editions. It is the very sign that the age of Aquarius has begun ~ the age of Justice and of Ganymede.

The *Satyricon* should not be looked at as a sequence of spiritual obscenities. It is also a book of love. The story of the young Giton and his friend Encolpius was made to move us, and also to amuse us. The lusts elaborately drip from these pages, but the tears do as well. I do not know how many times Encolpius cries over Giton, whom he believed to

have lost in certain coincidences. When their vessel is being shipwrecked, they attach themselves to one another naked to die together. I love this sentence: "We embraced our souls in our bodies." And you can certainly love it, you, who always talks about your soul, and at the same time of your body.'

To "dip him into the faith and the religion that were ours," I gave him the daring translation of Michelangelo's sonnets, indebted to the late academic Paul Hazard, and lent him a little book which he would hide easily: the translation, excellent this one, of *Alcibiades, child at school*, Italian scientific essay on pederasty, about which I was surprised to see it ignored by Gide. I showed to him, on our blue sheets, a copy of the original edition of the XVIIth century. Apollinaire indicates, in his *Enfer de la Bibliothèque nationale (Hell of the National Library)*, that in the whole world only five or six of it are known. One would say a little book of completely nothing, in the fine-grained calf leather of its binding, and that's a treasure. Regarding the translation, which is of the end of the XVIIth century, I purchased it when I was almost fifteen.' 'You were precocious,' he said. 'I was innocent, but I had the desire to know. This work caused sensations to me which I suppressed. My purity was enlightened, like the character's which represents me in *les Amitiés particulières*.'

He asked me if there were many pederastic works in the Hell of the rue de Richelieu. I answered him that one of the most amusing ones, which was attributed to an ignorant, had the title: *Lettres amoureuses d'un frère à son élève (Amorous letters from a father to his pupil)*. This book, seized under the second Empire, was printed again with a great deal of

noise under the third Republic by the anticlerical Library. But it is hardly literature. ‘The most beautiful love letter that a man has written to a boy,’ I said, ‘is the one of Epicurus to his love Pythocles: “Immobile, I shall wait for your lovable presence, your divine appearance...” And the most beautiful love letters that a boy has written to a man, are yours.’

IX

This city telegram, ~ undoubtedly the first one that he sent to me, for it had this post seal to explain the delay: “Found in the box,” ~ nevertheless reached me in time:

“Could you call me next Thursday at nine o’clock? I lost my address book and I do not have your number anymore. Don’t have any fear: I will be alone between nine and ten o’clock.

My darling, I have already read *Alcibiade* three times. It is something marvelous. The author has a power to persuade, which is absolutely honorable to the subject. I experienced and suppressed the same sensations as you did.

Michelangelo’s poems resound in me like an echo of your voice.

Forever.

Your darling child.”

His taste for the *Alcibiade* pleased me. I saw a new proof of our brotherhood in it. After having been, like him, the young Alcibiades, but without a tutor ~ and without a father of Trennes ~ I could say again the hymn that the tutor Philotime started, when he succeeded in seducing his pupil, 'If there are other paradises, I'd like to give my part of it, to enjoy yours.' Fortunately, Ferrante Pallavicini, author of this little work, warns us that he has composed it 'to make the children virtuous and to save them from tutors who are sodomites.' The axe of pope Urban VIII Barberini, wasting priest in bees, but in bees that were not Attic Greek, put an end to this moralist's career, by robbing us of the sequel, which had to be 'even more sensual': *le Triomphe d'Alcibiade* (*Alcibiades' Triumph*).

Alcibiades! Ganymede! Giton! I did not need all these names to add to my happiness, but they were its escort. It is to antiquity that I owe my "my faith and my religion": eventually, they have their perfect disciple.

The next day, at nine o'clock, stretched out on my bed, I composed his telephone number. I would have been impeded well, if someone else had answered. He assured me that he was alone, in his father's office. I indicated my number to him. 'Ah!' he said, 'how could I forget?' ~ 'For the first time, I speak with you in your house. It is a natural consequence of our intimacy. Think of everything that these words mean: 'our intimacy'! I am your soul and your body. You are my soul and my body. To hear you, I only have to listen to the beating of my heart and to hear me, you only have to listen to the beating of yours.

We will never be separated. The dream, invented in the book which made our love, will be accomplished.'

I appreciated the extraordinary silence with which he listened to this sort of confessions. At my place, when I quoted verses to him or nice sentences, he smiled, and sometimes roared with laughter. If it was my own language, inspired by him, he kept silent, his eyes closed, like to better indulge in contemplation or repeat my words internally. As I imagined him from far, as if he were in my presence, I suddenly asked him if his eyes were open or closed. He said, in another voice, 'I have my eyes full of tears.' 'Of real tears?' 'Of real tears!'

Would I have imagined that I could have such conversations over the telephone? conversations made, more by silences than by words, and where the abundance of tenderness provoked tears ~ 'real tears'? "Our intimacy," which had a physical basis, had been purified by something that went much further than the senses. I evoked my girl and, if these luxurious memories did not please me at certain hours, how much would I prefer this virginal discretion of a being who was still completely mine!

To unite his beauty with the one of my preferred poems, I arranged them in his favour. Baudelaire's *Hymn* that I sang in my bath, had become his hymn, thanks to very small changes:

To my most beautiful one, to my most beloved

Who filled my heart with clarity,

To the angel, to the idol of flesh,

Greetings in immortality.

And thus for the other verses which had to pass from feminine to masculine. He really was *my joy and my sanity*, like Tommaso de' Cavalieri was for Michelangelo, who said to this adolescent, before Baudelaire repeated it to a woman of easy virtue, 'You are my peace, my rest and my sanity.'

X

Sunday. A Sunday in pink sheets, to colour my lessons differently, but it was me who received a lesson of love every time. There was always a look, a gesture, a word with him to inscribe in the history books of the temple of Love in Thespies. The severity towards my inclinations that I had had for years, the faith in my ideal that I had kept despite the deceptions, the hate of everything which was ugly, foolish, and vulgar that I had cultivated, had obtained their reward. I loved as violently as love is blind, and I loved in lucidity.

In view of making him share my admiration for the poet of poets, I murmured in his ear *la Mort des amants (the Death of lovers)*. He remained like fainted under the beauty of these verses, then he embraced me, 'Before the death of lovers, there is the life of lovers.' I savoured

these words that prolonged the poem, and I took up my pedagogic role again, ‘We talked about the style: let’s regret a flaw in this diamond of the *Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*) which is for our poetry what *Candide* is for our prose: “*Viendra ranimer*” (“*Will come to restore*”) ... *rara*. That Baudelaire may forgive me and that Voltaire may support me!’

He counted on his fingers, ‘Petronius, Baudelaire, Voltaire...! I have authors to read, and Mr. Peyrefitte! But will I understand them like I understand you?’ ‘If they were not as comprehensive as the brightness of day, they would not be what they are. But, in Baudelaire there are things that you are not able to admire yet. The experience of life and the culture of poetry are needed to enjoy this quintessence of poetry and of life.

What is interesting for us, is that he wanted to call his book *les Lesbiennes* (*the Lesbians*). The lesbians are the sisters of the Arcadians that we are. Baudelaire was dismissed from the Lycée Louis-le-Grand (Louis the Great Lyceum) on account of Arcadia. The official commentators exert themselves, as usual, to deform or to veil this story. The edition of the Pléiade indicates that he was expelled “for a futility (refuse to reveal a note that a friend had passed on to him).” It is my strong opinion that it is about a futility, but what was this note? What was this friend?

It was a note which he tore up and which he ate up rather than to hand it over. It was a friend with whom he had a special friendship and that is where the pack saddle wounds the *ânes fourrés* (*the furred donkeys*). He cleared the way for them, for he protested against “the scandalous suspicions” of which he had been the object on behalf of his masters: one

seldom admits at this age and even need not admit, because one is the weakest. But his fellow-students knew what to hold onto.'

In my library I looked for the book which is the proof of it and which has as its author one of those, called Cousin. He talks about "Baudelaire's sudden disappearance before the end of their studies." And, from his own hand ~ one recognizes his calligraphy because of the dedication ~ he has written above this sentence Virgil's verse: *Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexim* (*The shepherd Corydon burned with passion for pretty Alexis*), which is the device of pederasty. 'That is what needs to be demonstrated,' I added. 'This document had to come to me. The ball searches for the player.'

'I love this name Alexis,' he said. 'One would believe the diminutive of Alexander.' '*Corydon* is the title of a book by Gide that you will read. It is a puritan defense of homosexuality.' 'I like *Alcibiade* better. That one, that's a defense of pederasty.'

His horror of the term homosexuality was equal to mine, but it is not the time anymore to substitute another word for this monstrous hybridization. It seems to have been made up to exclude what it can indicate in certain beings of poetry and of grace. The minority of this sort, that is represented by the pederasts, which means "lovers of boys," exactly search to sacrifice on these two altars. παιδεραστης

He asked me what I thought of Proust and of Gide. 'As writers or as homosexuals?' 'As homosexual writers.' I answered that their talent had simplified the understanding and without doubt the spreading of these customs. 'However,' I went on, 'Proust's homosexuality was, in

principle, due to impotence and that's a bit embarrassing. (He confesses, in a letter, that making love causes to him "a weaker sensation than drinking a glass of fresh beer" ~ the poor man!) And his eroticism depended on psychiatry. His works, so interesting for the study of homosexuality, have nothing to do with pederasty, strictly speaking, and Sartre seemed to ignore the Greek, when he expands on "the pederastic imperialism of Proust." People are free to see in his works all the imperialisms, except that one. It is that hardly any pederastic episode, no less ridiculous than unlikely, sneaks into this ingenious show of words. Proust explains to us that M. de Charlus ~ his type of homosexual hero ~ deprived of men by the war, "takes the habit and then the taste of little boys." It is like he says to us that a pederast, deprived of boys "takes the habit and then the taste of men." He forgets that these tastes and these habits exclude each other. To give us an example of this pseudo-metamorphosis, he shows us M. de Charlus with "a child who is hardly ten years old," without telling us what these weddings of the sow and the little mouse could rightly have been.

He, Gide, was a pederast, but he is also different in another sense. Indeed, he never practised, according to these terms, "love face to face," and he had this cry of indignation for one of his friends who, in Algiers, confessed to him to sodomize the little Arabs: 'What! you brutalize them!' Certainly, the brutality is to be outlawed (Byron had to let take care of his French sweetheart of Athens, Nicolo Giraud, whom he had hurt); but pederasty consists of possessing boys. As a result, what has been said about Fontenelle, referring to philosophers of his century, 'He has been the patriarch of a sect of which he was not', can be said about Gide.'

I came back to Baudelaire for some of his youth verses of which I pretended to reproduce the real meaning. They concern his boarding school at Louis-le-Grand. First, there is talk of the *heaven square of desolations*, of the *sourish milk of studies*, of the *triumphal and rebellious student*, of *pale adolescence*.

And then the unhealthy evenings, the feverish evenings came

Which the amorous girls gave from their bodies

And made them, in the mirrors, ~ fruitless lust ~

Contemplate the ripe fruits of their nubility.

‘What,’ I said, ‘are these young ladies who come out of the forests into a full lyceum, like female greyhounds in a cone game, in an era where there were no mixed courts?’

He smiled, ‘There are lyceum students who think of girls; others of boys... or of someone.’ ‘Yes, but who could have inspired them an image like that? Who among them has never seen a girl in a condition like that, were she his sister? On the other hand, because all boys, isn’t it? begin to be in love with themselves, they like to contemplate themselves completely naked *in the mirrors* to get excited, like Narcissus, with a *fruitless lust*. Cocteau describes us a similar scene in his *Livre blanc* (*White book*). Let us put bravely into masculine what Baudelaire did not,

to not infringe upon the rule of variation of the masculine and feminine rhymes and to not shock the schoolteacher Sainte-Beuve to whom this poem is dedicated:

And then the unhealthy evenings, the feverish evening came,

Which the amorous boys gave from their bodies

And made them, in the mirrors, ~ fruitless lust ~

Contemplate the ripe fruits of their virility.

An unlikely image exchanges itself for a likely... and vigorous image.’ He burst out, ‘If you correct, not only the mistakes, but the rhymes!...’ ‘There aren’t mistakes in Baudelaire’s poetry, except for the cacophonies (I have indicated one to you), repetitions, an unfortunate *not before* and *alternatively* which modifies three epithets.’

Alcibiades’ kisses paid the governor Philotime even for his pedanticness.

XI

“My darling,

How time flies, when one loves, like I love you! It seems to me that I left you yesterday and it was already the day before yesterday.

These are the results of the essays. For French, I got an A and I am second; for Latin, I got an A and I am third; for Greek, A- and I am fifth (excuse me). For English, I take the sixth place with an A. For maths, I am seventh with an A.

In the library of the lyceum I borrowed a book about the treasures of the Renaissance, illustrated by the sculptures of Pisano, Ghiberti, Jacopo della Quercia, Nanni di Banco, Donatello, Brunelleschi, Luca della Robbia, Desiderio da Settignano, Michelangelo. Some of these works have especially tempted me: "Jesus and Saint John embracing each other," by Desiderio da Settignano, or the David and the Captives by Michelangelo, which I looked at for at least a quarter of an hour.

To your body and soul forever.

P.S. I will call you next Thursday."

I was delighted by his successes with the essays. His late return to the lyceum made them absolutely deserving. To encourage him, I had said to him that, the more one distinguished oneself from the others by certain things, the more one had to exceed them in the things which one had in common with them.

His place in maths, relatively good, reminded me that his father wished him to have a career in the stock market. This career, natural for

a bank manager's son, did not encourage me beyond measure, but I did not judge it unpleasant that he would have a profession so different from mine. At our last encounter, I asked him if he always mused to make the palace of the stock exchange his Parthénon and he answered me, 'I don't know anymore!'

On the telephone, he still talked about his book about the Renaissance to me. I expressed the regret of not being able to offer him one that allowed him to admire the artists of this period better. 'The beautiful books will be for later,' he said. He gave me other details of his essays, 'Even at this moment, it looks like I am preparing one. I take a work-book, I open it on the slate and I pretend to write while listening to you, so that the postal employee will not be surprised about my regular visits.

Once again, there was this mutual silence, in which we listened to each other so well. He broke it with a sad voice, 'I think that you must start to count one... two... three... There is this good woman who waits in front of the cabin and who throws furious looks at me. While leaving it, I am going to say very loud, 'Roman women are not allowed to drink wine!'

Very softly, he had said our password, 'Next Sunday, three o'clock.' But I did not see him that day. Quite often I rushed to the window, at the sound of a pace in the corridor or of a cab which stopped in front of the gate. But I did not have any anxiety: our love was beyond reach. I had told him not to worry too much for me if he were impeded, because I comforted myself in his absence with a lot of work and my work too, it was him. In fact, he was better than "my arms and my charms": he

electrified and fertilized my spirit. I saw what the conjuring-book, which I achieved to make exciting and which I would start to dictate at the return, already owed him. Thanks to him, the perspective of the longest and most difficult labours did not frighten me: I had “the sweet travelling companion.”

He was even in my daily walk in the Bois. If there was a sunbeam that gilded the branches, a squirrel that climbed a trunk, a bird that charmed me with its trills, a perfumed expiration which caressed me near a flowering tree, it was to him that I read these impressions again. And during daytime I dreamed that he had described to me where we both could go ‘in the places of solitude through a very fine weather.’

On Monday morning, a short telegram, stamped on Sunday, notified me with delay that he went to his cousins for a birthday: “Letter will follow.”

And the letter reached me on Tuesday:

“Last Sunday, if I were not with you by presence, I was there by heart.

Several times, I removed myself to cry while thinking of you. Every time, I said to myself, ‘At this moment, I should be with him, I should be with the Beloved.’ But, like you said to me, a missed rendezvous is nothing, when one has a whole life of happiness ahead of oneself.

My darling, I call you next Thursday.

Next Sunday, we'll catch up on the lost time.

To your body and soul forever.”

On Thursday, his merry carillon resounded as soon as the morning. He was alone in his whereabouts. He announced to me that after the holiday, his sister and he would have a telephone in their rooms. While waiting, he occupied ‘papa’s arm chair.’ He was in pajamas ~ in blue pajamas. He just came out of his bath. I said to him that I loved his flirtations, his purity, his pure nails, his shining teeth. ‘I also love your laugh,’ I added: it does not cover your gums, like the one of so many mouths that think they are pretty.’ He repeated to me at what point he had been unhappy last Sunday. ‘And I, I was happy, because I was with you, without looking at your photographs. Our recent separations do not matter: we will have to know long ones. By chance, I am in the Parisian period of my work. But don’t forget that I write my books in Sicily, because I find my “climate of inspiration” there. Apart from that, my research for future works will demand stays in foreign parts that will deport me from you, even when you will take part of my life. Let us wisely exercise these trials. Our love will pay us a hundredfold. As a result, more tears...’

On Saturday, a telegram:

“My tender sweet love,

Why am I still being forced to write you? I awaited this Sunday as a day of happiness and it will only be the one of our shared sadness. Why is the weather fine? It is because of the sun that it will be forbidden for me to go to you tomorrow. Tonight we leave for X.

My darling, forgive me for having believed last Thursday that I would be free. I did not know then what my parents would decide.

I love you... *In perpetuum.*”

What deprived me of him was a family property in Oise. I knew that we would regularly suffer from that in the fine season and even in the winter, because it was close to a reserved part of the wood where his father hunted. After having been lavish with advices about patience, I had to follow them.

XII

To the pleasure of seeing him again in this beginning of June, the one of celebrating his birthday ~ ‘our first birthday’ ~ was added. When he quoted this word of the end of *Amitiés particulières* to me, I said to him that we were Georges’ and Alexander’s revenge ~ Georges in his autumn and Alexander raised from the dead in his spring. I admired the delicacy which made him protest: nobody, not even he, had the right to appropriate illegitimately in Georges the memory of Alexander; he

pleased himself to play with it. I embraced him: 'You don't need anybody's halo.' He showed the frames of his photographs.

His mother had given him a grey gold watch extra plate. 'I, I cover you with gold, but this gold stays with me. A handkerchief and books would have been my only presents.' I added one to them, discrete to liking: an old coin of the young Nero, with the inscription "Prince of youth."

The warmth made his pajamas annoy him. To walk about in the apartment, he rolled up a silk handkerchief in living colours that I had brought from Bangkok, around his waist. 'In the Far East,' he said, 'are there boys everywhere there ready to make love?' 'Boys and girls. The little Thai girls of the bathing houses are of an unimaginable refinement.' 'My sister is busy reading *Jeunes proies* and said to me that you are converted to the love of girls. I laughed in my sleeve.' ~ 'I don't need to be converted; it is always the same god that I adore in a different way. I could be in love with certain mothers because of their sons. But what proves that I am, strictly speaking, a pederast, is that the love of a son would never make me fall in love with the father.' He started laughing, 'All in all, the girls and the women are your favourite sins. To me, my mother and apart from her, my sister, these are funny beings.' This word reminded me of an anecdote from my journey.

One evening, in Bangkok, close to a temple where I had just assisted their prayers, two young Buddhist monks in saffron-coloured robes proposed to me in English to visit the quarter of their religious university. During this visit, which only had as interest their company, the night had fallen. To finish, they took me to their pavilion. On each

side of the door, a big clay water jar contained the water which was destined to drink and to wash with. The friends of my two guides received me, smiling. They studied the sacred books, in the glow of small candles; in the rooms, unrolled mats served for beds, blankets serving for sheets. As I showed them some sympathy, they invited me to spend the night with them. A mat and a blanket already unfolded themselves for me. In the semidarkness, I interrogated these illegible loved ones. Was this about a mystic night or did they have hidden agendas which I could not have honoured? There were six of them. I ignored the sort of reputation the French had in the Buddhist monasteries. I had been told about the adventures of doctors in the international mission with the nomads of Afghanistan and who did not get off well there. The insistence of my Buddhist monks was flattering, but I followed Zarathustra's prescription: "If in doubt, do abstain!"

One of them showed me out of the hurdle of the university to the boulevard. I rattled with him while waiting for a car. To clarify my religion, I asked him if it were permitted to Buddhist monks to have affairs with women. At this word, he choked with laughter, '*Women, women!*' Clearly, I had evoked to him what was the most absurd thing in the world. His laughter deserved the term Homeric, if it had not been Buddhique. Fortunately, a cab arrived ~ one of these small Thai cabs, open to all winds and which run off like arrows. Otherwise, my monk would have died of a convulsive laughter, saying, '*Women, women!*' He accepted a penny for the temple and disappeared into the lane of the university.

This Oriental's attitude was approved by my student. It was not the moment to tell him about the girl from Reims. Nevertheless, I declared that one did not have to reason about women after Alphonse Allais' humoristic example: 'If you must write: "Three hundred and sixty five women and one little boy, aged one, have come," you must put "*venus*" (= come) in masculine, because this one-year-old little boy, he alone, counts for more than the three hundred sixty five women. 'You see!' he cried out, even grammar is pederastic.' ~ 'Grammar has been made by men. Except for this point, the ideal is to reconcile the two tastes, in the way of the ancients. After Baudelaire, 'to love intelligent women is a pederast's pleasure', but they return it well to us. And the intelligent women are more and more numerous. Also the girls, not necessarily lesbian, but pederasts by body and spirit.' 'What do you call pederasts by body?' 'Girls who let do what Goethe did do to them... and Apuleius. For them, it is not a simple means to remain virgins and for young men it is not one to be pederastic. All that prepares the fathers and the mothers of the future.'

Every time, the announcement of the moment of leaving caused desperate whims with him. No proof of his love was dearer to me than these displays of his strength. And then, during the cab trip, the pressure of his hand prolonged them.

XIII

On Thursday he called me from his where-about, on the return of his horse lesson. His voice seemed shrill enough to me, so he was not alone. Suddenly, he had changed the range of his voice, 'Someone is approaching. I see you next Sunday.' This alarm put us back into the secretive mysteries of college.

The hope of Sunday seemed dubious to me, when I received a telegram on Saturday:

"... Too bad! tomorrow, uncle, aunt, cousins (what a bore!) will come to see us before the holiday, for the closing of our house in Oise. Every year, it is the same. I am disgusted with these people who impede me to go to you.

I have tried everything to stay free, but my parents did not give in. I told them it was the celebration of a friend who invited me. They answered me that I only had to apologize.

What a waste of happiness! Instead of being with the Beloved, I shall be bored with indifferent, blessed parents. I will be unpleasant, I will say no hello nor goodnight. Don't judge me disgusting and childish. I want to show that I love... my friends.

I have read *l'Exilé de Capri* (*The Exile from Capri*) and *Jeunes proies*, one in one day and the other one in one night ~ so much the worse if my duties and my lessons have suffered from it. I have been moved almost as much while reading *Jeunes proies* as I was while reading *les*

Amitiés particulières and I have wept over Philippe's and Irene's death. Like I love Jacques too for his affections and for his character!...

I would have a thousand things to say to you about these two books and for the two of us, but I prefer to say to you: To your body and soul."

I could not blame him for tears that were a tribute to my pen. The subjects of these works were made for him. I saw him moved exactly by the feminist episode of *Jeunes proies*, which he had ridiculed the other day. I was not surprised that he had wept over the young Belgian's death, because this boy and he were of the same quality. Otherwise, I promised myself to explain to him *l'Exilé de Capri*, of which the "character" was attractive, but the "affections" questionable and an example not to follow.

His furries with regard to his relatives did not startle me. I had too much confidence in his common sense. We had abandoned the plan to meet on the Vendee beach, but his parents had changed theirs: they would go to Deauville. What a jump from a remote hole to an elegant station! (His mother had inherited significantly and his father had made fortunate speculations.) It seemed that Deauville would not provide us with the advantage of an excuse to spend our days together. 'Next year,' I had said, 'I'm sure that we will have the occasion to join our holiday. One entire year of being clandestine will have formed a current that will bring us there where we shall want to be.'

I waited for his call on Thursday, but, the other day, a telegram came to me: John the Good's stupid physiognomy, that adorned one of the stamps, did not announce anything good to me:

"Last Sunday, after lunch, I suddenly felt feverish. I informed my mother about it, who said she would take my temperature. It turned out that I had 38, which is not enormous. But I had to spend the afternoon in bed. Apart from that, it was my unique consolation for not being with you. The noise and the people exhausted me and finding me alone with your thought, cheered me up a lot.

The next day, on our return from the country, our doctor visited me and established that I had laryngitis; undoubtedly, I caught it at the lyceum, for several of my friends were affected by it. He prescribed me a week of rest in my room. There is our beautiful Sunday, brought in jeopardy by my fault and I am mad for being ill.

My love, I see you at this moment, your head slightly inclined, your hands feverish like mine, sitting on your bed or in your arm chair, the way I love you.

I am being nursed, by turns, by my mother, my sister and our nanny. I shall take advantage of the absence of my angels to send this letter.

To your body and soul.

P.S. I hope to phone you tomorrow."

This small illness, which was worth such active care for him, brought him back to his age. He was no longer an adolescent for whom life had no secrets, but a child who was tucked in in his bed ~ a bed which certainly did not have blue or rose blankets. Inside me, I felt a chord vibrating that I had pretended to ignore and that had to be called paternal. It is me who would have loved to take care of him and I convinced myself that he would have been better more quickly. Thus, I echoed to his expression: “Your darling child.” He had become this by his angina.

He was not able to phone me and a telegram, “entrusted to his Spanish nanny,” gave notice to me that he was not allowed to leave on Sunday:

“... I will stay with the photographs that I have of you; but can they compensate your presence?...”

Poor photographs that he had of me, cut out of the newspapers and the weeklies! When he asked me for one to frame and to put close to his bed, I said to him that this would unnecessarily startle his relatives: he was allowed to read me, but not to take me as a patron saint.

On Tuesday, he called me at last. He had returned from the lyceum. He expressed his joy to talk to me, to be better, to have a good mark in Greek class. He had bought the *Art d'aimer* (*Art of loving*) by Ovid, in an edition that I had offered. 'Did you put a work-book on the slate, to look like you are writing?' 'I already have written an entire page in it. It is a poem by Apollinaire which applies in advance to our appointment on Sunday.' He lowered his voice to read, with inflections which only belonged to him,

"... My mouth will have breaths from hell.

My mouth will be a hell of softness and seduction to you..."

I thanked him for dedicating this verse to me, like I dedicated other ones to him. Our spirits, our hearts, were unanimous.

XIV

The art of loving? Easy thing for him, because he was Love. A *delicious victor*, he reigned again with me. Now it was Love without veils, now Love dressed in a shawl; Love foolishly raised, or Love, slumbering; Love, standing, Love sleeping; Love on the right side, Love on the left side; Love flat on the belly, Love on the knees, but not to beg

for grace; Love with the arrow and Love with the quiver. Our gestures were complementary. My thoughts, he surmised them, eyes closed, by the skin. He offered an inexhaustible field with caprices of imagination. His beauty and his grace allowed to dare everything without neglecting the ethic laws.

This Sunday, we had talked again about the holiday that was very near and that would separate us, and I unrolled before him further horizons which would bind us. I said to him that one of my big plans, postponed from year to year by the succession of my Hercules works, was *le Voyage d'Alexandre (Alexander's Journey)* ~ Alexander the Great ~ and that my dream from now on was to take him with me. So, I would wait till this was possible. We would let live again in our way Alexander and Ephestion. Fabulous track! Pella and Macedonia, where the hero was born; Troy, where he celebrated the memory of Achilles and Patrocles; Tyre ("sacred Tyre, the most fortunate of isles, perfumed garden of boys!" an epigram by Méléagre said); the oasis of Jupiter Ammon; Babylon, Persepolis, India, Afghanistan, without the nomads, Samarcanda. Journey through time, like through nations. Journey through civilizations where Greek love sometimes is bolder than in the West. A spiritual ambassadrice of France mentioned to me that, in a cafe of a Hindu town, she had seen boys, with green turbans on their heads, listen to the politenesses of big merchants. But she saw them through the openings of a screen which had been erected in front of her, to not arouse suspicion to these sophisticated people. *'Women, women!'*

He asked me if pederasty came from the Orient. 'It comes from everywhere,' I said. 'It has been found in all nations and, by a false primness, each one has thrown back the origin on its neighbours.'

The Greek confirmed to have learned it from the Persians or the Egyptians, like the Romans subsequently say to have got it from the Greek. It is not the Europeans who spread it in America, for the Indians practised it, nor in China, for the Chinese could have invented it. In the XVth century, an Italian poet of Latin speech, complained that the French, "powerful by the member," monopolized the Florence boys. This poet ~ Beccadelli, nicknamed the Palermitan ~ is contemporary with Louis XI and it is generally confirmed that the French ignored 'the Italian ragout' up to the expedition of Charles VIII. To have nothing to reply through the centuries and the borders, that is doing like Benvenuto Cellini with his Parisian judges. They asked him if it were true that he had treated his mistress 'the Italian way' ~ futility that could lead to the funeral pyre, like pederasty. He said that he did not know from what he turned around: that it was undoubtedly 'the French fashion.'

'Even in Florence, this great artist had been accused of pederasty before Cosme de Médicis and his answer was still funnier. 'May it please God!' he cried out in the middle of laughter, 'for this is what Jupiter did to Ganymede in Heaven and what the emperors and kings do on earth! The man of nothing that I am, could he and would he know how to do such an admirable thing?' Which proves that pederasty comes before the Olympus.'

XV

He was on holiday, since the last days of June. His three months of the lyceum had not allowed him to have a price. The “price of kissing,” in the early days melted in Megara by the pederast Diocles, is not being granted anymore. It was the price that young boys disputed on the lips of virtuous men, and the victor, Theocritus, tells us, “returned to his mother, loaded with wreaths.”

He did not need to leave until the midst of July, but I did not take advantage of his freedom to not raise suspicion. There was not any reason for being a regular visitor, except for “his friends.” Apart from that, matches absorbed him. The programme of his holiday underwent new changes. For lack of places in the Deauville hotels, his relatives had hired a villa near Saint-Malo.

It is he who had asked me a supplementary encounter for Thursday. In the morning, a telegram showed up to me as a bad herald:

“To my only Beloved,

I am truly sad to tell you that my tailor will need me at six o'clock. I have tried in vain to postpone this trying on, but Mr. X is very occupied at the moment.

After this regretful news, here is one that will make it good: we will not go to Saint-Malo until July 30th. So, I shall leave almost the same day that you will, my darling.

My love, next Sunday, at five o'clock, I will be close to you and be sure that you will not receive a telegram on Saturday.

Shit! it is nine thirty. I have exactly the time to put on my dressing gown, to comb my hairs in a sec and to go downstairs for breakfast.

I embrace my god and my idol most fiercely.”

This draft of him at his awakening did not rob me of a movement of regret. What! he sacrificed me to his tailor! But was it not initially in my honour that he made himself more elegant? His outfit was really a secondary thing, in comparison with what he was. And since he was with me, it became him more and more. If nothing could “compensate his presence,” his messages forbade me to complain. I loved them so much that I begged him not to use them as an excuse to exchange them with our appointments. Ah, well, since a short time I had a third photograph which served to multiply the illusion of seeing him. It kept me company during the day, for it was on my desk. Gold also glittered around it. It was my “golden boy” ~ *aureus puer* ~ like the beloved one of Tibullus.

This image pleased me particularly. He confessed all his secrets on it in his veiled look, in his lips which were ajar, in his craving pose. I was so struck by it that I had told him not to order other prints. There, he

was not his parents' son anymore, nor his sister's brother. But had he ever been the child of the hearts of good parents?

On Sunday, after our lusts, ordinary and extraordinary, I explained to him what he was for me. He was a boy, he was the boy and he was all boys together. He did not only have all the charms, but all the qualities. He incarnated what the Greek indicate by the word *Kaloskagathos* ~ “beautiful and good.” καλος κ'αγαθος

‘At the lyceum, the day before yesterday,’ he said, ‘the Greek teacher explained exactly the meaning of this word to us, talking to us about ephebes, and he did not take his eyes off of me.’ ‘There are teachers who do not have their eyes in their pockets, without being fathers of Trennes. The place where the Oxford teachers go to look at the students bathing in the river in the nude, is called “Parson’s pleasure.” ’

It looked like *L’Exilé de Capri* really had impressed him. This man, who lived by virtue of his tastes to face society, seemed captivating enough to him. I seized this opportunity to diminish his enthusiasm: ‘Fersen’s life is picturesque and instructive; but, even besides his temporary adversities and his tragic end, it is the example of a life of failure. He did not know love, he made it. It is therefore that I accepted Cocteau’s preface, which is an unjust stab at the character, but which contains this admirable word: “Eros without wings,” like Victory that the Athenians had chained on the Acropolis, so that she could not fly away. Nothing demonstrates better the difference between Love and loves.’

He was a dreamer, ‘Are you sure that Cocteau should have known what he wanted to say? If he had believed to disregard Jacques by cutting his wings at this way of love, he confesses that one can hold on there to the point of chaining him. Which proves, like the author of *Amours singulières* (*Peculiar loves*), ~ my latest lecture ~ said, that “Love is always Love.”

XVI

He had hoped to come the next Thursday, but his sister had invited friends in the country and had asked him to stay.

When he telephoned me to reassess this new mishap, he restarted his sharp, anti-family criticism. I said to him again that we had our obligations towards our relatives, even if we secretly are strangers to them, and towards our equals, even if we are very unequal to them. The finest of the finest is the contrary of the “revolt” and other contemporary literary formulas. We are in the world to enjoy life; well, to enjoy life, one needs to play with society. ‘Do you believe that I would enjoy life, when I am far away from you?’ he said. ‘You know that we are never far away from each other. Our love, though fixed, so be it, has wings, but not the “wings of a butterfly” of the “Cupid of the flour confectioners,” which Baudelaire made fun of. Equal to the Love of the Greeks, its big wings carry us. We are floating above families, centuries and laws.’ He listened like he knew how to listen and said to me, satisfied, ‘Oh well! I will try to amuse myself next Sunday.’ I added this comment, ‘Gide

wrote: “Families, I hate you!,” but, more maliciously, he spent his life in the bosom of families, especially when they were numerous. Maybe, the *sinister poet* is the *enemy of the families*; the enlightened pederast is their friend.’

He was sweetly delicious in his shantung costume which he used for the first time for me. These bright trousers showed his shapes even better than his black trousers, which had attracted my eyes in the court of the college. I congratulated him, ‘A boy or a girl must show his or her shapes. This is a reply to the hypocrisy of our civilization. The *blue jeans*, the shriveled and short skirts make our cities less sad. But the superiority of boys is to not deceive. Young people have said to me to have become pederasts by touching bra’s and girdlettes all the time. They aspired to nude that does not hang down. ‘When my sister puts on a pair of trousers, it is a disaster; nevertheless, she is very pretty.’ The Syracusans, experts in beauty, had erected a temple to Venus Kallipygos, Venus “with the beautiful buttocks,” - *the temple of Greece*.

To whom I would have had more devotion,

said La Fontaine, who undoubtedly was a pederast, like Molière. ‘La Fontaine took such an interest in childhood! But Molière! for example!’

I looked for the text of his biographer Grimarest, who viciously helps us out: “He observed the young Baron (the actor, then aged twelve) during supper and he made him lay down with him to have more time to get to know his feelings by conversation, in order to place more surely the good which he wanted to do to him. My student quoted Molière himself:

“Oh! in what courteous terms these things have been put!”

‘And,’ I said, continuing the lecture, ‘the good that Molière did to Baron displeased his wife.’ This is what happened to Demosthenes, when he sheltered the young Cnosion under the conjugal roof, and this is what happened to Verlaine, when he sheltered the young Rimbaud. For the rest, Grimarest assures us, like an official historian of today would do, that Molière “loved the good manners” and “shaped Baron’s.” However, he added that his wife gave the little comedian a box on the ear one day and that “a lot of bad reasons were given for it, even spicy ones”... Let us pay a tribute to the compliance or the naïveté of the spouse who waited two years to explode. But the children of this era often were, they too, of a naïveté that did allow things, hence maybe Molière’s word: “There are no children anymore.” A page of the duke of Créquy, ambassador of France in Rome, said to his fellow travellers, after a shelter for the night, ‘I had a good laugh: so and so, who slept with me, took me for a woman all night long.’

He asked me if Greek love did not equally contain a part of naïveté: ‘When the tutor of your *Alcibiade* convinces this beautiful boy to give himself to him to have the innate science, this one is really kind to believe him. And you said to me that in fact, the real Alcibiades had hoped to acquire by this means Socrates’ wisdom.’ ‘Allow pederasts, like all men, to tell some false rumours. I do not want to overwhelm you with the Italian poets of the XVth century, but still there is one, Pacifico Massimi, who must come to the rescue. Like this Beccadelli I told you about lately, he has written in Latin to “challenge honesty” better, but was no less protected by Sixtus IV, one of the great pederast popes. He reports to us, in a collection, dedicated to a bishop and completed by dithyrambs on this pope, that “According to the public noise, one enlarges his penis by having penetrate oneself from behind” (alias ‘sodomize’) and that, “Every boy, desiring that his will grow bigger ~ And will fill his hand,” ~ This trust increases the number of catamites.”

He frowned to declare that the Greek seemed more delicate to him. ‘Don’t lend too many virtues to them,’ I replied. ‘The *Muse garçonnière* (*Boyish Muse*) by Straton of Sardes, which I will translate to you one day, (it is lacking in the collection of the Universities of France, you doubt that well), will prove to you that they were worth giving his name to pederasty. It is about a work of decadence here, but the anthology would also be rich with the authors of the classic era. What do you think of Aristophanes praising the boys of the good old days who “wiped out the print of their buttocks in the sand of the gymnasium to not leave it to their lovers”? I would say with Nietzsche, “Oh! these Greeks, how they knew how to live!... Adoring the appearance, believing in the form!...” and in the most adorable forms.’

XVII

Fortunately, his invisible presence was as radiant as I told him it was, for this month of hobbies would dupe him more than his months of studies. With his mother and his sister, he led an existence of *chevaux-vapeur* (horsepowers) between Paris and their suburb, between their suburb and their country house, between cousins, uncles and aunts, who loomed up from all sides. On the telephone I followed his exhausting races, his latest purchases and finally, the preliminaries of the luggages, where records and books kept their places. The hopes of an ultimate encounter were frustrated. Even the correspondence confined itself to a telegram:

“My darling,

I’m writing you before I leave. What a day I had, last Sunday in ...! I forgot your advice there. One of my cousins had brought a girl of fifteen years old, foolish and pretentious, who imagined “to conquer me.” She was on my heels everywhere and bored Patrocle. She has been so horrible that I have given her a box on the ear.

In the afternoon, I went for a walk with Patrocle, leaving my charming company there. I returned just before dinner; then I reached my room, where I dived into Baudelaire’s verses... and into some pages of a contemporary writer of prose.

Thousands of kisses, my darling.”

When I read under his hand or heard on his lips: ‘my darling’, it seemed to me to only have been created to read and hear those words of this being. If I had needed to copy his letters, it is them that I would have reproduced with the greatest pleasure. They called to mind for me his way of pronouncing them and the delicious or profound sense he gave to them. Also, I did not want to reproach him for these obstacles which had brought me to having just enough to be able to live. Even in freedom, he was not free.

I was keen on taking him with me on holiday somehow. My epistolary treasure was too voluminous and I would not have known which to choose. His photographs were inconvenient. I had also asked him one of a small size and he had sent it to me. It was the fourth one I had of him. Under each one, I could have drawn an inscription, put by Bellini on the portrait of a young boy: *Non fuit aliter* ~ “He was not different.”

This photograph already showed him on holiday: he laughed on it with all his teeth and his chest trembled in the open collar of his dickey. ‘You are going to have there a frame even more precious than the other ones,’ I had told him on the telephone. ‘A back of ivory will be added to the usual rim.

You will be like Pelops, Neptune’s beloved, who had an ivory shoulder. You will be like the Jupiter of the Olympic, who was gold and

of ivory, and on the thumb in which Phidias engraved the name of the boy he loved. You will be chryselefantine Love.' To this erudite madrigal, his answer had been this long silence which delighted me and of which the thoughts after that had this summary so softly, 'My darling.'

XVIII

While my heart was flying to Saint-Malo, the young girl from Reims, returning from Switzerland, was flying to me. Her letters, with heights and lownesses, had continued to impose her commerce on me. Nevertheless, our nocturnal conversations between Paris and Montreux had not recurred: my telephone was not for her anymore. She arrived, like last year, the day before my departure ~ and the day after he had left. I did not have the impression to betray him, not because she was a priority, but because it was about quite different things.

However, I did not feel at ease with my visitor. First, I had suggested to confess the truth to her. She was made to taste a private statement like that. I would never have delivered my secret to a Paris girl, but this one lived in the heart of her province. Then I said to myself that there was not any necessity to fail to the rules of discretion with the one who was here. Eventually, I decided to rely on destiny. I had withdrawn the photograph which decorated my desk and the two which were at the head of my bed, but I had left the new one, freshly framed, on the dresser of my room. If we should go into this room and this

image would be noticed, I would explain. I had ordered to put orange blankets on the bed.

As the conversation took place, my embarrassment seemed to disappear. One more year had not diminished my correspondent's charms. Switzerland had given her a rose complexion, had gilded her hair. 'Our annual encounter...', she said. The memories of the preceding one reappeared with enough strength to make me guess that we would go as far as the room. But I wanted to amuse my desire. I spoke to her of my work in progress; of Naples, where I would be the next day; of Pouzzoles, of which the baths steeled me every summer for my battles, like the emperor Frederick II leaving for the crusade; of Florence and of Fiesole, my latest stopping places. She listened without hearing, through the clouds of her cigarette. I used her Christian name and she called me 'sir.' When she suddenly called me by my first name, I had the same sensation as when she had forced her tongue into my mouth. 'You have had a thousand things to think of and to do during one year,' she said, 'but I, who have almost nothing to do, I am obliged to think of the only thing that I have been waiting for since a year.' She stood up, bent over me and nibbled at my ear. 'Where is your room?' she murmured.

It was not the orange blankets that attracted her glance: the small, gold and ivory frame had produced the effect of a lover. 'Who is this boy?' 'The boy of my life.' 'Oh!... He is beautiful... One of your readership?' 'Yes, my high school student.' 'He rings you?' 'From time to time.' 'He writes you?' 'Sometimes.' I did not need to reveal everything.

She leaned her elbow on the marble shelf and contemplated the laughing face. 'He came... into this bed?' I did not reply. 'You are lucky... and he too. I would have loved to be a boy... and the boy of your life.' I kissed her and pushed her to the bed. 'No,' she said, 'I will not take his place. Let us stay in front of the photograph. Let us love each other... love me... while watching him.'

PART THREE

I

A few days after my installation at Pouzzoles, this letter from Saint-Malo reached me:

"My darling,

I would have wanted to write you immediately, but every time I had an impediment.

My room is very nice. It has been furnished in Louis XV style, like the whole villa. I have a balcony on the lake, where I can install Patrocle.

Since Wednesday, the weather is fine. We have made acquaintances with our neighbours. They are English people who have a

son my age. He is very good at tennis. In the mornings, I mount my horse with him along the lake. It is wonderful to gallop on the shore of the water and even a bit in the water.

I'm only talking about myself. Did you have a good journey? Are the little Italians beautiful too? I love you.

I hope to write you longer tomorrow. It is one o'clock. I'm being called for breakfast. I am still in my swimming shorts, my feet in sandals full of sand, and need to put on a decent suit again.

To your body and soul.

P.S. A card soon, I beg you."

From a far beach, the emanations of true love arrived to me. I had the illusion of seeing him in swimming shorts, returning from the beach, like I saw him in pajamas in one of his other letters and, one morning, on the telephone. His sentence about the "little Italians" showed his understanding for all that we implied. I kissed his photograph, which had inspired this observation to the *cameriera* of the hotel, 'It's your son, isn't it? How he does resemble you!' Unconscious tribute to the miracles of love. 'My beautiful "me" ~ you!' Carlos Herrera said to Lucien de Rubempré.

His holiday letters would even be the more valuable to me as the joy of writing him was measured to me. I restricted myself to rare cards, signed Georges, Christian name which was precious to us and which was

presumed to be the name of one of his friends. It is true that we were not separated for long. As he would come home at the end of September, I had decided to advance my return to this date.

“My darling,

I take advantage of the night to join you again. During the day, I have to go out with my parents, with my sister and with my English friend. Sometimes, when we stop in a bar or in a café, I contemplate sending you a postcard; but the address would draw attention.

My handwriting is horrible, for I am in bed. I’m sorry. My eyes are pricking as well and I do not want that, at the start of the new schoolyear, you will find me tired. Here, I go to bed very late and I rise very early for the equitation.

To you forever.”

This letter had crossed my first card from Naples. I had chosen the Greek bas-relief of the National Museum where Love is seen erect besides Paris and Venus sitting close to Helen. The names of the characters have been engraved in it, but Paris figures here under Alexander’s name, as precious to us as the name Georges.

This bas-relief had reminded me of a Latin poem, *Calypigia*, found during the Revolution in the library of the Benedicts of Saint-Germain-

des-Prés. It unmask to us how Venus obtained the price of beauty: her two rivals did not show their fronts to Paris, but, instead, the goddess of love showed to him and even gave him her behind. Ida's apple, like the one of earthly paradise, according to certain exegetes, was the symbol of another apple species.

“My darling,

I have had my greatest pleasure since the beginning of the holiday, from receiving your card. What has not been said on it, has been added by the illustration.

Are you thinking of me, my darling? What a question! I am waiting with impatience for the start of the new school year. Every minute brings me closer to you and to my love.

A few details about my English friend. He is a Londoner, fair, handsome enough. His name is Johnny. He speaks French very well. His mother is a Frenchwoman. In the tennis club, where we have been inscribed for the month of August, we got to know boys and girls who have villas like we have and whom we visit. In the mornings, after having galloped on my horse, we bath in corners where there is nobody.

To write you from so far away, I have the impression that my letter will never stop travelling.

To your body and soul.”

By talking to me again about tennis and about his English friend, he reminded me of the hero of *l'Exilé de Capri*. In this same gulf of Jersey, Jacques d'Adelsvard-Fersen, a young boy, had played tennis with a small Englishman who *sent him back his smile instead of the shuttlecock* - a shuttlecock that was only there for the rhyme. But I managed to evoke other characters: from my hotel, I had the hill of Baïes in front of me, where Adrien died. It had been difficult for me, this year, to not feel close to Antinous. I sent a card of his statue in the museum of Naples to Saint-Malo. This image would serve as a substitute for the bas-relief of Alexander and of Love.

Before leaving Pouzzoles, I went to Cumes. It is one of my favourite places in Campania. Petrone opened his veins there while having read to him "no speeches about the immortality of the soul, but light verses."

Since my last visit, the baptistery that marked the capture of the temple of Jupiter by the Christians, had been erected. I stretched out in the shadow of an oak, on the tiles of this temple. I thought I perceived in the sky the enormous head of the god whom had been discovered in this region and who dominates the hall of the Neapolitan museum. He promised me Ganymede forever.

The acropolis of Cumes, a Greek town, impersonated today the acropolis of Athens, to explain my presence on the ideal heights of Greek

love. I murmured the name of the being that incarnated this love for me. I had plucked in his honour a branch of myrtle. If I reflected on this golden branch, in this Virgilish atmosphere, it was not with the palm branch of Palm Sunday anymore. My young wizard had effectuated the metamorphosis. The shining leaves brought me the perfume of his kisses. This daydream charmed me until the evening.

Descending, I went to wander in the neighbourhood of the Sibylle, who had no visitors anymore. And in her cave, I cried out the name that I had whispered on the acropolis. This place of darkness has been less made for the mysteries of Apollo than for the mysteries of Priapus, of whom Petronius speaks. But weren't they our two divinities?

Filled with a divine breath, I dared write him a real letter. It told him of this day in a schoolboyish style. The ulterior motives completely deserved this.

II

I did not make my stay on Capri usual. All my preoccupations being to receive his messages, too many addresses could have confused him. I had also indicated to him beforehand the only two between which I would be divided: Fiesole was the second one.

At the railway station of Florence, the son and the daughter of the brotherly friend of whom I was the host were waiting for me. They were the image, contrary to my secret life, of a family life responding to

Horace's verse on "the marble threshold of the friend whom has to be respected."

On the morning of August 17th, a telegram from Sain-Malo was handed over to me:

"Think of you a lot. Wish you a happy birthday. Greetings."

I pressed this yellow report against my heart. The words had been written by hand in capitals, as to reveal the significance by it. Never had wishes moved me before. The boy who announced them to me, was the most fulfilled one of all my wishes.

In the evening, I had a telegram from Reims. This memory of my girl could only move me: she had written me at Pouzzoles and I had not answered her. The boy of my life and my girl of one year seemed united around me in Toscane, in an unpublished story by Boccace.

The next day, I thanked, by a card of my hotel villa, him whom I loved. To alternate the handwriting, I had used a fountain-pen with a big pen. And I signed with a feminine Christian name ~ "George's sister."

The day after the next day, my luck was at its climax, by reading his first letter, sent from Fiesole.

“My darling,

The air of Cumes revives me and gives me new forces, forces to love you and to adore you.

I feel my love like a cup which runs over.

I have read the story of your visit to the Sybille with pleasure and delight.

At first, seeing an express letter, I feared an accident. How feverishly I uncapped the envelope! and how lovely it was to be soothed!

Your card of Antinous is on my night table. Johnny noticed it and wanted to read it. You doubt well that I forbade him to do so. We had an argument, but it did not have any consequences. I was happy to fight for Antinous.

Since a couple of days, it has been blowing hard and the sky is grey. Daddy has taken a leap to Paris and will come back the day after tomorrow. We will visit the English isles of the coast.

To your body and soul forever.”

This letter was dated August 17th: he had written me two times that day, in order to be better with me.

His heart was on its guard in the smallest things. In Paris, I had made fun of his craze for telegrams, not without telling him that it was

useful to me: 'You imitate the elegant Italians, who only send *espressi*. It is a manifestation of the national taste for the superlative.' 'And for you, I shall not use the superlative?' he had cried out. Well, I had posted my letter from Pouzzoles by *espresso*, which told him of my departure: instead of smiling about this 'superlative', he had had the reaction of a tender heart which, in front of an unusual way of corresponding, feared a bad message.

On the Antinous of Naples, I let follow the David of Florence. A card of this sculpture that he had liked, would remind him of the verses of its maker to Tommaso de' Cavalieri. I added a discreet comment to my short lines, which he would know noticing: I traced in ink all the r's, calling to mind my Christian name, in the reports printed on the back - Firenze, Alinari, *cartolina*, etc.

Because I was condemned to pleasantry, his letters remained our lovesong, as he wrote them for two. I only had to recite poems to myself during my walks. They were the most beautiful ones of his sentences which I made resound among the pine trees and the cypresses of the Fiesole hills. I would have engraved them on the white marble plate, just like Virgil's verses had been in the circular wall of Cumae.

III

The envelope had the stamp of Rennes.

“My darling,

Yesterday, I have had some difficulties and mum has called a doctor. He has stated that I suffered from an appendicitis and that I needed to have myself operated urgently. So, I am in a room of a clinic in Rennes. I am a bit afraid. This has been so fast! Yesterday, I was still at home and tomorrow I am going to be operated.

I hope that the scar will not show too much.

I shall leave in five days, that is to say Tuesday, but I will not be able to walk until Friday. My hand is trembling and it hurts writing you.

My darling, I shall entrust this letter to my nurse.

I love you.”

This message, which would not have alarmed anyone, overwhelmed me. For his angina, I had a fatherly shiver; now I was very sorry. I knew well that an appendicitis operates itself as easily as an angina heals itself; but this word “urgently” had a very tragic effect in my view. His “fear” looked like a presumption to me. Our bliss had been too big to not be condemned to perish. My hand was trembling while reading and re-reading these lines, like his had trembled while writing them.

The self-confidence with which he talked about his coming departure, clearly reflected the surgeon’s self-confidence. But if there

had to be here a sole case where official optimism was deceived, I convinced myself that it would be this. I would have wanted to call my doctor and he was on holiday. I would have wanted to call Rennes, but what was this clinic? I would have wanted to call Saint-Malo, but would not they be surprised at a concern like that from Georges? Apart from this, on the date that I received this letter, the operation had taken place: the die had been cast. His flirtation about the subject of the scar made me smile sadly. I was surprised to have been so calm these last few days, when he was busy suffering, maybe dying.

The letter had been brought to me in the big foyer of the hotel. It is there that I worked with a joy that had just disappeared. I rose, gathered my papers and went to stretch out on my bed to give course to my tears.

I interrogated the small photograph, but I did not interrogate fate anymore. I reflected on the remarks of some of my students: 'So you never describe anything else than heterodox and sublime passions that end badly?' I would not describe the one that had marked my zenith, for I would not survive it. The being that had let me taste it, would not die alone. From the moment on that we had been created for each other, and that we could not live without each other, we would go both, just like he had wished to, "into a place of solitude," supremely and definitely.

The continuation of the holiday, the memories of the months gone by, the perspectives of the return only appeared to me through the lights of autumn, announcers of the decline. I contemplated this sudden change with a Roman serenity. If I were ready to imitate Fersen, it was

not, like he, out of dislike for lusts, in the failure of ambitions and the emptiness of the heart. But I would not be Georges de Sarre acting like killing himself after Alexander's death. I was not fifteen anymore. This time, the exchange of blood would not have been purely symbolic. In my blotting-pad was the envelope containing the blade that had served to cut our veins: it was like the note of this exchange.

I thought of Verlaine, singing of Lucien Létinois' death, *this child* whom he had known in a pious college and who had been *his bitter delight*. I would not sing of anything, nor of anyone. I had a secret joy to say to myself that nobody would know the motives of this premature departure to another world. I would burn letters and photographs by way of funeral pile. The temple that I had erected would not leave any traces. I did not examine the means of leaving: it was enough to me to have decided it.

Almost calmed down by this decision, I came back on the big day. I would have judged it improper to show to my guests a melancholy that was not customary to me. From then on, I did not see the necessity to modify my occupations and put myself to work again. The more air I had absorbed, the more detached I felt.

I only kept an eye on the mail by habit. The silence that thickened itself, strengthened my prognoses and my resolution. The calculation of the dates revealed something else to me that connected us weirdly. His letter, dated 18th and arrived on the 20th ~ it is the first time that Italian mail had been so fast ~ proved that his difficulties had started on the 17th, day of his telegram of vows and happy variations on "the air of

Cumes.” My birthday, which had been worth his declarations of his fondness to me, had coincided with the symptoms of his disease.

We had not consulted the stars to love each other: I had not searched what similarities he could have there, according to the omens, between Gemini which was his sign, and my birth Leo. Nothing had been needed to explain to me what was unique. Gemini had become my own sign to mingle us eternally.

IV

On August 30th, I had my biggest joy since the start of the holiday - my biggest joy since our meeting in the chapel of the college. “How feverishly I unsealed the envelope!” But I only needed to see it to come back to life.

“My darling,

On David’s card, I immediately observed the cunning in connection to the so precious “r,” because coming from a so beloved Christian name.

My operation has succeeded very well. I am already walking. This morning, my nurse has made me do the stroll of the park of the clinic, which is very beautiful.

Bravo for the pen trick, on your card of the 18th! You have traced certain letters exactly like my sister. I have not had any trouble to decipher the handwriting, unjustly qualified as illegible, and I did not read it two times to understand it, but five times for pleasure.

Having had many visits, I have not been able to write to you until the end of the day. You will read my letter on Wednesday or Thursday, when I will be in Saint-Malo. Our journey to the Channel Islands has been canceled.

Do you know that, right at the moment they put me to sleep, I have whispered your name? But then the doctor told me to have heard nothing. Fortunately! What would he have imagined? "This boy thinks of Mr Peyrefitte while having himself operated!"

To your body and soul forever."

Never had his formula of confirmation gone more into my heart. I had never imagined a more complete answer. The fear of losing him had made me know really what he was for me.

He proved to me what I was for him by explaining my card before saying a word about his operation. But what other proof, even more exquisite, this thought of his very last seconds of lucidity! As he was "my arms and my charms," I had been his mascot. I had said his name in the ruins of Cumes and he had pronounced mine in a clinic in Rennes. I covered his photograph and the small sculpture of Love with kisses. Our god continued to protect us.

Georges, amicably, thought himself being allowed to telegraph to Saint-Malo.

“My darling,

I have received your vow for a quick recovery and I thank you. I am in a very good condition. Yesterday, I spent the afternoon on the beach. This morning, the doctor took the thread away. I did not feel anything. They allow me everything, except for the swimming-pool by the sea. Patrocle was bored during my absence. The only distraction he had was the daily visit of my English friend.

The weather is splendid, at this beginning of September. At night, I am being rocked by the sound of the waves, which are breaking on the sand and which are beating in the creeks, and Patrocle, white and warm ball, huddles up at my feet.

My love, the end of the holiday is not far away. Soon I will be with you.

Body and soul.”

To which of these letters give the palm? Which one crown with myrtle and with laurel? Every time there was a phrase, a description worth our temple, which was erect “forever.”

PART FOUR

I

Since the day after my return, in Paris, I heard him on the telephone. The words pushed each other aside on my mouth. He only had to say and to say again to me ‘my darling.’ Then, like every time, we listened to each other palpitating in silence. Eventually, he had to be informed what pleasure his messages had done to me, what had been my regrets for not being able to express sufficiently to him what ‘fear’ I had had ~ without adding to what degree ~ when I got to know that he was being operated. He was doing extremely well and this accident was only a memory. He went to school again, but would only work in hope for the day of rest ~ for the day of Love.

Me too; I was back in harness. My old secretary, whom I had not needed since Easter, returned from the country for the work that kept me busy. He did not doubt that he was going to live in the shadow of a love novel. I judged it unnecessary to take the inspiring photograph from my desk: he was man of the world enough to not ask me questions.

A visit to Oise robbed us from the last Sunday of September. But the next Sunday was ours. The sun of La Manche had bronzed him and the swimming had fortified his muscles. However, his slightly drawn features reminded me that he was recovering. His father had wanted to

send him to the mountains to complete his healing. He had refused this to not postpone our reunion.

I had put his telegram of vows on the pile of his letters, in front of one of the photographs that were in my room. 'It will stay there all year long like a good prediction,' I said to him. I showed him the beginning of the typing of my new book: 'You're accompanying my heavy caravan, like you have helped loading it.' He smiled, 'Do you believe that you aren't accompanying my small caravan again, loaded with schoolbooks?' 'In fact,' I answered, 'we're beginning a new school year together. We got to know each other in spring. It was also a way to start a love. But, at the same time, it was the mark of an extraordinary break-through in the course of a year, in the course of studies, in the course of existence. From now on, we leave again on the same footing for all the years of our lives.'

I was happy to prove to him that I loved him beyond senses. The cautions that his state demanded, made me moderate his ecstasies and I limited myself to put my lips on his fresh scar. It was as discreet as he had wished.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to interest him in my curiosities. During his first visit, he had had a charmed notion for what surrounded me, but after this, he had hardly paid attention to it. As soon as he arrived, he threw himself between my arms, staying there for a long moment, his eyes closed, pouring the kisses of happiness. Then he undressed in a trice, but with order, and swifted into the bed which was more than our bed: our gym, our recreation court, our canteen, our chapel. And if I sometimes made a classroom of it, the more because he

did not suit his age and the frivolous colour of our blankets, it was to compensate for lessons about things that would have amused him more. Today, we would not pass our time in bed, because we had not gone there first.

His taste and his intelligence immediately were at the service of his attention. These objects, this furniture, which I had gathered, were just like him, the fruit of my work. But, like their beauty or their rareness had only been made to receive a soul from him, it was from him that my work had received its crowning. I opened the libraries, of which he already had had a short overview. I took some beautiful ancient books from it. 'You are the blue Tabby which doubles these book bindings of Moroccan leather,' I said to him. 'No,' he said, 'I am the book and the book binding.'

One of the objects in a showcase drew his eyes. It was a terra cotta where the XVIIIth century admirably represented Greek love: Jupiter, sitting on his throne, pensively watches Ganymede who, erected at his side, supports the cup on his thigh. This look is not the robbing and insolent god's, who lifts this child and his rooster, in the archaic pottery of the Olympia museum. Everywhere else, the king of the gods is being stashed away beneath the form of an eagle. Only this Frenchman, the sculptor Marin, dared give him his human shape with his beautiful pourer, without taking anything away from his divine majesty.

'So, in the XIIIth century,' he said, 'there were amateurs... like you?' 'Certainly, and it is odd to notice that the most French one of the centuries was the most pederastic one.' But, about that chapter, its history still remains to be written. I would bet that this terra cotta has

been modelled for a great pederast of this era and who was a protector of the arts: Voltaire's son.' 'Did Voltaire have a son?' 'A natural son: the marquis de Villette, what said gossip. Anyhow, Voltaire, in his old age, converted him to marry him to 'Lovely and Good', ~ it is his only conversion, still it was not durable ~ and died at his house, quay... Voltaire.'

He said to me that I needed to regret to have not been able to dredge up Voltaire himself in the Sodom lake. 'Almost everyone is being dredged up there, when people have good fish-hooks. But there are the pederasts of one moment, the entrenched pederasts, the regretting pederasts, the frustrated pederasts. The case of Voltaire must be brought up the more because he was the friend, sometimes untrue, of all the pederasts or homosexuals of his time and because by his pen, especially in the *Anti-Giton*, he condemned "the Socratic love." But he was not the first and will not be the last to not write according to the customs, which maybe are temporary and more or less well hidden. For entire Paris, he is the lover of the lady president of Bernières in 1725. Well, that year, in the month of May, one Dupuis, college governor and squeaker, handed him over to M. d'Ombreval, lieutenant of the police, as the most dishonourable of the 'dishonourables' ~ that is how our peers were called then. Naturally, this detail does not occur with any historian of the great man, who sleeps in the Panthéon.' 'People will have thought that it was slander. One swallow does not make a spring.' 'Patience: five years later, the new lieutenant of the police, Hérault, confirms to 'the poet Voltaire' his quality 'dishonourable' in a report, written in his own hand and addressed to the Prime Minister, cardinal de Fleury. The funniest thing is that the cardinal had been, in his beautiful years, the lover of cardinal

Bonsi, the Grand Chaplain of France. That is, without pattern, a capture in the lake.'

II

It was on the third Sunday of October that we saw each other again. He was as fit as a fiddle and as round as a barrel. Completely able-bodied, he even took his horse riding lessons again. We did not need to lay restrictions on ourselves anymore. He had asked me to look for photographs of Philippe and Edwige, heroes of *Jeunes proies*. The one of the little Belgian alarmed him. 'Maybe,' he said, 'this boy would not have been killed, if you would have been able to write him.' 'Who knows? At the age when one risks to believe oneself a monster, because one does not look like the others, it is very important to receive a support. The comprehending families are more numerous than recently, but one still finds persistent incomprehensions. A young man wrote to me that his father threatens him to detain him in a special clinic, if he does not renounce his tastes.

That father should see an admirable Italian documentary on the youth of today. One sequence deals with one of these English clinics where they are searching to make homosexuals of your age 'normal.' One of them is extended on his bed and his nurse, young and lovely, smiles at him in a lascivious way: he does not even look at her. A second nurse is busy reading and another nurse, no less seducing, provokes him without any more success, by sliding the top of her bare foot on the

book. And so on. In the final scene, these boys do a hell of a rock in front of their melancholic warders. A friendly female 'speaker' says in French, with an indulgent smile, 'Nothing can be done about this.'

'This word,' I added, 'is the one of reason, like one of science.' 'It is the lesson of the *Amitiés particulières*. But I think that the mothers understand this problem better than the fathers.' 'Certainly! Inasmuch as homosexuality has something feminine, if it is not hermaphroditic ('Our sin was hermaphroditic,' Dante ordered to tell to a sodomite of the hells), the heart of a mother is closer to it. It is also possible that by discovering this secret of her son, she might have the satisfaction to think that no other woman will replace her.'

He reminded me of the word of this mother, whom I have quoted in *The Exile of Capri*: 'So much the better,' she said to a bitch who perfidiously revealed her son's customs to her, 'he will not sleep with you.' 'This noble mother,' I continued, 'is worthy of a very noble Italian father I know; he surprised his two heirs in tender dialogue and told them as a full reproach, 'At present, I do not doubt anymore: you are my sons.'

My allusion to Dante had struck him: 'It is so amazing that an Italian put the sodomites into hell!' 'He has simply put others into purgatory. Neither Gide, nor his commentators, quoted in the appendix in *Corydon*, have provided the sense of this obvious contradiction, which only moral theology can explain. Sodomy is only a mortal sin in the eyes of the Church, if the act accomplishes itself until the end, that is to say: frustrates the reproduction. Dante was not ignorant of what he did by separating chaff from wheat and, as he has cleared away with the chaff

his ancient master Brunetto Latini, he knew what to stick to as for Latini's behaviour. An epigram by Piron quotes the word of a student who had had an affair with a master who was not much restrained as well. This boy is ill and the doctor orders to conserve the urines, but the female servant forgets this and supplies them by her own means.

These are the waters of a pregnant woman!

the Doctor cries out and the student, from the bottom of his bed,

I just said it to father

That he would make me a child.'

When I insisted too much on this genre of anecdotes, he smiled for a moment and changed the subject. Looking at the photograph of the young Belgian, he said 'I am jealous of her, because you have gone to Cuide with her.' 'I could not go there with you.' 'A lot of girls write you?' 'I have always had fine correspondents, but I have one whom I prefer: a girl from Reims, whom I have even seen twice in one year.'

The hour had come to let this champagne cork jump. There was not a shadow of jealousy in his look and I thanked him for that. He

seemed surprised at these renunciations, 'I wanted to say that I was jealous of Edwige's journey with you and not of relations you have had with her or of those you have with your present correspondent. These things do not exist for me. There is only you who exists.' 'For me too, there is only you who exists.' I told him of my desperate decision of a cruel week in August and he jumped at my neck, crying.

Since the telephone was in his room, I, frequently enough, had the softest awaking of the world: he called me before going to the lyceum. I begged him to be discreet, at these hours when his parents were still in the house. Everything guaranteed us a future without confusion, if we observed rules that were, by the way, spice as well. He loved to commit himself to them and I loved him, like I told him, for his strength, as much as for his grace.

When he was late, he restricted himself by saying, 'Hello,' ~ this 'hello' that I would have had distinguished from a thousand ones ~ then, 'I love you' and his delicious 'My darling.' I played with the thought that he left for his lyceum, with his French book, his Latin book, his Greek book, and his mathematics book, having said these words of love on the telephone. On other times, he did not say anything and made me listen to one of his favourite records. It was my awakening in music then, my awakening by the angels...or by a song.

In the afternoon, he avoided ringing loud, because I had my secretary. But I was delighted, when he risked himself to ring me towards five o'clock, at his return from the lyceum. To talk to him in

private, I dragged the device into my room and, listening to his words, tender or playful, it seemed to me that I was having tea with him on ‘our bed.’

III

One evening at the end of October, one of his telegrams was handed to me on the moment that I went out for dinner. He had called me in the morning, but I was used to his comments of our conversations.

I opened the envelope on the road. Seeing different pages, I went through them immediately at the light of a lamp post:

“My darling,

Be strong, you too. After what I am going to write you, will your sentiments modify?

I cannot live without you anymore. I do not want to live at home anymore. All my strength, all my love are in you. Without you, I am nothing.

I am sure that mum, if she knew that I am only happy with you, would accept to trust me to you. But maybe your work forbids you a life like that.

Since weeks, I do not think of anything else. To live with you, not to leave you anymore, to serve you, to love you, that is my only goal. Without that, my life does not have any meaning and is not worth living.

You imagine that you would argue with me, but I am certain of my decision. Which boy of my age ever wrote to a man what I wrote? It is you who told me this.

Maybe you would repeat to yourself that I will have to wait. Waiting for what? Unless for you, you whom I love more than the world. Waiting until I am twenty? But it is now, that life would be most beautiful for us, now and always, always with you!

Oh! I know, the world serves as an excuse for lacking courage ~ the world and its sillinesses! It is even capable of changing the loves. Love does not change. So, we should not give it up.

You only knew the reserved boy, but who really loved you, because he has proven so. Today, it is the determined boy that appears. You said to me that I was strong, but you did not know all that I could desire.

You will judge this letter being of bad taste. You will classify it in one of your boxes (letters of *Amitiés particulières*, letters from Philippe de M. and others). But no, that is not possible!

In what state, my God! am I! I ask much of life, because you have made me demanding. A great, hidden love is not enough for me anymore. I want to live it entirely. And by willing this, I create sorrow in the being of my love!

I implore you: do not try to see my parents or to call them. That would be the last thing to do. For the rest, next Sunday we will talk with each other about this project which imposes itself on us.

If I would have called you this morning, I would have sniffed. It is really the first time that I would have been relieved by hearing the click.

To you forever.”

I remained paralyzed at the corner of the street, my throat dry and my heart beating. Nothing in our love would have given me an apprehension of this kind. Everything was harmonious and without a shadow in it. Like another message had made me say in the course of the holiday: it was too beautiful to last.

I reached my restaurant, with a heavier step than I used to have. The meal was difficult to swallow. The letter was open on the tablecloth and I did not stop re-reading it. The feverishness of the handwriting, the stains made by the pen or the blotting paper, the unusual cancellations, the excessive downstrokes testified to the extent of his trouble. If he had not claimed to me to have made his ‘decision’ mature, I would have attributed it to some family conflict. Coming from him alone, it only had more weight ~ a weight that crushed me.

However, bit by bit, I reacted. Despite my strict diet, Comus had given me my audacity. Until my extract of verbena ~ *casta verbena* ~ which would acquire aphrodisiac characteristics! The net that would entangle me, was not the one I could have feared ~ the one of Vulcan

capturing Mars and Venus, the net of family and society: it was the net of Love. As I believed in this god and had found him in this boy, I should not do as if I did not believe in him. Would I be less strong than a child?

I went out into the night and undertook a long walk. From now on, my imagination was running faster than his. I told myself that this telegram announced his coming to me, even though he spoke of next Sunday. Soon he would be at my door with a small suitcase, like classic young refugees. In reality, we passed from classic to romantic. But I had to gather what I had sown.

I remembered our words and our deeds. We had pronounced the word ‘always.’ We had exchanged something better than kisses and caresses: a few drops of blood. Since his second visit ~ the one which had us made completely united ~ he would have wanted ‘to not leave me.’ And every time, he had these extraordinary whims at the moment of leaving. This summer, I had decided to kill myself, if he would come to die. A decision like that really was worth his, and dictated my behaviour to me. A boy who loved me “more than the world,” and whom I loved more than everything in the world, would not be given a rejection by me.

I, in turn, asked myself why I would have to “argue” with him and show myself reasonable. After all, he had ‘intelligent’ parents; would not they understand this situation? Had not we obtained his mother’s indulgence beforehand? I flattered myself to knock over all obstacles, with the irresistible power of love.

It is true that my life was not a life of love, but of work. I examined if this innovation would not compromise it. He himself had thought about it. I also thought that the presence of a being of which I felt the beneficial influence from far, would be a perpetual incentive. For decency, I would install a sofa in the office. But eventually, we would have the happiness of sleeping together. He would wake me up, not on the telephone, but in the way of the young Glaucias whom the *Sylves* sing about, and who woke up his lover and master by his kisses. It is he who granted me this last title, by offering me to serve me. But it is me who would serve him. I would help him to do his duties, like he had proposed to me, and one day I would have the honour of a lecture in class, not for a page from one of my books anymore, but from one of his notebooks. He would travel close to me when I would be alone, or in my room when I would be with my secretary, and I would go to have pity on the time that I talked to him on the telephone.

What would my environment say of this 'nephew', fallen from heaven? I would make fun of it. I have seen men, tied to successive young men, presenting them successively in the quality of nephews. At least, I would not have been known for this.

The end of my walk lowered the tone of my lyre. Our big project collapsed. The acceptance of the family seemed illusive to me. Would honourable people agree to surrender their son to someone? Even though his mother loved my works, the love of literature had its limits, like love. She valued me as mad as he was, while hearing me invoke Greece and the stars. I would wave in vain with Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Virgil, and Plato.

If he had had the imprudence to escape from it, he had destroyed everything. Against his adventurous initiatives, I had to restore the social laws. I would bring him back to his parents; I would help them to excuse the aberrations of a young heart, troubled by a book, but I would not let him be unnerved like Alexander. He knew that I loved him for life. We would see each other again, when he would have made forget this whim. But what a pity that he had not had some patience!

Anxious, I arrived in front of my door. Oh, luck! there was nobody. My sleep was not less restless.

The next morning, I trembled at the ringing of the telephone or the bell. The night had strengthened my decision. If he called me or if he came, I would convince him that the impossible love, made possible in the shadow and thanks to a miracle, killed itself while appearing in full day.

His silence reassured me. I concluded from it that he hesitated. The smile of his photograph, on my worktable, told me that I was not wrong to hope. Love would be our auxiliary, even against love.

Shortly before lunch time, a new telegram. Our doom was sealed. The dispatch stamp ~ 8.50 am ~ showed that he had gone to the lyceum: he stayed in his vehicle.

“My darling,

My letter of yesterday will have disturbed and confused you. But I have thought about it. My nervous outburst has terminated. I understand that it is necessary, alas! to continue normal life. I do not have the right, with all my love, to make and to oblige you to commit a foolishness.

I have pushed until the absurd what you told me, that the world did not count for us. It does not count, but we have to count with it. I have been very naughty to cause you any sorrow, and this sorrow is going to last until the time that you will receive this telegram. But I would not have dared call you this morning.

How to have myself excused? By loving you. Loving you always with body and soul. By adoring you. Tear this letter of yesterday, which represents a bad memory, apart.

I see you next Sunday at three o'clock."

My joy was as lively as in the most beautiful moments of our love. I admired this boy who had been at the end of his idea, but who had corrected himself. I was also touched by thinking that I had been on the point of making his 'foolishness' my own, and that we, separately, had become wiser.

To demonstrate my satisfaction to him, I telegraphed to him two simple words, signed with a false Christian name, and which would be easy to him to explain to his relatives: 'Thanks. Greetings.' That evening, a telegram answered me: 'I am happy.'

It is a telegram, on Sunday, that replaces it:

“My darling,

Today is a day that I would have needed you the most. But, having forgotten that I had a history essay tomorrow, for which I did not prepare anything, I have to catch up. Last week, my studies did not interest me much. I have been punished for that.

My love, our meeting in the court of a college has been the most beautiful foreword one could dream of to build ‘our Book’ ~ the book of our life ~ and this book of which the pages write themselves every day in our souls, will be worth of this foreword and worth of us.

I wanted to destroy at once the mediocrities, the narrow-mindednesses, the small daily cowardnesses, because a lot of things that I would have accepted if I were alone, I demanded to dare them in your name. But it is also a way to dare them as knowing to wait, like you have told me. From now on, we are responsible for each other on the same level. What you do, you do it for me; what I do, I do it for you. I have given you my faith, quite completely and non-divided. I had the impression of being strong before, but you guess that I feel an invincible joy now.

Our alliance is not simply you plus me: it is you and me, more me and you, that we are together or divided.

Since the start of the schoolyear, I find in our love something even more powerful, serious, magnificent. Hence my small ‘attack.’

To your body and soul forever.”

Could not my body and my soul have been forever to him?

IV

The blue pillow became moist with our tears. Maybe they had a cause which we would not have admitted. Instead of weeping over ‘his madness’, we were weeping over not having committed it. The secret luck which we enjoyed, and which I begged him so to protect, what was it, in comparison with the luck that his audacity had offered to me? He had given me the opportunity to be myself at last and, if he had withdrawn himself, it is because he had not judged me capable of it. I was dedicated to stay a man of literature, instead of living my life as a man. Certainly, I wrote bold things and faced society, but this society in regard of which I thought myself free, had not liberated me at all. I tried to make a breach into the prejudices and had let myself be beaten by the most absurd.

If I analyzed my defeat, I perceived without any trouble what had prepared it. To this boy, who only lived for love, I had not stopped talking about my work, showing my paperwork, my notebook, the typed

sheets which accumulated themselves. I was proud of this effort, rightly without doubt, and searched to make him proud of it too. I had applied myself to save the balance of the two trays of the weight. But with him, I was not in the country of weights, I was in the country of Love. I was not under the sign of Libra, I was in Gemini. And because I was born for him, I did neither respond to his expectation, nor did I to the call of this sign by preaching the reason and the temporizing. I embraced him, and my instinct told me that I had lost him. My telegraphic acknowledgement had been a cry for love, but could seem to be the voice of egoism. Just like he had regained control of himself to avoid a deception, he had called himself “happy” to save me from another one, but he was not the tricked one, neither of himself, nor mine. I regretted not having been “strong” enough to say to him, ‘This madness, let us do it.’

While his reflections oppressed me, I unrolled the banal thread of logic. I congratulated him to have understood that he had to persevere in ‘normal life.’ What words of honesty thrown like ashes on this glowing charcoal! Every now and then, he looked at me while magnifying his eyes, according to his so special behaviour, and he approved with a gesture, but I was sure that he feigned the approval. He had told me that, from now on, we were ‘in equality’ and I was not convinced of that anymore. By the sense and the sparkling of his look, this equality had been established from our first encounter. Since last week, he had exceeded me. And he had returned backwards, his arms loaded with flowers, to have himself apologized for a love which he had attempted to accomplish.

With good reasons, I did not blush while adding triflings to it, 'If you were unhappy at home, I would not support the idea to exclude you from the pleasures of life. You say to me that you do not need anything, that your parents refuse you nothing, that they have not said to you, grousing, that they grant you a great liberty ~ and I know something about it ~ that your sister is adorable with you, that she does not hinder you in the least. In short, everything, in your own family, is made to consolidate 'the impossible made possible.' You see me, you write to me, you call me up: nothing is lacking you.' Again, he approved.

He inquired if I had torn his letter. I told him that I had avoided this and that it would be one the most precious ones of our correspondence. He would read it again with pleasure within a few years, when his dream of yesterday would have become reality.

The reality, did not we possess it already, in his aura the most delightful? To the tears of salt, followed the kisses of myrtle.

V

The telegram of this Tuesday in November was not in one of those envelopes to which I was accustomed. This one, of a straw colour, folded in two, lively by a bouquet of roses, certainly was a home loan, done by his sister. On the other hand, the white paper was his ordinary paper.

“My darling,

I have a big favour to ask from you. A big favour which will probably make you contemplate. A mean service, which should be always out of the question in our love.

My darling, could you lend me one hundred thousand francs (= *6500 pound. Translator.*)?

Oh! I know it well, it is enormous! A boy my age, needing a sum like that! My love, have confidence in me. It is horrible for me to write this figure to you and I am trembling with the idea that you read this letter.

Don't you blame me for this, my darling? No. We love each other too much to blame each other for anything.

Above all, my darling, do not ask me questions. I am very unhappy to have to ask you this. Later, I will explain to you and you will tell me that I have been right, I am sure of that.

I have thought of asking help from my parents, but they would not have understood.

Do you give me permission to go to you next Thursday at eleven? On Wednesday morning, I will not have the possibility to call you. Call me in the evening at eight o'clock and do not answer. I will know that you agree.

I love you. Yours always.”

We were going from surprise to surprise. Suddenly, he passed from the state of someone who did not need anything, to the state of someone who needed one hundred thousand francs. In other terms, we left the world of love for the world of money. He had protested loudly, every time I had offered him to fill his pocket. I had told him that I would take up my posts by this again. That would have been the most discrete present, if he did not use it indiscreetly. Despite his refusal, I did not ignore that the necessity would present itself sooner or later. We had not lost anything by waiting. I had a motive for being stupefied by the figure, the unexpectedness and the mystery.

Putting things in the worst, I imagined him to be the victim of blackmail. Had he talked about me to one of his friends? Had his sister intercepted his calls? The two hypotheses were unlikely and the second one insulting. He did not have a buddy and, for the rest, he had too much common sense, despite his 'small bout', to have revealed our secret ~ he was even too much in love for this. On the other hand, he had only said good things about his sister, of whom I had sung praises at our last encounter. If she had been the instigator, she would not have provided him with one of her own envelopes. Eventually, because he had considered resorting to his parents, I was not involved, but I was not surprised that he would have doubted their understanding. What he also said, that he would explain "later" what it was about and that I would approve of it, took the idea of blackmail away. His youth did not prevent him from considering that our compliance would have created a permanent danger.

Whatever the objective of this request was, I would have wished that it did not change anything between us, but I was obliged to say the contrary to myself. A new fact had created itself, which undoubtedly prepared other facts from it. The question to live with me had already paved the way. The being which I had believed to be clear like crystal, had his shadows, which I had to accept. His letter announced to me beforehand the bit that his explanations would be worth, if I succeeded in obtaining them. Fundamentally, what did it matter to me? I loved him, I only loved him and, obviously, he loved me and only loved me.

But what was this need, so exorbitant, which he could satisfy without the knowledge of his relatives? What wicked expenses had he done or did he have to do? He was not a player; he did not have a little girlfriend; he lived between his lyceum, his two houses and my domicile. Probably, there was only talk of a whim, but this whim, I did not want to discuss it. He had counted on me for a thing which only depended on me, and he would not be deceived in his hopes. I was happy to start proving to him that what was mine, was his. I would not imitate the lover of whom Plato speaks, who gains the benevolence of his loved one by permanent promises and who then, “from pursuer, becomes a refugee.” I would not imitate the tutor of the ephebe of Pergame, who made him hope for a horse as a prize for the “complete and desirable coitus” and only offered him a kiss.

I attributed the sum, fixed by this whim, to self-conceit. Expecting ordinary, modest, and repeated requests, he had preferred to provide his piggy-bank all at once again. Maybe, he also believed to place himself at what he judged to be ‘my height.’ What do I say? It was up to me to

elevate myself to the height of his family, which seemed very rich. His father had just bought a Mercedes. His sister had received a Triumph as a birthday present. He had showed me a photograph of her at the steering-wheel of this machine and another one in the tower which she made furnish near the country house. She resembled him as two drops of water and I understood her success. She swarmed with elegant bosom friends of whom he searched the names in the worldly Bottin in my house. Even if the possession of this register is not a mandate of worldliness, I smiled that his parents had not arrived there yet. Nevertheless, they had been invited 'in an embassy.'

It is all this that turned him on and that made him feel like sparkling. How would not I have apologized him, me, who had been sensible for his vanities, which were really beyond his age? The only thing I regretted, was that he had multiplied a bit the 'my darlings' in the occurrence. But are not the cuddles natural, coming from a young being who is asking? They are evidence of his timidity. His timidity had even forbidden him to confess this so-called need to me face to face.

Who sufficiently knows if he did not search to put me to the test again? Because I was walking with him into the future, like the priests were walking into heaven with the faithful, he had done so to bring me back on earth. My minimal willingness in regard of his offer for a life together must have struck him. His 'whim' continued to measure my wisdom. It was to be seen if the gift of his youth and of 'his faith' were worth a hundred thousand francs to me. 'A favour which will probably make you contemplate'... It had all been contemplated, but the word was convincing.

I returned to my first conclusion: what welled up from the ‘source of pleasure’, was not *amari aliquid* (*something bitter*), but *aliquid novi* (*something new*). It was as much a ‘novelty’, in my regular existence, as this extraordinary means of calling up to carry out a signal. Our novel of love ~ ‘our Book’ ~ took a small detective turn.

At eight in the evening, I chose the number. A female voice said ‘hello’ and I hung up. It is also in a peaceful family that my suspect call reverberated. This event would not have produced itself, if others, of which I was the author, had not preceded it. Just like I could not snatch myself of it, I had to suffer its consequences.

This missive had reached me in the evening, like the one which had caused me several embarrassments. I took it with me to the restaurant to read it again and to lighten my thoughts better. The seal of the envelope was always: ‘Clarify yourself better.’ I contemplated on the word of Nucingen: ‘How one is right to have a lot of money!’ That having a lot, that having little, or having hardly, for whom would this be, if it were not for the being you love? I have heard accusing those who love boys of miserliness. It is true that they do not have the habit of offering martens or diamonds. Some of them demand a stinginess, dictated by prudence. A poet of the Anthology regretted ‘the time when boys let themselves be seduced for a quail, a ball, ossicles.’ Gide, who is supposed to have been extremely stingy, agreed with this. Men for women pass the same test, because, according to Flaubert, ‘a financial demand, of all the squalls that fall on love, is the coldest and the most unrooting one.’ This coldness, this unrootment, do not always have a sordid cause. This marvelous being, who produced desire by magic means, reveals himself suddenly, in

some way, with his functions of digestion. The honey of this bee is not, like Latin poets defined, 'a sweat from heaven' or 'the saliva of the stars' anymore. The one who gathers honey needs pollen. I was sure, in any case, to love a bee and not a hornet.

The next morning, at 10.50, a black car parked in front of my gate. Two men with sad faces came out to stride across the pavement. Notebook in hand, they verified some indications. Were they a *wave of regiments* (from the *Ballad of Bad Reputation* by Verlaine), ready to *verbalize near the arcades*? But what appearance was there that my idyll with a boy from a good family transformed itself into 'an indecency case'? These are the misfortunes of a beginner. And these misfortunes are never love stories. Were these the master singers, come on foot from the tree, to gather the fruit of their strain? In the pocket of my bathrobe I had put a bundle of hundred thousand francs ~ ten notes of ten thousand ancient francs. I evoked the terrifying 'pederasty' article of the Grand Larousse, which describes the long trial 'of a very well-known man in science in Paris', who, during twenty years, was exploited by 'singers', of whom one declared, 'It is not fifty thousand francs, it is more than fifty thousand francs that he has given.' The figure was classic. Love of my life, what do you compel me to think of?

Ten minutes later, a cab stopped; it was him. He made the impression of being concentrated rather than concerned. As soon as I had locked the door again, he embraced me with passion, as usual. I did not pretend at all to look like a 'noble father', but did not answer his kiss. 'Later,' I said.

I looked through the window: the black car had disappeared. Those men clearly did not have anything to clarify with us, but the coincidence had been symbolic. I mentioned this accident to him. He smiled and apologized for having been able to bring me so much sorrow into my head. I made him sit in an arm chair and placed myself opposite him, like at the moment of his first visit, 'I would never lecture you, in the first place, because I do not like that, second, because our moral is above moral. My telephone call of yesterday evening has warned you that you would have what you desire. However, just like you have said yourself, it is extraordinary that a boy your age needs a hundred thousand francs. This sum is nothing in relation to what you are for me, but it is something in itself. In one moment, you have aimed right: into the thousand, into the hundred thousand. Bravo!'

He blushed and I was afraid that my irony, though kind, had been a bit strong, 'I love you; as a consequence I would not know how to offend you. One of the thousand, hundred thousand reasons why I love you, is that you are a child. You have proved this to me one more time, when you told me that you failed in 'asking help from your parents.' Even billionaires would ask their son why he needs a hundred thousand francs. Well, I do not ask you, as you requested me this; but I ask you at least to swear that this sum is for you alone.' He looked surprised, 'For whom would it be?' 'Another question, if you allow. You need this money today, Thursday, and not tomorrow. What is this terrible expiry date? and why may I not know the motives of this from today on?'

He saw well that, while pretending to ask anything at all, I obliged him to say something to me. He lowered his head and, like a student

whose resistance is at an end, confesses in a rapid voice. In truth, this confession was not one of those that expel all doubts, even of a heart which is strongly in love: he had borrowed a hundred thousand francs for a month from a friend of his sister's and insisted on giving it back tonight, for the month had expired. He had talked to me about this girl, immensely rich and already of age, whom his sister had known at Saint-Malo. She had had the elegance not to remind him of this home loan, ignorant of it, but he had become angry about not keeping his promise. He insisted on it all the more, because they were on the point of getting an argument.

As I had presumed, I discovered a new aspect of the being I loved and who loved me. This determination did not strike my love, nor even my trust. His boy mysteries, I liked to let him have them. I was sure that he did not hide anything suspicious, nor undignified, and that was enough for me. Therefore, our debate was not important anymore. We spoke to no one in particular, I mounting my hobbyhorse of bourgeois chatter again, he beating the campaign in full fantasy. Why had he asked this girl for this sum? Because he had not wanted to ask me for it. Why this unnecessary detour, as he had to turn to me fatally, on the expiry day? Because he had counted on the pocket money that was given by his father, money that he had used to purchase records, books... Besides (that was the principal hole of his purse), he had spread in these purchases a sum, meant to pay a suit. Why had they handed him cash money rather than a cheque? Because the tailor preferred to be paid specie, etc., etc. In reality, the 'et cetera's' were not numerous. I rose and put the bundle into the inside pocket of his vest. He raised his head

to kiss me. In the corner of his eye a tear beaded ~ the tear of emotion of a hundred thousand francs.

I pulled his arm chair next to mine and resumed my speech in a low voice, as if we were on the telephone, ‘Our love is hard boiled, but it demands care to not be disturbed. We have had two alarms within a few weeks. You have realized, with an exemplary vigour, that we could not still live together. So, you are capable of seeing this clearly. And we have to ban exactly what is not clear. I repeat this word, because, since the beginning, I have loved in you your clear side, that is to say: Greek. I could not have been interested in an anxious, tormented, excited or nervous boy ~ having a ‘nervous outburst’ is not being a nervous sufferer. You have brought me peace of the heart and the senses. I have thought to give it to you by letting you make the most of your youth, by forming your spirit and by taking care of your future. It is natural that I agree with everything you wish, provided that this does not put our love in danger. “We are you and me, more me and you.” I would not have anything to refuse to the divine being who has written to me something like that.

But..., my darling, my love, I must add this, for the respect of you and me: if, some other time, you need, not what is called money and which is constantly at your disposal, but what is called a sum, even much more considerable, but also unjustifiable, you will have it immediately. I would not be less forced to tell myself that, in this love, calculations begin to enter, to spread obscurities, and its sovereign beauty would be altered “forever” by it. This time, I have not “reflected on it,” but on that moment, one would have to be an imbecile to not reflect on it.

These problems will not present itself anymore when we live together, because two beings who love each other and who live together, do not have secrets. We will put into practice then the admirable prescription of the Greeks, of Greek love: 'Everything is being shared between friends...' because between real friends, everything is clear.'

'Friday.

I love you, my Love.

Before having known you (nine months ago), I believed that being happy was next to having money, responsibilities, boys... Now I know, that being happy is loving someone more than everything and more than oneself; it is writing to the loved being; it is weeping with joy while thinking of him.

Our conversation of yesterday will be the only one of this kind. But there will be thousands and thousands of it, eternally pleasant. I swear it to you on a love that exists more than ever. Only death could destroy it ~ only death.

Thus, everything is as before and even better. Time has nothing to do with us, because we possess this treasure, which is our love.

I would like to outline my formula in characters of blood, of my blood, of our blood:

To your body and soul forever."

‘I am happy,’ he telegraphed me, when I had thanked him to abandon a project which would have thrown upward his family against us. He now told me all the reasons of his happiness. And I was happy, me too, to have done him a favour.

VI

Sunday of fever and kisses.

There had been only a few words about the reimbursement of Thursday evening. Everything had happened with the desired discretion. The girl had said thanks with a wink. After that, as if she had only waited to break this rule, she had quarreled with his sister and had gone, smashing the door.

I talked to him again about my girl from Reims, who sighed at my silence or at the shortness of my answers. He offered me to write to her in my place. This idea amused me. However, if I mentioned my correspondent’s name to him and her general delivery office, I judged it preferable to be their intermediary for the letters that she would send to him.

I believed that he had gone back on his prejudices about the fair sex, but he assured me that he had his reasons to keep them. He saw the easiness with which the girls connected and separated. ‘During a few

weeks,' he said, 'my sister hid her in a second, goes to her house, receives her in our house, in X... or in the country, and after that, good evening! Her longest durability has been in favour of my moneylender: three months! I imagine a male friendship as indestructible.' 'There are solid female friendships as well and maybe your sister is looking for them.' 'What do you want to say?' 'What you are guessing.' 'I have never thought of that.' 'The apple never falls far from the tree. That does not mean that you must entrust yourself to her.' 'Notice that she flirts with young people. But did not you tell me that lesbians and pederastic women were our allies?' 'You are too young to have trivial allies together. On the other hand, we could have a kind correspondent. She is full of spirit and, nevertheless, belongs to this world on which we will always be strangers. I knew her since more than a year and still did not know her. I do not know if she is sensual or frigid ~ with boys there is never ambiguity! If she is really on our side or if she tries to bring me to hers. When I write to her in a frivolous way, she writes frivolously to me. When I make up the style of the guardrooms, she does not imitate it, for she is well educated, but she tells me what effect it produced to her. When I praise purity to her, she becomes angelical. In short, it is a cute chameleon who takes my successive colours and has none of them. As for me, I describe to her the ones of the "miraculous clouds," because I left her for an inaccessible Cythère. But if irony is the privilege of maturity, one of the charms of youth is the enthusiasm of convictions.

In October, she begged me to offer her the hospitality of one night, having to do a match in Paris. One night! when you were there, my love! One 'night of love' with her! I answered her with a rebuff. Without getting angry, she informed me that she would not come, but

that I was disdainful of her intentions: she had simply desired ‘to watch me sleep.’

That is nice, isn’t it?’

My scarf of flax that I would make flutter,

Far from your beautiful face, would have taken care of spreading, etc.

‘It is nice, but it is one of the proofs of female misunderstanding.’

In Taormina, I have known this old, Baltic baron, of whom I speak in *les Amours singulières* (*Peculiar friendships*), and who had lived happily for a long time, divided between his family joys and those of pederasty. Having lost his fortune, woman and children, he was tempted, at an advanced age, to marry a rich Swedish woman, who was dying to be a baroness. On the point of returning to Sicily for the wedding, she wrote to him: “Soon, I will rock you like a little child.” He telegraphed her: ‘Project cancelled. Good luck!’ And I still see my old baron hitting the ground with his two walking-sticks, telling me, with a flame in his blue eyes, ‘I don’t want to be rocked like a little child at all.’

My girl from Reims was not discouraged and I continued receiving the best composed epistles of the Champagne... ‘with a lot of porridge for the cat, like everything that is female literature.’ ‘You are naughty,’ he said; ‘consider this poor little soul that suffers.’ ‘She does not suffer!

Like I have ridiculed her to be ready to put to sleep her senses to see me sleep, she confessed to me, in her last letter, that, ball point hardly put down, ‘the most beautiful hand of the world softly goes protruding to the most beautiful thigh of the world.’ He smiled, ‘Let sleeping dogs lie.’

VII

The trimester ended peacefully. I followed, in him and with him, the daily life of a good lyceum student, of a young reader of good works (he devoured Gide, Montherlant, Julien Green...) and of the brother of a sister who had already been introduced. But I did not worry about his diversions: they were limited by his age and by his studies, and also by our love. If he went to Saint-Germain-des-Prés sometimes, lark’s lure to the young people of today, it was in the company of his sister or his sister’s friends. ‘She replaces me in places where I could not take you,’ I had told him. ‘But soon I will reclaim all my rights.’

Since the beginning of our intimacy, I had asked myself if, despite the nature of our relation, I had to protect what often continued to exist of innocence and childhood in those who are not children, nor innocents anymore. When I had been confirmed of his quality, I estimated it superfluous to hide things or people from him and I made it a point of honour to let him enjoy my experience. I had liked to continue, for he did not lose his spontaneous grace, which is, in young beings, like ‘the flower on the fruits.’ He remained the way he was, despite the inevitable transformations, and I considered, almost with serenity, the day that he

would take a liking to other people's bodies, his soul staying in me. By the way, I did not imagine him as a rival of men and women, but of girls and boys, having some bit of appeal to them. I had put him at ease on this subject, only by begging him to conceal nothing from me, and he had said, accusingly, 'Whom do you want that I love, as I love you, you?'

What made me live, in reality, was just the love of a boy for a man and the love of a man for a boy. If I had ignored until then this love at its absolute power, I knew from then on, that it could give the desire to die by making happy. This made me see how much of my resolution to disappear had been sincere, when I had believed to have been deprived of it.

I appreciated the care he always had to write me, between our rendezvous and our chatter by phone.

They were the embroideries of the canvas for needlework, gold thread and of silk. His art of writing had the same source as his art of loving. And his art of loving would have added to Ovid's art, whom he had read because of my preface.

He apologized, one Saturday, for going to his house in Oise, 'Tomorrow, instead of being in your arms, I will be in front of a chimney with two big boots on and a sweater, a small cat on my knees ~ a small cat that is sleeping and that is spinning. I will caress it, thinking of you and watching the flames in its eyes, decorated with paillets.' Another time, he begged me to receive him one Thursday, the Sundays still being uncertain, 'My visit will hinder your work, but try! I will be so contented!' This 'try' was neither Racinian, nor Cornelian. To

announce to me, on the other hand, that we would have our usual day, he blazoned out, 'Sunday will sparkle with our joy.' He had had the illusion of noticing me on the back on the street, 'It was your neck and your gait, and then the face of an imposter, anyone's face.' He had been bed-ridden by a flu, 'You were at the head of my bed to help me recover and in my bed, to prove to me that I was not ill.' At the moment of his angina, he had told me almost identical things, but, if he repeated them more vigorously, it was a way to prove to me that his love did not change and became bigger with him.

The Christmas holidays separated us. His family was invited to a castle in Anjou. These commuters had friends from all sides. A long letter, preceded by postcards, described the cheerful reunion of three families, the peculiarities of the girls and the boys, the walks through the snow, the pine tree erected in the middle of the salon, the midnight mass in the village church. 'At the right minute, I have thought of you more intensively than usual and, after mass and the Christmas night dinner, when I found myself alone, in my big, badly lit room and on an immense bed, I have missed... But I have held on, thinking of you again.' Had not I assured him that I was a good moral teacher?

My Christmas was different. The girl from Reims had begged me to call her... 'exactly at midnight.' She was ill with flu, like he had been, and would not accompany her father to mass. My voice resounded in the office of another father. Could I defend myself for this? Hebe covered his part, if Ganymede was absent. He had not had the time to start his correspondence with her, but to play with a ball while waiting

for her game, she had undertaken an intrigue with quite a young boy. Her promise of supplementary details, merged at a distance, reinforced the charms of this Christmas night. I had ordered to cover my bed with an orange sheet, like the day of her visit. Just like for the feasts of the Roman Church, there were appropriate colours for those of my Church.

‘I love this girl, because she knows so well how to love you,’ he had told me. She could, in other terms, take me, release herself and take me again. Her voice, for which I was always sensible, slipped over me like her hand, which, however, did not have to be far from ‘the most beautiful thigh in the world.’ She described to me this boy with whom she got acquainted in a public garden, where they were walking their respective dogs. She kept on spinning the adventure with a sensible slowness and witnessed, delighted, Chérubin’s first emotions. She did not laugh about it, for I had blamed her her laugh in relation to the small cousin, and she incited the flame by a gesture, a slight touch, a blink. This spectacle heated her to the point that she had to return to her own house ‘to calm down.’ She paused, ‘While talking to you, I also calm down...’ ‘Are you in an armchair?’ I asked her. ‘No, on the waste-paper basket.’

I burst of laughter. She revealed my lack of respect for Venus, like I revealed hers for Priapus. Perfect harmony is difficult between the two sexes, even outside the beaten tracks.

VIII

He had written me to celebrate “our first Christmas,” but I did not admit to him, at his return, that I had had a guest from far. If he had his little mysteries, I had those of my life as a man. He was neither hit, nor slightly touched by it: Libertinism is not a god, but a dwarf. And it is in the arms of Love, on our blue bed, that I tasted “our first day of the year.”

Sometimes I was tempted to tell myself that he did not always make the necessary efforts to liberate himself. So, how would I have been thankful to him to have managed this in a circumstance like that? He had given to me my real Christmas presents and I, like Pergame’s tutor, had only kisses to offer him thankfully.

‘I will not speak to you about Greece, nor about Rome, nor about the Renaissance,’ I told him. ‘To enlighten a new year of love, after some year of love! I will talk to you about the love of today. The happiness I owe you, made me understand the happiness of other people: I expected it to be a deceit, when it was not based on exterior qualities. You have got all of them, but you have proven to me that the most important one was the gift of love. Without it, I would be less chained to your youth, to your spirit and to your beauty. What do I say? Maybe I would have escaped from you. Love represents real beauty, the one that God, according to what Hafiz says, ‘observes through the lover’s eyes.’ And rightly so, for this god is Love.

You have taught me too that there is no need to be in despair by it. Convinced that I would not find it anymore, after having met it again, I have written that it “only happens once in a man’s life.” It has come

back into mine and those who think to have lost it, will see it return one day.

Yes, everywhere there exist men that are made happy by boys in secret and who make boys happy. Everywhere there are also young people and boys who love each other and you are going to hear one example of it. All these loves, not only based on bodies, but on souls, electrify the atmosphere and announce, for a near future, the victory of Love.

Two years ago, in Fiesole, I was invited to dinner in a villa where a French family was staying. I waited in the salon for the gathering of the household. The door opened on a covered gallery, and on its other side the marshland of Florence extended itself, gilt by the setting sun. The French family already counted the father, the mother, the daughter. Was lacking the boy. Suddenly he appeared on this background of a classic scene and his look came to me, almost as penetrating as yours in the recreation court. He was twelve or thirteen years old.

During the meal, I frequently crossed this look, but I am not more mistaken with him than with you. He did not look at me to make me master of his secrets, but because I had made them taste better. I have never seen him again and in my memory he was only a graceful image, mixed with a sunset and with a dinner in Toscane.

During your absence, I have gone to a reception. A young man addressed me at the bar and told me, with lowered eyes, in a quick voice, 'I thank you, sir. I owe you my happiness with a young boy who was introduced to you in Fiesole two years ago.'

IX

He was trembling on the telephone, 'Guess where I am going for the Easter holidays.' I could only answer, 'To Greece' ~ Italy would not have caused such a sensation. 'Fifteen days in Greece!' he cried out. 'Isn't it fantastic? You would say that it is to celebrate the anniversary of our love.' Among all the ties that destiny was weaving us, this would be one of the most precious ones. The decision of his parents, even inspired by him, came from our stars, like coincidence that led me to his college, one day in April. This made me forget that I had dreamed to be his guide in the country of the gods. 'This journey is essential,' I said. 'I did not make it until I was twenty-five years old, and it changed my life. You are going to make it in your early youth, while your life has already changed, and to consecrate this change.'

A telegram, dedicated to 'our anniversary', sent me back the echo of our words and of those that I had told him these last times, 'One year that we know each other!... A new year of happiness that begins and a year less before 'our life'!

These ideas mixed with the Greek dream to stop making him drunk and I got drunk myself in my turn to see him revive my young dreams. He was my ancient me, ready to be born in Greece. Our myrtle was blooming, made progress. I had breathed it on the acropolis of Cumes; he crowned himself on the acropolis of acropolises.

Time was flying. 'In three weeks,' he wrote to me, 'I will be in Athens and there, better than elsewhere, I will be able to think of you with dignity. One sole thing bothers me; it is that, during this whole journey, I will not be able to receive your messages, but you will often receive them from me!... Last Sunday, I have been walking, reading sonnets by Shakespeare; I have recited them to you very high in the wind... I speak to you of Shakespeare and not of Plato, because yesterday we had the English essay. We will not have the results until next week. I will take the draft to you next Sunday, so that you can correct the mistakes before our teacher does. I love it that you teach me certain things, stretched out on a certain bed...'

Now he corresponded with the girl from Reims, of whom I transferred the letters. When he begged me to read them, I established that they were childish; my two partners remained children between themselves.

'Stretched out on a certain bed', I gave him my last instructions. His joy about this journey hid to me the regrets of an absence which would be for a month. His parents had extended the programme: leaving by car, they would visit Italy in passing. He would have to catch up fifteen lyceum days.

I recommended to him to see the central door of St. Peter in Rome, which John XXIII had made clean so fortunately. I already had noticed Ganymede and the eagle there, interlaced amorously; but, thanks to this good pope, these carvings which were covered by sheen, have come back

into the light: Pan in an erected state, on a triumphal car, dragged by two children who were also fit out well; then, lying on a bed, where one of them tickles him on the right side. 'It is not Greek love,' I said, 'but Latin love.' 'I think,' he said, 'that I would always prefer Greek love.'

As travelling-money, I wrote to him in the text of Theognis' verse: 'Oh, the most beautiful and the most desirable of young boys!' I added: 'This verse, to me, is associated with the discovery of art, of thought, of landscape, of Greek love. It has rocked me during five years in the country that you go to. But it did only apply then to shadows. You will murmur it every now and then, like I have said it in your ear.'

One section of the museum of Athens shows a philosopher who recites it, stretched out on a bed like us, and caressing the ears of a hare. The hare was the symbol of Greek love, either because of his ears, straight as young priapes, or because this animal was presumed to be hermaphroditic... My beautiful hare with the green eyes! Isn't it curious that in former times, in college slang, 'rabbit' has been called the 'little friend'?

I like to see on rabbits this white and soft flesh...

'Soft' is clearly ironic.'

His telegram of April 4th, on the eve of his departure, brought me his first goodbye to France:

“My darling,

I will recite everyday: *O paidón callisté...!* Your thought will not leave me one instant. I will not be absent-minded for one moment. I will be completely in our world ~ this world where our love ‘took form...” Ο παιδόν καλλιστή

X

On April 9th, letter from the eternal City:

“My darling,

Our journey unrolls itself excellently. It is very fine weather.

Milan is of little interest, but in Florence, I found again the masterpieces that I admired in the books. I remained alone for two hours at the Piazza della Signoria. The Tuscan landscape is sublime (cypresses, olive-trees...). The Roman country pleases me also.

We are in the Hassler hotel near the Piazza di Spagna (strongly active, at night...). Yesterday evening, with my sister and my cousin, we visited ancient Rome, illuminated by spotlights. In the Colosseum, I believed to see...

This morning, we have begun our visit of the Rome of the popes. I did not neglect to make my confession at the central door of St. Peter. Tomorrow, we will be in Naples, where we will stay one day and a half.

Often, I stop watching the things and the people to close my eyes and to watch you in myself.

I agree with you: the young Italians are, in general, more beautiful than the Frenchmen.

I embrace you... See you soon, from Naples.”

He had talked to me about this cousin of twenty-four, one of his sister's lovers. All three of them were traversing the trail in his car, for it is with a double crew that his family was driving to Athens. Despite this splendour, I suspected an embellishment: the hotel which he indicated to me ~ the most expensive one in Rome ~ seemed little likely to me for so many people. The fact that he wrote to me on his ordinary paper, contributed to convince me of this. But a bit of snobbishness, reinforced by boasting, did not it characterize a certain youth having aspirations? To understand him, I only had to think again of myself at the same age. These ‘shakes’ were quite useless in this seducing picture and I would make him laugh about it, on the day that he would not attach importance to it anymore.

Second letter, from a stopping place in Calabria.

“... Yesterday, in Naples, I wrote to you. But, unfortunately! leaving our hotel (Vesuvio), I dropped my letter into the drain and, furious, I tore it up. It was “via Partenopea,” right opposite the sea. My excuse is that I observed beautiful boys who were walking and holding hands.

In the afternoon, we traversed Pompeii. We will not go to Capri until the return. I regretted to not have been able to go to Cumes. Tonight, we will embark at Brindisi for Patras.

My letter is not fantastic. After six hours of driving in the mountains, with roads that have thousands of bends, I have a heart that is all upside down. I would like to express to you the beauty of the things that I have seen. But what’s the use, as it has already been done in a book that has given itself the title *From Mount Vesuvius to Mount Etna*?

My darling love, I embrace you.”

The bends of the Calabrian roads did not alter the pen of the charming letter-writer. He remained identical to himself all along the way. In Rome, he had closed his eyes to evoke me, but he had quickly opened them again to contemplate the beautiful boys. In Naples, this contemplation had captivated him to such a degree, that it had cost me a letter. Could I be angry with the one that followed his inclination and, at the same time, my wake? He had told me that before he knew me, he had believed that happiness was to have, among other things, ‘boys.’ For

this possibility, which had seemed more unimaginable to him than to me, the young Italians had some chances from now on. I was glad that he loved Naples. It was another indication of his quality. But why this new punctuality of address, concerning a Neapolitan palace?

As he went on in the country of desire to the country of love, I felt as close to him as we were “on a certain bed.” It is not only because he had brought two books of mine. I was his real traveling companion, as he owned his traveller’s lights to me. For his parents, he was a boy, rewarded for his Greek love by a journey into Greece. And he was the image of Greek love, just like he would see it being illustrated in the Greek museums. He was one of these ephebes, sculptured by amorous hands or drawn on the vases with the word *Kalos* ~ ‘beautiful’ ~ these vases that lovers gave to their beloved.

His first Greek stamp, come from Pyrgos, decorated a letter, written on board of the *Adriatica*.

“My darling,

We have just left Egoumenitsa, berth before Patras. Unfortunately, the weather is not as serene as in Italy.

My cabin is very comfortable and I am not seasick.

My darling love, this night...

I tell you many things in a few words, but I repeat to you what I always used to say to you: To you forever.”

Happy child of my love who had sacrificed to the god of men and boys, on the border of Italian and Greek waters! He could disembark.

XI

His card of Antinous of Olympia responded to my Antinous of Naples.

“... This morning, we have visited the famous ruins and the no less famous museum. Everything is becoming green: the orange trees, the lemon-trees are covered with fruits. A perfume of wisteria is floating in the air. Again, the weather is magnificent. That makes the ruins and the sculptures more lovely.

I love you, my darling. In the city of the king of gods, our love immortalizes itself. The beauty of Greece unites itself to us.

The moment I thought of you in front of Jupiter and Ganymede, an immense sunbeam entered through the window-panes. You are my sun!...”

He had reason to feel himself at home 'in the city of the king of the gods': Ganymede was with his real master.

Olympia only possesses Antinous' bust, but at his most beautiful age ~ fifteen or sixteen years. I looked at this face with the long, curled hair, with the delicate neck, with the nose and the cheeks, mutilated by the rage of men. But it was neither with Antinous, nor with Ganymede that I was in Olympia: the boy that I loved, suddenly appeared to me in the reality of his body. I detailed his muscles and his members; I did not touch the marble anymore, but the flesh; I inhaled the fern of his brown hair; I bathed myself in the lake of his eyes. Jupiter, Adrian, you have been beaten.

"... Athens at last! After having seen a very beautiful temple at Bassae, on the top of a mountain, after having seen Sparta where not much is to see, Epidaurus which is a delight, Nauplie, where we slept in a hotel of Bourtzi, ancient, Venetian fortress on a small island... And then Mycène, Corinthe and tonight the Parthenon.

When the sun was setting, it was rose. I have admired it from the roof of our hotel (Hilton).

I am waiting impatiently for the day of tomorrow to mount the Acropolis and I will read again a page that I explained in class.

Short history of Olympia. One of the museum guards was young and very beautiful and he hung out almost all the time besides the Hermes to have himself admired at the same time. In the evening, on the Mont Cronion, I perceived him with a visitor...

My darling love, I love you..."

I had talked with him about several spots, but not about Bassae, which I was eager to reserve for our future journey. To have this not much frequented temple inscribed in their itinerary, his parents knew how to travel. At my last shelter, people still went only on donkey back and the ascension needed hours. Probably, the driveable road had been achieved. But I would have regretted to come out by car in front of these Arcadian columns where the clouds often grasp each other.

His "short story of Olympia" reminded me of another one: one of my Greek friends asked a guard of the ruins where Phidias' workshop was and received as an answer: 'At six I'm free.'

The letter from Athens had a postscript: "I have sent a card to your friend from Reims."

We had quite forgotten her, that one! I would not have given her a place in the virginal Panathenaea, but in the Dionysian processions, where the virgins escorted the phallus. Discretely, I also put there my Belgian companion of *Jeunes proies*. Other silhouettes tried to profile themselves on this Athenian horizon: those of my earlier lovers. They were erased by a boy with whom I had exchanged some drops of blood.

The envelope and the letter paper had a green letterhead: *Green Coast Bungalow*.

“My darling,

I hope that you have forgiven me the injustice to send you a postcard of the Acropolis, but I desired to determine my thoughts for you at once and this was the only way. I also hope that you have understood my exaltation.

It is so warm here that we have decided to settle down at Cape Sounion.

I have wept of joy seeing the sunset through the arcade of the temple.

Our hotel is very close to the sea. It is therefore that my parents have chosen it, preferring it to Belvedere, which is higher.

Tonight, I have stayed at my balcony for hours. The almost full moon reflected itself on the waves and I thought of you... To you for always.”

I was touched that he was so sensible about the things of art and of nature. The tears that they made him pour, were as dear to me as his

love. His room of Sounion undoubtedly reminded him of his room of Saint-Malo. But he did not listen anymore to the sound of a sea “that the Argonauts did not know.”

For the one time that he wrote to me beneath the sign-plates of a hotel, he seemed to apologize himself for not being in another one, of a clearly superior category. What folly of grandiosities had seized him? Maybe he believed to flatter me: he played this little comedy for our glory.

His card of the Acropolis had been lost. The day before his departure, he sent me one of the museum of Athens, representing the small, bronze ‘jockey’:

“My darling,

Yesterday, in the evening, I verified the fame of the Zappeion...

I suppose that, in your time, there was less lightning. It is not far from our new hotel (King George).

We will take the boat at Patras again the 26th or the 27th, and we will stay in Naples for three or four days.

I am almost afraid to find myself in Paris again after having seen things that are so dazzling. Fortunately, someone who loves me more than Greece, is waiting for me there, his lips and his heart full of love, of

this love that bewitches me and that allows me to write to one single person:

To your body and soul forever.”

Greece, which had held such a big role in my life, could not bring me anything more delicious than this greeting with his signature. The buckle had been buckled, the oracle accomplished. Did I blame him for his excess of curiosity for the Zappeion? Like in Rome and in Naples, he showed me that he was walking in my footprints. But I had told him enough about it to save him the *faux pas*.

At last, his Athenian address was in the credibility: we left the big luxury for first class. But then, if this address was real, with what right did I pretend that the other ones were not? Why would not a bank manager offer his family a royal ‘tour’, favoured further by the exchange rate? I mocked myself at my doubts and accused myself of stinginess toward an exceptional being. Now it is me who wanted that he lacked nothing, were this an unnecessary marram panicle.

I counted on a message from Naples, but Italian mail competed with Greek mail, which also stemmed a card from Janina. He let me know from Florence ~ (“Sequel to my letter from Mount Vesuvius”) ~ that he had been on Capri for one day: “Magnificent day, filled with the memory of a book.” He added: “One cannot love Naples more than I do, so well that my parents have promised me to take me there for a month this summer.”

The dream continued its course. The gods would reunite us on the same wave. We would live there halcyon days. I had been a good prophet.

XII

On May 3d, he said good day to me on the telephone. I had a cry of joy. ‘*Kaliméra!*’ he said then. I repeated the Greek good day. ‘*Buon giorno!*’ he said at last. Paris, Athens, Naples ~ our three cities. I thanked him for his letters and his cards. He interrupted himself, ‘Do you know what celebration it is today?’ ‘It is ‘our celebration’, as you are back.’ ‘It is Saint-Alexander. You forgot that?’ ‘You made me forget *les Amitiés particulières*.’ ‘My return on this date is not a coincidence. I succeeded in directing mum, with whom I was in the car since Rome. Dad has returned by plane some days ago. My sister will not be there until tomorrow.’ ‘You are not only “the most beautiful and the most desirable one,” but the most adorable “of young boys.” After this long absence, you put us back on the point of origin of our love.’

The details of their second passage to Naples, proved their broad-mindedness, and, if they still needed it, the financial means of his amazing family. His enthusiasm, which his sister and his cousin shared, had made his parents decide to leave them three days longer in this city, they themselves pursuing to Rome.

I saw a herald of our freedom there.

‘That will certainly provide us an official occasion to get to know each other,’ he said. Last year, I imagined to tie myself with his relatives on a beach of Vendée, then at Deauville, but we discarded this project, which had not been taken on again for Saint-Malo. Now, I held on more to it than ever.

He talked to me, in a new conversation on the telephone, about a secondary school student whom he had met at the ‘Umberto Gallery.’ I said to him that this meeting place was quite as worth as Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the plaza of Spain, the Colosseum and the Zappeion, but that the real secondary school students were rare here. ‘Does it make a difference that you are a false secondary school student, when you are a real boy?’ he said. ‘This will be my friend of next summer.’ I did not see an objection.

These interviews, which never lasted long enough to my liking, did not make me forget that I was robbed from his visit. He had to work double so hard to not compromise his prizes. His messages were even more rare.

One day, he announced to me that his so-called secondary school student had written him. He seemed so excited about it that he gave me a hint. From question to question and from answer to answer, we were soon on the footpath where I had led the girl from Reims: the telephone of love became one of excess. Nothing had happened between this boy and him, except for... such a small thing! They had entered a photo booth and, sheltered by the curtain, the young Neapolitan’s hand had been given a free rein, but not on the side one expected. It had caressed, like the tutor of *Alcibiade*, ‘the blissful and celestial apples’ and one

finger had gone then to discover what is called 'the garden of boys.' That day, we did not talk further to each other.

I was delighted with this story. He had established what was the burst of nature with the youngest beings in the happy countries. Nevertheless, I thought that he got to work fast. His letters from Italy and Greece had only shown me the vivacity of his spirit and his eyes. But the première of Naples already included the premise of his Neapolitan confession. Expert in Greek love, he initiated himself in Latin love.

Now, letters and telegrams alternated once again with the phone calls to let me wait patiently. He wrote to me that he wanted to win three prizes: "If I have them, my family should grant you one." He added, "I renounce describing to you my despair of these days when we cannot meet each other. I love you like one cannot love. And that makes a month and a half that we embraced each other." A month and a half, indeed! Two weeks had gone by since his return.

The epistles from Reims formed a supplementary case between us, but I did not read them anymore. His atoms and those of the girl seemed being quite clung to. The cards that he had sent her from Greece, had conquered her. He begged me again to throw an eye on the messages that I received from her in favour of him. I was surprised to see that she was on a first-name basis with him and called him "my darling." Not being able to make love with him across space, she provided herself the illusion of it by these intimacies. For help, she had the souvenir of the small photograph. 'The first-name basis,' he told me, 'is preceding the journey to Greece and the very recent "my darling." 'And you, how

do you call her?’ He burst out laughing, ‘Do you see me saying to a girl “my darling”? I say to her “dear friend”... *Women, women!*’

However, I enjoyed myself with dreaming for him of something she had to dream: that she would be, among my heralds, the Chloé of my Daphnis. That initiation was part of Greek love and Latin love. Alexander put a daughter of Darius into Ephestion’s bed. Martial desired that his mistress should be “tried out” by his sweetheart. We were not yet there, to tell the truth. But, like all our acts, these licenses were in nature and in the nature of things at the same time.

Neither letters, nor calls prevented reflections of another kind. I established that our relation had somewhat modified itself: the external world had begun to introduce itself here. Even if this world were “our world,” the place that he agreed with, reduced mine. “During this journey,” he wrote to me, “I reflected on quite a few things and I believe that I evolved a lot.”

Isn’t it this what, without his knowing, made him delay our encounter? His memory was filled with beautiful sights and his heart kept the souvenir of a boy of whom he had been lord and master in public. He had invited him to breakfast and to dinner, had gone out with him by car and by hackney-coach. The famous gesture had compensated for two days of amusements.

Could not he have been scatterbrained by his success? He learned me one more detail: since his first Greek berth, at Egoumenitsa, he had received overtures, almost as worthy as the Neapolitan gesture. While his parents were inside a shop, his sister, his cousin and he, on a café

terrace, saw a young man turning around them, who ended up jabbering French to them. They invited him to sit down and ordered one more *ouzo*. He constantly said to the flattered sister: 'Pretty young lady, pretty!' but under the table his knee very indiscreetly pressed the brother's.

If his journey had achieved to form him, his escapades at Saint-Germain-des-Prés completed his information. He had the frankness to not hide them for me, which showed well that they were not of any importance, but to me they seemed stolen from our possibilities of meeting each other. It clearly was something else to take advantage of a drive with his sister, something else to have an afternoon to devote to me. But eventually, everything resulted in the same statement: I was not the only one to occupy his thoughts; I was not his unique aiming point.

I defended myself by having regrets about it, because his sentiments in relation to me could 'evolve', like him, by remaining identical. They had passed, with him, from childhood to adolescence; they would reach one day the male age, when amorous friendship would have succeeded to love. It is to prepare him for this change that I had filled out his spirit. But he was so precocious that my lessons had been almost superfluous. He would not have needed me to take the right direction at once: Rome, Naples, Athens... Saint Germain-des-Prés.

XIII

The last Sunday of May gave me back the possession of my well-being. Like on another one of our great days, our tears and our kisses were intermingling with themselves. He still had the reflection of the Mediterranean on him. All the beautiful things he had contemplated, multiplied his beauty.

When *the good storm* had calmed down, I told him what was on my heart. This journey, which had seemed one more bond to us, had, after all, separated us for almost two months. I had rejoiced that chance would come to terms with him, but maybe it had come too soon. His parents had been too intelligent. It is with me that he should have drunk at the source of Castalie and at the Neapolitan *acqua ferrata*. These principal pages of 'our Book' ~ he had written them without me.

'Without you?' he cried out. I had justified him beforehand, but was happy to hear his own justification. He had not stopped thinking of me, until his cabin of the *Adriatica*, until the one where he photographed himself with the lyceum student from Naples. It is for me that he had been so attentive and so bold. It is often me that he had believed to see on the street, in Florence, in Rome, in Naples, in Athens, just as it happened to him in Paris. Once again, I handed myself over to the rocking of "loves, delights and organs."

He had forgotten the photograph of the young Neapolitan and even his letter, which he had begged me to answer. 'Coming to you, I'm forgetting all the rest,' he said.

The sister and the cousin had ridiculed this friendship, but with a more than brotherly indulgence: the cousin had approved of boys loving

boys, and the sister, confirming what I had supposed to be her tastes, had approved of girls loving girls. 'There is a good marriage in prospect,' I said, 'for homosexuality has never impeded to marry one another and to make children. But hasn't the future taken advantage of this to poach on my preserves?' 'Not at all: it coveted the sailors, the evzones.' 'The new generation finds the secret of happiness again. It outlines itself in two verses of Euripides: "Fortunate man, who embraces his love ~ And picks the flower of a tender girlfriend!" Our era calls that bisexuality. This word is not nicer than homosexuality, but it does say what it wants to say.' 'For me, I only imagine happiness in homosexuality.' 'Me too, clearly, but I talked about physical happiness and not about love. By the way, this term homosexuality which grazes the ears, seems to represent something less, instead of representing something more: a sense of more. The non-homosexuals have a sense of less.

But, as I have told you already, who is not homosexual? First, everybody is bisexual at a certain moment of the conception; Plato was the first to reveal this under the veil of a myth. Then, everybody has had a desire or a homosexual contact in his childhood, in his younger days. Only the hypocrites deny this. On the other hand, great writers, very far-away from homosexuality, like Alfieri, Tolstoi, Michelet, confessed it. The homosexual is the complete man. That is the meaning of this verse from an Italian collection of the XVIIIth century, *la Couronne des "cazzi"* ("The Crown of the "cazzi") ~ "catze" is a word of Montaigne: "He, who is not a bastard, is not a man." 'In my lyceum, the philosophy students have asked the teacher to talk to them about homosexuality and he has made an impartial explanation. This impartiality struck them.' 'You see well that we are in the era of Ganymede! Soon there will be a chair at

the Sorbonne on homosexuality, with obligatory subscription. Maybe it will come to real propaganda courses, like in ancient China, in pre-Hitlerian Germany and in Soviet Russia at its beginning. It is outrageous that, during twenty centuries, religion, morals and the law have conspired to mutilate the human sort with a right and a pleasure that belong to it, that they have made a vice of it, a defect and even, for a long time, a crime. This extra sense, this sixth sense, which is communal for both sexes, is the basis of art, of intelligence and of all the refinements of life. ‘The buttocks are the doors of the Muses’, the old adage said ~ *Portae Musarum clunes.*’

XIV

The next morning, before getting myself to work, I evoked the visit of the day before ~ this awaited visit since so very many weeks. It had lent a new charm to the face that smiled to me in its frame. Kisses still wandered around me. Like the philosopher of Athenian style, I quoted the verse that had become our password: ‘Oh, the most beautiful and the most desirable of young boys!’

I stretched out my hand to take one of my two fountain-pens on the table ~ I had a porphyry Sheaffer, recently bought in Rome, and an old, black Parker, present from a friend. The Parker was not there. I had used it on Sunday morning, and since then, nobody had entered the apartment ~ nobody, except he and I. So, it was inevitable that an idea occurred to me. It was absurd and revolting, but just like I had not been

able to impede it to be born, I could not impede it to grow and to grow more attractive.

I looked at the delightful photograph and my eyes filled themselves with tears. Like Alexander's suicide, it was too "stupid," but it was done.

Despite my certainty, I rose to search everywhere ~ on the furniture, under the furniture, under the pillows, under the carpet, between my papers, in the drawers, in my clothes, in all farthest corners. I devoted one feverish hour to this exercise. My faithful housekeeper, who had arrived in the meantime, discovered nothing, she neither. To let me be face to face better with a perforated corpse of a fountain-pen, there was not any telephone call this morning, not any jingling by suppliers. It was the silence of great dramas. How ridiculous they seemed to me, the one hundred thousand francs, compared with this fountain-pen!

Baudelaire, after a lecture of Sade, imagines the "delight," but also the "horror," of loving a female thief. Though theft has been presented, like murder, as "one of the fine arts," he translated, among other things, a sentiment of inferiority. Even at the age when I read the marquis de Sade, I had not convinced myself that the moral of the senses should abolish every kind of moral. Yes, there is pederasty, homosexuality, sexuality, bestiality of the lowest levels of society and of adventure, of which theft is the least defect. And there is love, inseparable from esteem, Greek love, pederastic love ~ the god Love.

I blushed that a being in which I had seen the perfection of this love and the incarnation of this god, forced me to think of these things.

But had not he already forced me, on the day of the strange request for money? However, I had a conviction then that would have made me throw many more notes through the window and myself into the fire: that is that he loved me. To have had this degrading gesture, this subordinate and intrusive gesture, was it possible that he loved me? I had cried, because I doubted that. I did not cry for a fountain-pen, but for our lost love. The remark by Anatole France verified itself: "What had happened? nothing, and this nothing erased everything."

Still, I tried to resist. If I loved him as much as I told him, did not I have to forgive him and forgive him once again? I contemplated Jean-Jacques Rousseau stealing a ribbon in his younger days, but not from someone he loved. For the rest, Jean-Jacques was not our hero. I evoked Alcibiades, stealing a lot of money from an Athenian who courted him and who marvellously said to apologize him, 'He could have taken everything.' But Alcibiades had wanted to make fun of a man he did not love. The boy that I loved, did not need to take everything: everything was his. Since he had taken any little thing at all, it is that he did not believe in what I had said to him, and that he did not have more esteem for me than love.

I sat down in my arm chair again. How different was the smile of the photograph! And the frame, pure gold, changed into lead! What would have made me foresee these transformations? Yesterday, during the drive in the cab, his hand had pressed mine on the small bench, maybe more strongly than usual. And, returning home, he had pulled this fountain-pen out of his pocket! And he had not called me yet, to confess a reckless act or to murmur, in a voice that would have told me

everything, 'My darling...' ! After these words, his silence would not have been the one of drunk love, but of repenting love. Actually, why would not he continue to love me after having robbed me? Why would his gesture in the cab not have been sincere, despite this other gesture? Cannot a heart, even so young, cover these contradictions and ignore what the hand is doing? I looked at my hands, that should have been stayed united with his until the last day. A fountain-pen had broken this union, like a mean fairy's little stick.

But, eventually, this fountain-pen, would it be thinkable that he had stolen it from me? Should I have added believe to my eyes, if they had been the witnesses of this theft? He, who had not hesitated to ask me a hundred thousand francs, would not he have asked me this object, instead of taking it? It is true that it had been easy for him to take it, but that he had been forced to ask me the one hundred thousand francs. Maybe even, he had only taken it, because he had been sure, after having put himself on a level like that, to be covered from this suspicion. But, while the extravagant request for money had seemed a prank to me, this small theft did not.

I saw a kind of symbol there: the revenge of the world of love on the world of work ~ this world, which was not 'our world' and which I had seemed to defend. When he had encouraged me to live our love completely, he had sensed beforehand that 'my work forbade me that life.' He had forgotten that he had known me thanks to his work, and his instinct punished me for not having sacrificed it to him.

I thought of verses by Cocteau:

Laurel of glory that presses

Without joy, exclusively full of marble,

Inhuman laurel, that the April

lightning shall kill you!

The lightning does not touch the laurel, but it is the *April's* one that had pulverized our temple, on that beautiful day in May.

I conserved a spark of hope: that I would read or hear his apologies in the afternoon. Really, at five o'clock, he called me. His voice did not reveal anything abnormal. He was more cheerful than ever. From the moment that he did not immediately tell me the unique thing he should tell me, I did not have the taste to listen to him. I pretended to have an urgent occupation and abridged the conversation. This excuse was sufficient to surprise him. He did not stir it up. It was the first time that we expressed ourselves like two strangers.

In the evening, while considering better, I reproached myself for my behaviour. I did not have the right to condemn him, if he did not confess. But when would I have his confessions, as he did not make them today? I did not imagine to provoke him either. Covering his pride, he had had to dispose of this fountain-pen. Hence his calmness of this afternoon. His unhappy gesture did not detonate less a certain

unconsciousness. Well, what had seduced me in him, was his full consciousness of everything. Until his “nervous outburst” of the return, he had had the lucid vision of the world of love and the desire of placing us above the vulgar. We were already on the Olympus. And we just fell on the pavement.

XV

He called me the next morning, at the same hour. Never before had he telephoned me in the afternoon on two following days. Guilty or not, he clearly called me to be informed. The device transcribed to me the echoes of bland music. Did he want to declare his innocence or give the illusion of it? Now, I was with my back against the wall: he had to explain to me. I had used another hour of the morning for fruitless searches, attempts of a love that refused to die. Leaving my secretary, I left the room with the telephone and went to throw me on my bed, flat on my belly. It was like being thrown on the one who had shared it so often for my delights. ‘Stop the record,’ I murmured, ‘for it is to your soul that I address myself and we only have to do one accompaniment.’ ‘What is happening?’ His naturel tone should disarm me. But the wound that was bleeding in me, made me cruel, ‘Listen to me until the end, without protesting.’ And I told him the story of the fountain-pen ~ of the two fountain-pens.

As soon as I had finished, I accumulated the words to show the fatal sequence of assumptions and the poison that they poured out into a

mentality like mine, 'The logic of the things is terrible, but I am sure that it is in the wrong. Help me to answer it, so that I will not think of it anymore.' He remained silent for one moment, then said in a hard voice, 'You have hurt me.'

This reply did not destroy "the logic of things," but it resounded in my heart. It did not make me find back my fountain-pen, but I found back my love and my esteem. After the tears of grief, the ones of joy jumped up. He said that, he too, had wet eyes, and that he was not surprised at my torments. 'But I,' he added, "I would not have had this suspicion.' I experienced the regret for not having been silent. My need of frankness had created between us, not a lie, but a flaw. I tried to fill it up by pointing the moral of this event.

'Like everything that happens to us,' I said, 'this small affair will teach us a lesson. You love in me someone intelligent and I love you for your intelligence, as much as for your other qualities. Our intelligence is the guarantee of our love; but it can drag us along to specious reasonings. The only way to destroy them, is to not hide them from us. We love each other too much, so that the least incident does not look like a tragedy, but also that it does not end in a comedy.' 'You call that a comedy?' 'Sorry for this word. Forget that I am exhibiting foolishness while talking of intelligence. Forget everything that I said to you. From this long conversation, only more love will result.'

The next morning, I received a telegram, of which the sloppy handwriting evoked the one of the "nervous outburst":

“What a night! I have not slept a wink. A kind of burning sensation in my stomach devoured me and still I have trouble writing now.

I told myself that the suspicion, despite everything, might keep crossing your mind and that was enough to make it impossible for me to sleep. I am scared that you would have believed me to be able to do a thing like that.

I contemplated this “fountain-pen mystery,” but, in the middle of my misery, I smiled about it. I even roared with laughter. There are two very different things: this ridiculous affair and what it has become for you. I have told you that I understood, because you love reasoning. But you have jumped to a conclusion too quickly. In class, we were given two examples of syllogisms that demonstrate the most incredible things and the most false ones.

Since I have left the good fathers, I have neglected my prayers a bit, but I shall do one, so that you will find back the fountain-pen.

It is with great satisfaction that I have seen the day arising. I have canceled my equitation lesson, which will take place now on Wednesday afternoon. I need rest. I do not know if I will call you this afternoon. Hearing you would do me a pleasure and frightens me.

I called you yesterday, because the day before I felt something peculiar in your behaviour. But to foresee therefore what you had to tell me...! I am still confused.

I ask myself if you are happy with me, leaving with my sister. I am willing to not go anymore to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, nor elsewhere. What would not I have given to have stayed the boy that I was last year?

Last night, trying to distract myself, I thought about Italy. Just like you, it is the country that I would choose to spend there a part of my life, but your presence would be needed. Within a month, I would be there to wait for you.

I would like to kiss you, just at this moment, my head leaning on your belly.

Next Sunday, I will be free.

My darling, forgive me for having been the involuntary cause of so many concerns.

To you forever.

P.S. Ah! Mum just announced to me that next Sunday... In short, it is only the other one that will be for us. I adore you.”

Though he had been forgiven ten times, I appreciated his request for forgiveness. I did not count on the effect of his prayer to some Saint Anthony, but I thanked love, our god.

On Thursday, new telegram:

“Do you know that it seemed more and more outrageous and hilarious to me to have been able of being accused of the theft of a fountain-pen? Really, if I had stolen from you, that would prove that I do not love you and you have been right to say it, for there would be really talk of a theft. This word that made me laugh at first, would even be suitable for an object of no value. Having climbed with you onto a top and stealing a fountain-pen from you! So, I would have lost my head? Look everywhere, though you have already done that. This Parker has to be traced. It is not for me, but for you.

My darling, I beg you, write a small word to me. I will see that you do not hold something against me for having caused trouble to you.

To you forever.

P.S. I add to this letter a photograph of my best schoolmate, who has come to us in the Oise the other weekend. He is not bad.”

I was charmed by his insistence to convince me that he was innocent. Even a maniac of suspicion would have forgiven him.

The photograph that he sent to me, put us back into “our world.” It did not speak about love, but about complicity. The veil of youth had been thrown on the small worries of life.

To answer to his demand, I wrote to him some lines in which there was talk of the Neapolitan sun, of dissipated clouds, of benevolent dew. It was exactly his birthday and I took advantage of it to present my vows.

He called me up cheerfully, 'Guess what my sister has given to me as a present: a Sheaffer!'

XVI

We saw each other again on Trinity Sunday. Our embraces, our tendernesses achieved that the larvas that I had pulled from them, dived into nothingness. We loved each other with a fever that was enlarged by the danger that we had been in. Everything, even a mistake, was made to seal our pact better.

'You have offered to not go out with your sister anymore,' I said to him. 'Some time ago, I would have accepted, out of prudence and a little out of jealousy. But our love just stood the test. So, it is strong enough to defy anything and you do not need to take away your freedom for me. Far from forbidding you Saint-Germain, I would rather persuade you to go there. You will not take existentialism lessons there, as it is the school of anti-beauty. You will breathe there the air of youth and of pederasty. I would do the same, if I had the time for it.

You regretted not being the boy that you were last year. On the contrary, it would be pitiful having a year of lateness. We are changing strongly, but what makes our virtue, in the real sense of the term, is what

is not changing. Just like I believe to know you, it is not possible that you stop loving me, and you know me well enough to know that I will love you all my life. Having said this, you must make your experiments.’ ‘I have not made them with my schoolmate. It’s a pity, for I would have wanted to amuse you with it, but I only feel at ease in Naples.’

This time, the photograph of the young Neapolitan had not been forgotten. He belonged to the classic type, cheerful and curly, which can be imagined in the arms of Petronius or Fersen, and which Luca Giordano painted in Saint John the Baptist. But this Baptist did not point his finger to the sky. ‘Isn’t he beautiful?’ he said to me with conceit. ‘He is as beautiful as all the little Neapolitans. But you, you are as beautiful as Love.’

Neither had the letter been forgotten. It was time to answer it. I made him observe that neither the handwriting, nor the style were of a lyceum student. Everything sensed the humblest education and the humblest condition. Surprising detail, the address was *poste restante*. He told me that a young man from Naples could have his motives to be discrete, like a young girl from Reims.

This letter ended with the word *Baci* (“Kisses”). In my draft for the letter I put the augmentative *Bacioni* (“Big kisses”). ‘No,’ he said, ‘I won’t send him “big kisses”; I’ll send him kisses... like he does.’ ‘Did he give them to you?’ He blushed and looked out of the window, like looking for a vision of Naples. ‘Understand,’ he said in a very low voice, ‘those were the first kisses that I gave to a boy.’

I received news from the girl from Reims. Eventually breaking with Switzerland, she would go and spend the month of August at Positano: all three of us had chances to meet each other. Her father being married again, she would be with him and with her mother-in-law, but she would agree to leave them in the lurch. She praised to me the one she called “our darling,” expression that I persisted to judge displaced. Last Sunday, he did not make the slightest allusion to her. But who knows if he did not please himself with cheering her up, with the reserve of forgetting her the next moment? Undoubtedly, she thought that we would renew on Capri the spintries of Tiberius.

Telegram:

“My darling,

Our encounters are not going to be very numerous: within fifteen days, I will be in Naples.

My love, I have lost a friend and a confidant: Patrocle. He passed away last Saturday, after having been dying for two hours. Indigestion? Oppression by the heath? Illness of young age? I do not know. I have had a lot of grief. If I were a poet, I would make verses about his death. As soon as I will have returned from the holiday, I will buy another small cat.

To you, tenderly.”

Patrocle's death grieved me like it did him. One moment, it seemed a bad herald to me for the holiday. But could anything darken a clear horizon? His way of comforting himself, reminded me of Corydon's: "You will find another Alexis." It is easy to find another Alexis, but not another Alexander.

The schoolyear was over. He had brought his notebook to me to show me his good places, but he only had the second prize for French. This tormented him. 'It would be disturbing to always have the first prize,' I said to him. 'It is enough to have it one time. At the same time, don't be sorry for not being a poet: you are Poetry.'

What a news! His father had been appointed in Paris and was already looking there for an apartment. Everything was smiling to us. Maybe, we would pay visits to each other, for his family only wanted to live on the VIIIth or the XVIth. I did expect there no less than people who had become so elegant. 'You will go to the Janson Lyceum, I suppose?' 'Daddy inscribed me to the Louis-le-Grand, because he studied there.' 'You will find back Voltaire there, the marquis de Villette and Baudelaire.' 'I will not be dismissed for "refusal of passing on a note." But lyceum students are no longer dismissed for a motive like that. *Les Amitiés particulières* have served for something.'

I told him that I had ordered to check, in the national Archives, the files of the "motives of exclusion" of the public schools, in the hope of discovering Baudelaire's one. Too bad! nothing about Louis-le-Grand for the month of April of that year. But my secretary did not return with

empty hands. He had been gleaning, through a century of college life, the most exquisite stories of hares and rabbits. Someone who would want to convince himself that “nothing could be done” to change the boys, would only have to turn over the leaves of these annals. But besides the offensive, love is palpitating as well, under all regimes.

A report of the lyceum of Versailles, dated December 4th 1871, gave an ancestor in the “rule of the game”: ‘A student of the 9th, eight and a half years old, X..., has tried to introduce here what he calls the “game of the pencil.” So, there is nothing new under the sun, neither under the desks.

He had promised me his visit for the next Sunday, but he had gone to the Oise, where he was late and from where he wrote to me:

“What is annoying me the most, except for the fact of not being able to come, is not being able to warn you. But soon we will be in “our town.” Until now, we have seen it with “approximates”; it is going to be proud of a great love...”

This was his last message in this beginning of July, like his visit on the day after the prizes was the last one. I heard him twice on the telephone, telling me again about his grief over these impediments and his joy in anticipation of our encounter at the foot of Mount Vesuvius. The apartment in Naples had already been rented, thanks to an agency. He indicated the name of the street to me, near the national Villa. He did not know the number.

His mother and he left by plane; his father and his sister would join them again by car some time later. The cousin, fallen into disgrace, was not on the trip. He would have embarrassed us. The gods would liberate us from all obstacles to crown our love.

XVII

A letter from Naples, stamped on the evening of his arrival, informed me that he already had seen “his friend” again. He did not qualify it anymore with “approximate.” I was moved by his efficacy to write me and by his appeal to hasten myself. Work delayed me in Paris until mid July, but I had never been so impatient to shake off the yoke.

One point in his letter had diverted me: he begged me to answer him “poste restante,” because it was the “most certain” and the “easiest.” It was certain, but not easy. His taste for mystery and his romanticism had inspired him to imitate the girl from Reims and the Neapolitan.

Second letter:

“My darling,

We came back from Capri. I have amused myself a lot, at first on the beaches, then on the square, where a faun who is familiar to you, was showing off.

I admire the beauty of the little Neapolitans, even more than during my two passages.

Our accommodation consists of three rooms and a dining room. That is primitive enough. My mother, who, in the beginning, got carried away by the “local colour” side, starts being sorry that it is not more modern. We have a housemaid whom she is making understand herself, knowing a bit Italian.

“I have never loved my dear mum like in Naples. We are looking like two lovers. She accompanies me to the swimming-pool. She got acquainted there with my friend and she found him “charming.”

Love.”

On the 12th, third letter:

“My darling,

Every day, I throw myself at the poste restante to know when you will leave.

My sweet darling, mum surprises me more and more. She is of a youth that I would never have suspected. Maybe that’s why she gives me confidence. In the evening, she allows me to go out alone, leaving me the key.

Yours.’

P.S. Ah! Ah! I have... Anyway, my friend and I... Do you apologize me? The temptation was too strong... It was in the boat, at night, in Posillipo...”

PART FIVE

I

I had telegraphed him, some days before, that I would arrive on the 16th at four o’clock in the afternoon. I was certain that he would be at the airport. As he was so free, he would leave his mother and his friend easily. Jupiter went away from the height of the sky in a Caravelle, not to take away Ganymede, but to add to himself on earth “nurse of boys.”

Ganymede was absent. I told myself that he had neglected to go to the mail, or that, despite my presumptions, he had not managed to free himself. Surely, he would have sent me a word to receive me at Pouzzoles. Going through Naples, I ordered a detour in the cab through the street he lived in. Was I going to perceive him? The city of miracles did not make one for me.

Nothing of him at my hotel, of which I had reminded the address to him. I attributed to him a new excuse: his father and his sister, disembarking unexpectedly, had had to dupe him.

I was very surprised by his silence, the next day and the following days. Suddenly, we were more remote from one another than when I was on these shores and he in Saint-Malo. Actually, the sentiments were no less modified than the situations. I might tell myself that our love had not changed; it was mixed here with all kinds of things that had distorted its character. The conclusion that I suppressed, since some months, at the bottom of my heart, imposed itself with the force of obviousness. Our little boat was going to drift; it was not the one of the Posillipan. After having spoken so often to me about our future encounters and rushing so much to meet him, he forgot that I was his neighbour since five days.

The chamberlain of the hotel had had words that were as moving as last year, seeing the photograph again on my bedside table. I took care to tell him that “my son” was some kilometers away from us and behaved like a prodigal son. Every afternoon I took the “Cumana” to reach the city of my dreams, but without setting myself to search him. He knew, he, where to find me. I would have judged it indecent to write to him again. By the way, what would I have told him? That I waited for him under the elm and not still under the myrtle? It would surprise him.

On the sixth morning, the manna fell from the sky: he called me up. The mere fact of hearing him rewarded me for everything. His Neapolitan voice had more enchanting graces. He flew over with love

and explanations. As I had imagined, it is the coming of his father and of his sister that had turned upside down his use of time. He had not known of my telegram until the evening of the day before, returning with them from a new stay on Capri. His sister had got more enthusiastic than ever about the island of Fersen. A word from the girl from Reims, received with my telegram, confirmed him that she would be at Positano on the 31st. Our reunion of three was approaching, he said, without counting the reunion of five with his parents. In reality, I did not wish so many people. Somebody was whispering close to him. I asked him who it was. He had a small, triumphant laugh, 'My friend, of course! He said to me, *Sei bello* (You're beautiful).' 'I know. Promise to call me the next day.'

Once the prestige of this conversation had disappeared, I made some remarks. How did he go to Capri, as I wrote to him the date of my arrival, right before telegraphing it to him? He had not said a word about this letter. How didn't he fix a date for a rendezvous with me since today? I had wanted to leave the initiative for this to him, to not impede his liberty, but I had taken care to declare that I spent my afternoons in Naples, that I took dinner there and in which restaurant. How did he permit this boy to murmur words of love to him, while he was telephoning me? I realized well that he was an easy prey for an enterprising bardash, but he seemed to derive pride from it. Well, when I begged him to specify his address to me, he evaded the answer, 'It is number 80, 82... or 30, 32... The sign can be badly read.' This was not the taste of mystery, but the will to keep me at a distance. I had come to wait.

No call the next day, nor during five days more. The entertainment of Naples did not stop me from dreaming of something else. Losing courage, I wrote to him this note, that damned every self-esteem: "Love waits for Love."

On the 28th, answer from Naples:

"The telephone refusing to give me my Love ~ the line of your hotel is constantly engaged ~ I am obliged to write, me too.

Yesterday morning, we came back from Sorrente. There are very beautiful boys at Amalfi, where we spent two days. I thought about you in front of that sea which was so blue, and those horizons. Are you on Capri? Tomorrow, I will try to call you.

My friend is in the seventh heaven. My sister took us by car to a big, sandy beach, at sixty kilometers from here.

I discovered a passion of myself: water melons.

My darling, within a week, you'll be with me.

Per sempre."

"For always" had become Italian. Whatever the civilities of this letter were, I estimated it a bit casual. He ran through the surroundings, where it was allowed for him to call me, and he had not taken the

trouble to do so one single time. He told me to have called me from Naples in vain and I hardly believed this: my hotel did not have so many overloaded lines. Why, on the other hand, delay a rendezvous for eight days, which could so easily be managed every day? Besides, these “beautiful boys” with whom he was continually harassing me, started to aggravate me. And what preposterous idea to presume that I was on Capri, when he was in Naples! Well, he would deserve this small lesson: within three days, my cure would be finished and, if he had not kept more positive attentions from then on, I would bask on Capri to console myself. Last year, I had not gone there out of love for him; I would go spitefully this year. To me, Naples seemed to be buried under the ashes of Mount Vesuvius, like a new Pompeii. What do I say? We ourselves seemed buried under other ashes. My holiday took place as if he had not existed and his, as if I did not exist anymore.

Indignant, I packed my suit-cases. I stored the statue of Love and the chryselephantine frame in their cases. What did the arrow, rocked by the little god and the roar of laughter of the portrait mean? I did not make the pilgrimage from Cumes to interrogate the Sybille. In her cavern, I would have cried less strongly the name that replenished my heart. However, I sent some lines to Naples, *poste restante*, to indicate my address on Capri.

II

Capri! Would I make it my place of exile after having waited for happiness on the other bank? But Capri, like Paris, is “the place of the world where we can best do without happiness.” It is true that friendship is also a happiness and I had numerous pledges of that. They modified the train of my thoughts. Bit by bit, I surrendered myself, like my young traveller had done, to this careless life. It offers surprises, for beauty does not only attract the impure.

In the house of a befriended collector, I saw a most honourable English couple, Sir John B. and his wife. The master of Greek pottery reposed there from his works in relation to attic vases, and his noble countenance, under a tuft of hair of snow, evoked the virtues of this Hellenism of which I did not follow all lessons. Through his wife, who was the lively interpreter of his deafness, I reminded him that I had blamed him a lot, when he had been appointed doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Lyon. His French colleagues offered him a goblet of the painter Douris, representing a philosopher, caressing not a hare, but a young boy. It had been indicated too late to me at the antique dealer's shop, where it had been kept for Sir John and I had to be content with admiring it. ‘It is the goblet that you gave to the Museum of Oxford,’ I said to his wife. For one moment, he searched in his memory, catalog of all the Greek vases of the world, ‘Ah! yes,’ he said, ‘the goblet of Douris!’ Obviously, it is with the eyes of the Celestial Venus, as blue as his, that he had studied the subject. For him, there was no Greek love: there was only Greek art.

On the Tiber mountain I saw the “# 1 guide” again, ancient little chamberlain of “Monsieur the count,” that is to say of Jacques

d'Aldesward-Fersen. Youthful grandfather at present, he shows to my readers the park and the terraces of the villa Lysia, which one discovers in the middle of pines on top of the ruins of the imperial villa. But if I had congratulated myself with having created on this island another newspaper than the one of the *Book of San Michele*, I felt very sad to tell myself that *The Exile from Capri* might have contributed to take away the most beautiful present from the *Amitiés particulières*.

During a cocktail party I saw again that he had named himself “the faun of Capri.” It had been outlined by an accidental young couple: a marvellous little French lady of whom nobody exactly knew who she was, and a young Austro-Italian prince of eighteen, favourite of the island this year. I was under a bower where they came to sit down. We engaged in a conversation. The young man looked at the girl, sometimes with desire, sometimes with melancholy. He pressed her waist, kissed her hands, her cheeks. ‘How pleasant it is,’ I said, ‘to see two beings who adore each other!’ She threw a naughty look at me, ‘One day I will tell you his secret.’ She did not need to tell me.

In a cabaret I saw another couple again, that was no less symbolic: a Spanish singer and a Georgian guitarist whom I had known in Paris. Had they landed on Capri, with their guitar and their furious songs, to lead its subjects to hell?

III

On the morning of August 4th, I took a sunbed on the terrace of the villa of which I was the guest, at Marina Piccola, when an express letter was handed to me. The envelope had the stamp of Naples and of the day before. I uncapped it quickly.

“Your word from Pouzzoles has stupefied me. Last Saturday, Sunday and Monday I was on Capri and I just arrive here. All evenings I was on the square or in the bar of the Quisiana. I bathed in the “Canzone del Mare.” It is extraordinary that I have not met you. Maybe you do not go out much. What enrages me of having missed you, is that I was alone with my friend from Naples: on Sunday morning, my parents and my sister left for Sicily. I must admit that people pointed this out to me and I will tell you amusing things about this subject.

The girl from Reims is at Positano since yesterday. She will visit the whole region, your *Mount Vesuvius* in hand. As she is by car, she followed the same itinerary as I did on Easter: Milan, Florence, Rome.

My sister made herself several friends on Capri ~ in particular a very rich, young German girl, who was very sad about her departure and who will accommodate her at her return. She does not feel embarrassed with me anymore, though I am as discrete with her as before. The air of your island transforms from morning to evening. I regret that you have not seen me in rose trousers and in celestial blue shirt.

To my big shame, I have to appeal to you for a service ~ a loan. Could you deposit by poste restante two hundred and fifty thousand Italian liras (= 110 pound. *Transl.*) in four money orders? I will pay you back this sum in Paris. That is the fruit of Capri and of my inexperience. Of course, my parents are not knowledgeable of my embarrassment, except for my sister who advanced some thousands of liras to me.

I am very sorry to ask you again for a service of this kind and especially a big sum too, but once again, it is a loan. I would be angry to make you believe that the figure of my “mortgages” will double continuously. On the contrary, I want, at the same time of this sum, to give back to you what you already gave to me. And the “money questions” will be over.

I have said to you four money orders, for this will be easier to receive. Don't imagine that I have been “kidnapped” (you feared something like that in Paris!): there is only talk of my needs. Does it please you to send me the money from this week on? I have to pay back before Saturday.

When you will get acquainted with my parents and my sister, do not speak a word about this business, for heaven's sake. I have been punished enough by talking about it with you. But I am delighted at the idea that soon our relation could be public. I will tell my parents that I have been introduced to you on Capri. My darling love (I have not even embraced you), if I still dare demand money from you and a lot of money, it is that it deals with their trust.

Did I tell you that in October we will settle down on the avenue Foch? My father has rented a magnificent apartment: five rooms, two drawing-rooms, dining room, reception room, and so on... Mum is blissful and I, I am yours forever.

P.S. I have done all these expenses, because I thought that I was in the skin of a Fersen. Total: ten pairs of trousers, ten short-sleeved shirts, ten pullovers, sandals of all colours... Don't condemn me; otherwise I will be sad. But no, I cannot be sad, because you love me."

Under the sun that was baking my back, small grooves furrowed my face in the shadow, but I kept my eyes dry. This letter put an end to the greatest love in the world. The chryselephantine statue was lying in front of me in two hundred and fifty thousand pieces.

Thus, the only role he left me, was the one of the moneylender, to not say the dupe. He did not even worry to know if his untimely demand did not disturb my summer budget. He did not worry beforehand to give his more probable explanations than those of the one hundred thousand francs. They were as contradictory as he pleased. If he had composed himself a wardrobe like that, how would he justify the purchase to his parents? How relevant was his sister, as she had left for Sicily? And what would he say, when she would want to know who had bailed him out? The new connection to the avenue Foch was an ingenuous means to force my hand. Did he believe that this address answered for an unlimited capacity of repayment? Even his proposal to give back to me what I had given to him, was as humiliating for him as

for me. Our relationship was not from lover to loved one anymore, but from creditor to debtor. “Our Book” changed itself into an accounting book. The words of love only served to gild the pill.

By hiding all kinds of things to me, he made a confession to me: that I was a pain in the neck. His stubbornness to conceal his address to me, was an extravagance and a challenge at the same time. Was he really keen on bringing his family and me together, while he seemed to rob me? I went to the extremities of suspicion: he had not come with his mother, nor with anyone, but was provided with a small budget and was meditating on deceiving me while he was there, without showing himself in the arms of the one whom he treated. Certainly, I had told him that our love was free and I would not be annoyed by his liberties, if he had made the least rules for them. Anyway, the girl from Reims had taken her time wrongly to meet Cupid and Apollo in the garden of Priapus. Like the poet, I could say: *My only star is dead*. Though I was in the bay of Naples, nothing would give me back *the Pausilippan and the sea of Italy*. My fate had been predicted by the letter that evoked a night in a small boat in this area, less beneficial to love than to desire. Another poet ~ our poet ~ reminded me

That building on hearts is a foolish thing

on hearts and on bodies. I had to act like a man who disengages himself from childhood and of unconsciousness. I saw only one excuse

for him to talk about a loan with me: he remembered what I had said to him in relation to the one hundred thousand francs: that, if he asked me again a sum that was also irresponsible, he would have it immediately, but that these new calculations and these new obscurities would disturb our love. His attempt to postpone this moment, was not less illusory than his promise never to reopen this chapter, and then what would undoubtedly be his other promises. He had not passed all bounds of his credit, for my warning had only been a brake for “a boy his age”: he had passed all of those of insolence. I had praised his letters to him in such a degree, that he thought to pay me in words. The most irreplaceable one of my young preys left me as a prey to words. At the same time, he lost his unique place, his “immortality,” and joined the world of temporary loves. His person to me seemed veiled by a haze. Yet we were under the clearest sky, but we had left the estate of lucidity. Yes, my eyes were dry, but my heart was melting in my breast.

I considered a solution: send the money orders with this simple word: “Goodbye.” Thus, I would have kept my word by giving him back his. However, could I comply with the desires of a boy of whom I did not know the address and who forbade me a right of a look at his behaviour? I was responsible for him by the job that he would make of this money. His request to pay two hundred and fifty thousand liras by poste restante would have seemed to me a child’s idea, like that of the one hundred thousand francs, if this child had not been emancipated and delivered to himself. Despite of what he told me, was not he the plaything of some bachelor pad Mafia? On second thoughts, this supposition seemed slightly plausible, just like his coming to Naples without his family. If he were alone or in suspected hands, he would

have implored me a long time ago. The small boat of Pausillipo contained more lovers than pirates.

I considered two sentences of his. One of them dated from the history of the one hundred thousand francs: “Before having known you, I believed that being happy was next to having money, boys...” ~ it had escaped him to put money first. The other one had followed to the affair of the fountain-pen: “What would not I give to have remained the boy that I was last year?...” ~ he had warned me that, even if I were wrong to believe him capable of a shameful act, the “angelical” boy, the boy, *fallen from the sky* into my arms, was not there anymore. He had not yet fallen into the Styx, but I had the painful satisfaction to tell myself that my presumptions had not deceived me. The request for money had rightly been “the beginning of the end”; the affair of the fountain-pen, a mysterious herald, and the end still was a request for money.

I pulled the deckchair into the shadow and, lying on my back, contemplated the sea ~ this sea and this horizon in front of which he had evoked me at Amalfi. Suddenly, I had a return of the flame, like reverberated by the mirror of tides. What! in one scale of the balance, there would be two hundred and fifty thousand liras, and in the other one a weight as heavy as the world, someone who had been my reward for having been born and for being what I am! To give him up as a result of his temporary absence and of his Neapolitan comedies, was a more irreparable foolishness than the ones he committed. If he had lost himself on these banks, isn't it because of me? If he had wasted his money, wasn't it in the certainty that I would remedy it? It is not this need that broke the equilibrium of the two scales. ‘All things have a

price, except love,' a great courtesan said. All things have a price, except for what is without a price.

It is true that, now, I saw a price and only saw love. Our love, it was "him and me," "me and him." Either we were together, or we stopped to be. In one scale of the balance, there were two hundred and fifty thousand liras; in the other one, there was nobody.

It remained to settle the present affair. I would not be deaf to his appeal, but I wanted to take the advantage again and force him to explain himself better. So, there was no other means than to simulate a rejection. I wrote to him these three words on a big white sheet that I sent express:

"Impossible. Regrets. Love."

A decision imposed itself with regard to my guests: the one of not starting an epistolary dialogue in their company, telegraphic or even by telephone, with a boy lacking money in Naples. I declared that the letter of this morning was an emergency call from Fiesole and, the following afternoon, I hit the road to Caprian pleasures.

IV

I had added a line to my *espresso*: “Tomorrow, hotel X., in Naples.” He would see that the bridges had not been burnt.

During the crossing, my imagination inflamed. Suddenly, I feared a tragic event. Last year, towards the same period, I received the news about his operation in Italy and I decided to kill myself if he would die. These memories, occurring in the middle of the tides, aroused ideas in me that were gloomy as well. What shock would he have had while reading my note? A shock that was all the more big than unexpected. Wouldn't he have the reaction of a child who believes himself betrayed? His head, from which floated the heroism of the *Amitiés particulières* and also the nervous disorders of a Fersen, wasn't it capable of everything? At least, there was something real in this accumulation of lies: he was without money. On Capri, my resistance had been reinforced by the atmosphere that I breathed too. My entourage symbolized this solid world that is the secret enemy of love. In a princely town, I could not have reasoned like a free man. The caricatures of love that I had seen here and there, had increased my skepticism. My gesture to push back the cup that I had to empty to the bottom ~ to this imbroglio of complications, produced by an adorable, fantastic and invisible boy ~ had also been natural. A defamed island had been the fortress of moral order for me. But on the boat that made me cross the bay, I had found myself again face to face with our love. I trembled for not arriving in time.

The hotel porter handed a thick envelope to me, put down since some hours. I did not wait for being ascended to my room to read a same message and ran into a salon.

“August 5th.

I admire your letter. It is your masterpiece... You know how to be the warmest person when you want to, but also the coldest one. This “Love” that you write like an insult and a reproach...! I would have them, reproaches to write to you! Oh! no insults, but I am too much downcast.

“Everything that is mine, is yours...” You, who do not hesitate to spend a foolish sum to buy a statue, you let “your love” be in want. You let me down, when we were nearing our goal: you were going to get acquainted with my parents.

It is for you that I obtained from them, by a big conversation, the permission to stay in Naples. However, how I would like to accompany them to Sicily! They have given up the apartment they occupied in July and have rented a splendid room for me in the house of private individuals. I had all the money, needed for the fifteen days of their absence and I volatilized it on Capri in three days.

I am going to borrow enough from my landlord to take a ticket for a plane to Catane in order to join them again at Taormina, where they moved into the San Domenico hotel. Let us hope that they have not already left again...”

“Later.

I always have your letter in front of my eyes and I reflect, I interrogate myself, I cry. This big, white sheet only has two lines: your address and three words. "Impossible" and you told me that impossible was neither French nor Greek. I read again "Regrets" and I really want to believe this. "Love," it is this word that is too much."

"Much later.

Now, I am like you during "the fountain-pen affair": I have doubts. Haven't you changed? Am I the one that I was for you? I had thought that you did not love me more than money. Money, a fat lot I care; but doubting the one into whom one put his confidence, is much harder than having no money.

You will say to me, "My words, my letters have been the proof of the contrary." But, for a writer and a man like you, it must not be difficult to write nice letters and say nice sentences to a boy ~ particularly gone into raptures, hypnotized, radiated and amazed by you.

I am not angry with you. You obtained what you desired and I do not complain about it, but you made a mistake by imagining that you loved me. When you love someone more than yourself and you know yourself to be loved more than anyone else, can you refuse him anything, and at first a sum which is not so big? Excuse me for having said to you that you loved money. I don't know what you love. As for me, I only love you. That is terrible and irreparable...

I send you back your "love," which squeezes my heart.

You will laugh about my fountain-pen. It is very funny, when I am totally me. But I have not finished, for the amazement that your letter produced, is not close to finishing. Maybe you suppose that I asked money from you for the money. I asked you for it out of necessity. That my spendings have been absurd, is not the problem.

I understand that you hesitated. One day, I wrote to you about a similar request, which would make you “reflect.” This time, I do not know if you have reflected, but you have hurt me. You should not talk of “love,” nor of “regrets.” I would not have written to you, if you only had put “impossible.” The two other words are knives into the wound and force me to react.

I beg you! I am too unhappy! From the moment that you will receive this letter, answer me. Go and bring your answer to the mail this very evening. I would like to have it next morning. I did not sleep this night. I am alone, desperately alone. You don’t have friends when you have no money. My landlord and his wife are very kind, but I would blush while confessing my distress to them.

I love you.”

I was convinced before reading it, for I already had done a part of his speech. Despite the contradictions that remained, he took me again by the force of his sentiments and the magic of his pen. As I always loved him, he did not have any trouble to convince me that he loved me. So, the things appeared to me from another angle. Instead of being

shocked by his proud tone, I admired him for not having adopted the humble attitude of the guilty one. Instead of surprising me to have to write him *poste restante*, from Naples to Naples, I did not judge without dignity this fierceness of his keeping his distance. He did not want to give up under the impression of need. Like he loved me without seeing me ~ and I understood now what it had cost him ~ he asked me to prove my love without seeking to see him. I accepted this bravado.

Nevertheless, I did not expect myself to be obliged to go to the mail at once. For me, it was sufficient to be calmed down in order to think that he was too. By the way, my arrival had had to be confirmed to him: the solution of his “embarrassment” was close.

I had dinner on the terrace of my restaurant and I hoped that he would make me a surprise by coming here. His family was far away and his friend was off. He was “desperately alone.” What appearance it would have been for me in the turbulent night of Naples! He did not come. Maybe he had been afraid of looking like begging for a meal. Maybe he even punished me for my lack of faith, like the gods that hide their presence to the immortal ones.

V

As soon as I woke up, I called to the porter to know if a letter had not been put down for me. He did not have one. I was disappointed by that. I had told myself, that night would have brought him comfort and

that he would expect it inadmissible not to show himself. I found my spiritual condition of Pouzzoles again and my forbearance of yesterday evening seemed really ingenuous to me. I was one of those who only believe in gods that they can see and touch.

I spent the beginning of the afternoon writing a beautiful letter. Between refusal and acceptance, there was a medium term. Giving a bit, that would have been haggling; giving all, bringing me to blunder. Giving nothing, was a right reply to someone who did not even allow me his presence. I did not treat him with cruelty: he had a home and his family was not to hell.

I wrote to him that my love had been acquired by him forever; that, since three weeks, I had had week signs of his; that in Naples, where he had believed that he could not be happy without me, I still had to wait for a rendezvous with him; that I preached freedom to him, but that it had to rest upon regular proofs of love.

I did not deprive myself of some ironic observations. I told him that I explained his misfortune to myself by his change of fortune. I had bound myself to a delightful boy with a bourgeois background that was rather mediocre, which had made me attach myself to him only more, for I saw myself in the case of being more for him. And I discovered a young lord, endowed with a family that lives in great style and who let him two hundred and fifty thousand liras for fifteen days. In his conditions, it was not very blameworthy to have them “volatilized” in three days. At the same time he was authorized to qualify this sum as “not so big,” though it had seemed “voluminous” enough for him at first. I added that it was voluminous enough for my tourist purse and

invited him to follow his own inspiration: borrow from his landlord and landlady the means to join his family, whom they know. Thus, a “question of money,” aggravated by the circumstances, would not be opened again between us. As he had stumbled while wandering about, it was up to him to recover. That would complete his education.

I concluded that this stay, of which I promised so many joys to myself, had turned into a fiasco and partly into hide and seek, so I would leave Naples immediately. We would see each other in Paris.

I had taken this message with me, while going to breakfast. At four o'clock, there was already this answer:

“Ah! how your letter has done me well! If you had not changed towards me, how would I have changed towards you? Would you want to be a cause of torment, when my fate is united with yours? I told you this: I have done a sad experiment. All the more sad, because, this time, I neither amused myself on Capri, nor did I enjoy it. At the bar of the Quisisana and elsewhere, I only hoped for one thing: noticing you.

I have addressed myself to you, because I can address myself only to you. I turned in vain to the people I live with. But why don't they do a service like that to me, when the one who loves me most in the world, doesn't do it to me? I agree with you: between you and me, the questions of money are repulsive. Be sure that I suffer having to ask them again.

And then, you ask me not to see you until we are in Paris? Don't you feel that I need you? That it is on you that I want to lean? You invite me to go alone for some time. Does a child learn to walk alone?

Now, I am alone and I'm thinking of you. I'm also thinking about all my troubles ~ yes, troubles! I am alone in an unknown city; I only have two thousand liras for eight days and even if I go to Taormina, I would not be sure to find my parents there. They did not know if they would go there directly or if they would start driving around on Sicily. Well, what do you want me to do?

You seem to reproach me the money which has been let to me, and the apartment on the Avenue Foch. It is not my fault, if my family benefited from a "change of fortune" and if it pleases them to make me take advantage of it, even extremely. Well, you leave for Florence, like someone who is escaping his past. One would say that you distrust me, that you fear other requests. Didn't I tell you that there would be no other ones anymore and that it was only about a loan? As soon as my parents will be in Naples or I will be in Paris, I will eliminate all these matters of money. As I have myself committed to this, I will even pay you back what you gave to me and what I would have loved to have today.

Your love for always.

P.S. Write soon. I cannot believe that you are not interested in me in this situation. Without that, the only thing is to throw oneself out of the window."

He had realized well that I did not like to leave for Toscane more than he did to Sicily: our carbines were short-lived. And he imperturbably displayed his art of writing, which I had compared lately to his art of loving. But their coincidence, having become less perfect, only succeeded in suppressing all his contradictions. The most important one was to repeat that he needed me and to keep me at a distance. Maybe he confused his need of me with his need of money. And money was taking the lead, as in the sentence that I remembered on Capri. It was clear that he submitted my desire to meet him to the assurance of giving him satisfaction. To hasten things, he shook the shadow of suicide, which had floated over my crossing. But I did not dread this disaster anymore: in his torment, he kept his cold-bloodedness. In order to prove his destitution to me, he had used a crumpled sheet of paper. I saw placed in position by such a young boy the ruses of a woman ~ “the refuges of Lorette, to pull a note of one thousand depths where a man keeps it,” as Balzac said. I did not keep my one thousand notes “in depths.” They were staying, what a pity! strongly over ground level, quickly dispersed by the preparation of a new work or by the purchase of one of those art objects with which he reproached me more rightly than I did “reproach him the apartment on the Avenue Foch,” but these purchases were, like my love for him, tributes to beauty.

This strange correspondence plunged me, me too, into contradictory sentiments: it did distinguish the reasons of not loving him anymore, while I was discovering his character better, and demonstrated

the impossibility of not loving him as long as he would give me the slightest proof of love. He had given me the most exquisite and the biggest ones: at the moment I was happy with very little. I only received the echo of ancient words, but they had changed my life. I did not forget that I had made him leave childhood and he certainly was not a child anymore that “learnt to walk”: he was even a child that made me walk. He abused memories like formulas, but I acknowledged his right to do so. I acknowledged all his rights.

To finish it, I simply wrote him to call me the following morning at nine o'clock. Before going through his wishes, I demanded that he would go through mine: he would give me the alm of one day. To me, it seemed that I had deserved this day well.

While leaving my room to go to the mail, I found a new letter, which had not waited for my answer. So, where was he, this elusive one, who was walking to and fro between my hotel and the post office window and whom I never would meet?

“My darling,

I implore you! Do not write me again to tell me what I know. Everything you said to me, I know.

I would be offended, if you believed that I have become a stupid boy who acts at random. I beg you, help me. I don't even have writing paper. This sheet is half of your “masterpiece” from Capri.

I have calculated what is necessary to me for my eight days. I do not ask two hundred and fifty thousand liras anymore, nor two hundred, but one hundred and fifty ~ just to settle the arrears of my room and my sustenance until the return of my family, who will allow me to pay you back everything.

If you love me (why this if?), go to the poste restante before seven o'clock this evening and deposit three money orders, so that I can collect them immediately.

I do not say: "For always," in this letter which looks like an invoice, but it is always true."

He made me a discount. Undoubtedly, it was for the sale of water melons at Porta Capuana that he did his patter, "I don't ask two hundred and fifty anymore, nor two hundred... Where did my love bring his love of water melons? But I grew impatient with his obstinacy to play on the blowpipe, and I failed to tear my ticket. Nevertheless, as for him there were accents that could not deceive: his pleas that were more and more insistent, his third promise to pay back, an argument as vulgar as his discount, witnessed that he was exhausted. He reconciled by the word "invoice," but I would pay the invoice only after having seen the mailman.

VI

Never, since the day that I had waited for him on the Place de l'Etoile, had my heart beaten with pulses so rapidly as on the morning of this August 7th, when I saw him standing immobile on the corner of the Place du Municipio and the port. He had called me on the appointed hour, in a badly confident voice, and I had fixed this rendezvous with him to go to Pompeii. I had needed to pronounce the words, destined to comfort him: "I love you and you will have what you asked me."

Never had he been more beautiful, prouder, quieter. To me, he seemed to have grown. I loved the sobriety of his outfit, which had nothing of Capri: white trousers, white shirt, white shoes. A small red belt and red shoe-laces were his only concession to fantasy. Though his complexion had darkened, the reflection of his long brown hair made a wonderful contrast with his sweet skin texture. We greeted each other in a low voice, 'Good morning!' 'Good morning!' He did not say, '*Buon giorno!*' His handshake was a bit fast and his smile hardly perceptible, but that was not to surprise me: we had imagined another encounter under the sky of "our city." I would have wished that he would embrace me. However, his too fast kiss had displeased me, on the day of the thousand francs. I cast a glance around; nobody observed us, nor did "Saint Jean-Baptiste" lie in wait. He was really alone, like he had said.

We got on the tram to reach the "Vesuviana." This banal means of transport postponed a private meeting that demanded gradations. Could I have been closer to him in a cab and not take him by the hand on the seat? But in which way would he have answered this gesture? He was holding a big envelope for photographs. I pretended not to be curious about what it enclosed.

Next to us, French people discussed with animation, because, in a bar, they had been 'cheated for one hundred liras.' 'The thieves!', they said. Automatically, I touched the pocket of my trousers where the one hundred and fifty thousand liras were, and I considered that I had never been robbed of one hundred liras, in this city that I had been visiting very often during the past eighteen years. To delay still the burning subjects, I told him, *sotto voce*, that the Italians of the north shared the preventions of strangers, contrary to Naples and that a Roman newspaper had given me the responsibility, some years ago, of defending the Neapolitans, reviled by a famous Toscan journalist.

We were standing against a window pane, without looking at each other. The somewhat too pronounced perfume that soaked his hair, made me think of the discrete fern of our beautiful Parisian days. I pointed to him, while walking, at the church tower of the Church of Carmel on the Place du Marché, and told him that I had promised myself to write the history of Conradin de Souabe, beheaded at fifteen in front of this church by the horrible brother of Saint Louis. 'Conradin?' he said with a smile that enlightened his eyes behind the black glasses, 'you invoked him in *les Amitiés particulières*.' This allusion put us back instantly into our real world, like the one that he made at his return of his Easter journey. I took him by the hand: he pressed it with the same force as during our drives to his suburb.

We got out in front of the station. I took two first class tickets to Pompéi-Scavi. On the quayside, a comedy monk, shortish, stocky, his bare feet in sandals, miaowed, shaking a moneybox. I told that certain

monks prolonged the remunerative cult of Priapus by doing the job of ruffians.

The compartment was almost empty. We settled down face to face. At last, I was able to feed my view. Our knees touched, our breathings were mixed. My soul, like in Agathon's kiss, went into him. But his embarrassment had not disappeared totally. I begged him to put off his glasses. He took them away, turning his head, then put them back. 'The sun of Naples is so blinding!' he said. These glasses were the symbol of the smoke screen which he had tightened between us.

After the departure of the train, he brusquely came sitting on my bench and stuck himself to me, as if we were in "our bed." I leaned my hand on his thigh and his warmth came to me at once through the material. I would have wanted to stay like this for hours. But he rose to sit down again opposite me. He said that he preferred to go in the direction of the train.

He showed me the photographs: they were two images of him on a yacht. I barely looked at them, as I had something better to look at, but the pointless game of requests and answers really had to be started. To whom did this yacht belong? To someone whom his sister had known on Capri. What was the name of this rich German, of whom she had made a conquest? He only knew his Christian name. Where did he live in Naples? Not very far from my hotel. To feign to believe what he had told me, I made an allusion to the Avenue Foch and he blushed. I stopped my interrogation, so that this day would leave us only pleasant memories.

Looking for quiet subjects, I talked about our girl from Reims, but I understood that, from then on, she was only an epistolary theme. Even his sister had disappeared behind the smoking screen. So, I decided to deliver myself to the intoxication of uncertainty. I did not know anymore if I loved or if I were being loved, if we loved each other for a day or forever, if he were happy or not to go to Pompeii, if his thought was with me or with his unfaithful Neapolitan. But, as his charm did not lose anything by it, I did not have the right to complain and only took care to enjoy myself.

We had arrived. On Easter, he had visited the museum, but I made him see bronze phallics, discretely placed in certain display cases and which escaped his attention. I told him that he really would see other ones in the secret museum of Naples. He reminded me that, in one of my books, I mentioned the inscription of a niche of this museum, where a phallic has been sculpted: *Hic habitat felicitas* (*Here dwells happiness*). 'This niche,' I said, 'was the mouth of the oven of a baker and the phallic, to which the inscription relates, is obvious. But an ecclesiastical author wrote that the "bliss" of this baker was to make good bread.' 'This could have been a French archeologist,' he said: 'I have read *l'Oracle*.'

We went to the restaurant which is in the enclosure of the ruins. There was a quiet corner, despite the number of tourists. This was our first shared meal ~ the meal of Pompeii. His joy was always a bit nonchalant. Agitated by his black glasses, I declared that the sun did not risk blinding him in this room. His eyes bare, he stared at me. At last, we were sitting in front of each other, better than in the carriage. The

entire past rolled into this look and gave its power to the present. I guessed that he did not resist anymore to it and I pressed the top of my fingers on my lips to send him a kiss ~ our first kiss of Italy. He enlarged his eyelids and a smile of happiness illuminated him. Our love, like a phoenix, was born again out of its ashes. 'I love you,' I said. The tone of these words was more resonant than this morning on the telephone and he felt that. I pressed my legs against his under the table. All doubts had disappeared, all problems solved.

Avoiding delicate questions, I limited myself to the practical things, 'What I will give to you this evening, can you put it in a safe place?' 'Yes, I have a small trunk which closes with a key. I put it into a suitcase which is also closed with a key, like my room.' 'You have these keys with you?' He pulled a bunch out of his pocket: there were, with the three keys, those of two other suitcases, left on Capri with this German girl of whom he did not remember the name.

'Until the return of your parents,' I said, 'we will see each other often, I hope. We will do whatever you want to do, we will go wherever you want to go. Everything is ours, except for Capri, as I am supposed to be at Fiesole. But we will venture there to have lunch on the Mount Tiberio, at the ancient cabaret of the "beautiful Carmelina." I will have black glasses.' He had a smile, 'When you will know my parents, we will go there with my family.' His art of evading the answers remained flawless.

On the other hand, he supplied me spontaneously with some details about his friend. This boy was still on Capri in a small pension. I presumed that my money would pay the balance of his stay and I

explained the cloakroom of the invoice to myself. ‘In Naples,’ he added, ‘I went to him four times. No more, for you need to take advantage of opportunities when nobody is there. The interior is “middle-class,” but decent... He does *that* very well!’

What a progress in his language in relation to these things! Instead of talking about it with modesty or with irony, it is completely right if he had not winked at me. Did he believe himself still “in the skin of a Felsen”? By the way, his seduction took a more intoxicating aroma, like the one of essences which he had poured on his hair. I told myself that, as long as he would be beautiful like this, I would be at his mercy.

We went outside. It was the hot hour, when the streets of the dead city are almost deserted. In an out-of-the-way block, the name of one of them delighted us: “Street of the Twelve gods.” I thought of the temple that the twelve gods have in Rome under the Capitol ~ the last temple of paganism and where they carry the epitaph of “agreeing people” or “accomplices.” A light touch assured me that the gods agreed. We glided behind a section of a wall. My hands fitted his muscled forms, my mouth inhaled the kisses of myrtle. Our ardour was too big to allow us to do complicated things. He was panting so strongly that someone who would have passed, would have been able to surprise us. But, mumbling, he said, ‘My darling’ and his soul flew into the grass with mine. For a moment, we were silent, immobile, overwhelmed by the pleasure and by the poetry of these ruins. I said to him, ‘These minutes will be sacred to us, like those of our first kiss in the chapel of your college. But here, we are in one of our temples.’ He added, ‘The one of the Twelve gods!’

At the end of the street, the triangular forum invited us to rest. It was the landscape of a poet from the *Satyricon*: “The noble plane tree spread its summer shade ~ And the pine tree rounded, with a trembling top ~ And the tree that saved Daphne and the mobile cypress...” Flowers filled the air with their fragrance, birds were singing, a breeze shook the leaves. The place was worthy of love, like the street that led to it ~ *dignus amore locus (worthy of the love of the place)*.

We wandered through the city. These houses and these monuments evoked to us the preserved relics in the museum: the prints of bodies and of trees, the carbonized or intact food, the toilet utensils, the household cleaning staff, the working utensils. But in the city, like in the museum, there were reminders of another kind: phallics in relief on the walls or on the paving stones, obscene paintings, hidden by shutters. We amused ourselves while establishing that the guards refused to reveal these frescos to the women, also if they had fair hair, and did not remove the boys, even those in short trousers. Near the Vettii, in the room of the erotic scenes, together with us, kids were allowed to enter, who listened attentively to the description of each posture. In the country of Priapus, these are the privileges of the *casso (dick)*.

During our promenade, I walked sometimes behind him or was ahead of him and came back and met him, to have all the aspects of his body which I had never admired so much outdoors. He was amused by this game, which did not remove his naturalness from him. If he had had himself noticed on Capri, he did not go unnoticed at Pompeii. A clergyman photographed him on the corner of a street.

I took him to the enclosure that is near the Vesuvius and we climbed the tower on top of which the ruins have to be seen in the setting sun. We were alone.

The glory of the sun on the purple sea

engaged itself with the glory of Pompeii and with the glory of our love. Though this love was busy putting on another character, it was always as soft and as glorious. It was always the glory of Greek love. Knowing to love, it is being able to love someone who changes, but who still loves you in his own way. And could I doubt being loved by the one whom I loved? Despite the fact that he concealed his life from me, he stayed with me on a top of which he himself had measured the height ~ the top that the acropolis of Cumes symbolized last year, and that this Pompeiian tour now symbolized. ‘In Greece,’ I said, ‘you thought to immortalize our love, but you were there without me. Here, we immortalize it both.’ At the back of the platform, we embraced each other. The fever of the Street of the Twelve gods flared up again. He said to me, lovable student, the verse of Theognis, that had been the leitmotiv of his Easter journey, and I repeated it on the mouth “of the most beautiful and most desirable of all young boys.” I saw another symbol in this visit, ‘Our love has triumphantly undergone a new crisis. It was not dead, for it cannot die: it was moaning under a rain of ashes and it is shining now in the light, like Pompeii.’

The return into the warmth of the twilight. Our hands, intertwined on the seat of the wagon, before the flight from the landscape. The dinner on the terrace of my restaurant. The young people who passed by and stared at us. The shopkeepers who proposed to us objects in a scale, cigarette lighters, transistors, music boxes, cameos, fetish dolls, ties, postcards, sunglasses ~ thank God, he did not wear his. The rules of the fence only deprived us of mendicants.

We moved towards the Place du Municipio. A street opened itself on a celebrating district. It was decorated with an immense electric sign, of which the multicoloured lamps represented the Roman Trevi Fountain. The blinking of the ampules pictured the mobility of waterfalls. Other signs made the arms of Naples shine red and gold. We tasted this entertainment of a childlike people and I described to him the illuminations of the Sicilian celebrations that were as surprising.

‘Who knows where my parents are today?’ he said. ‘But soon they will be back. This date is going to be important to us.’ I said that our public relations would not render null and void the considerations of prudence: ‘Shortly after the arrival of your family, I will reach my house at Fiesole. But as you go through Florence again, we could meet each other there. That would be a beautiful prelude to our encounter on the blue sheets.’ He approved of my enthusiasm and imagined to conduct his parents to my own residence. We would sleep under the same roof. I could slip into his room. The plans flew from our lips, like the water of the fountain on the sign.

We continued our walk. Not far from my hotel, I showed the sombre streets that aligned themselves at the back, ‘Your room is through

there?’ ‘Through there,’ he replied. I gave him the package of the one hundred and fifty thousand liras. He grabbed it with an almost wild gesture and put it in his pocket.

We slowed down our pace, without saying anything. Before we separated, I notified him in a friendly way that he had not thanked me. He jumped, ‘Oh, I did! but you did not hear.’

VII

Since my return from Pouzzoles, I had only carelessly recited, while taking my bath, the masculinized *Hymne* of Baudelaire. That morning, I declaimed it at the top of my voice. I thanked our poet for having supported me in doubt, and the small photograph for having magnetized to me the original. I had covered it with kisses, as soon as I woke up, with the same fervour as last summer after the success of the operation. Following the rite, the small statue of Love was also part of my transports. But it is not the Love of Thespies anymore ~ the chaste Love of the *Amitiés particulières*, the Love of the museum of the Vatican ~ that this small statue reminded me of. It was the Love of Pompeii, which is in the Morgan collection. This modest American refused to buy the winged phallic that the statue had in its hand. The antique dealer who had sold it to him, kept this toy for forty years, in the hope that the famous collector would decide to ask him for it. After all, it is in my house that the winged phallic has settled. Since yesterday, in spite of Morgan, I had the Love of Pompeii in full.

Like every morning, I read some pages of *Candide*, and some pages of the *Satyricon*. The most beautiful French of the world seemed the more pure to me under the sky, and the Latin of Petronius more elegant on the places of the action. But I held my ear to the telephone, where the voice of Love would resound any time. We had agreed to have lunch together. The rendezvous had not been fixed: he preferred to call me.

My attention weakened, my throat tightened, as the hour moved forward. I leaned on my elbow on the balcony to watch the passers-by, in a hope that was as naïve as during my crossing from Naples. The magnificent square spread out its greenery, its flowers, its fountains. The yellow and grey palace of the Municipio, the royal palace of the colour crimson, the castle of Anjou of the colour ochre, did not amuse my eyes anymore. The port where a liner was at anchor, the sea where Capri profiled, talked to me about escape and about treachery.

When I went down for lunch, the porter handed this letter to me:

“My only Beloved,

I leave very early for Capri, in order to search my suitcases. I will come back this afternoon or tomorrow morning. In any case, I will call you from there.

My darling Love, my Well-Beloved, I adore you. The softest and most foolish words cannot translate my love for you. Let us swear to each other not to doubt each other anymore and to always have faith and

to always remember each other. Yesterday!... Yesterday, it was perfect happiness, the happiness of two lovers, united for life...

P.S. I would have loved to tell you this on the telephone, but it is too early and I am afraid to wake you up.”

These lines had been written on half a sheet of paper, like his last letter. Swearing to me to not doubt me anymore, was a bit strong. But to plant me there while asking not to doubt him anymore, was not less strong. We had left each other around midnight and he knew then that he would make way under sail this morning; that's why he had not made an appointment. Or rather, he behaved like a sleepwalker, like a hypnotized person ~ not “hypnotized” by me anymore! It was not the suitcases he was going to search for: he was going to find his friend again with his booty. Even if his nice sentences moved certain fibres in me, I had to admit that they had lost all sorts of sense. The Love of Thespies, of Pompeii and other places, was nothing, alas!... but a fountain-pen anymore. The god had flown away. I kept the winged phallic of Morgan.

Once his execution had been pronounced, I tempted, as usual, to rehabilitate him. I really wanted to believe that he had been happy while being with me during a day, and that he would not forget the pleasures; that he had not dared announce to me his intention to go to Capri, nor wake me up this morning, and that he would call me this afternoon, if he did not come back. I really wanted to believe that he was sincere while calling me “his only Beloved.” But was not I “adored” like an

unreal divinity to which people burn some incense to obtain his acts of generosity? I had qualified this role more brutally in my reflections of Capri. He was, he, “my god and my idol,” but my *idol of flesh*. He owned me by the spirit as well as by the flesh, and the two were indivisible.

The brusqueness of his gesture, when he took the money, had struck me. I had seen a sign of his shame in it and of his confusion. Now, I saw the impatience in it of someone who said to himself, ‘At last!’ It is this muffled word that he had pretended to translate to thanks. For the rest, what he said or did not say, did not matter.

Despite my desire to pack up and go at that moment, I decided to await the events. I would not go and pursue him, nor fight with his abductor, like this client of the speaker Lysias, who fought with a rival over a boy of Plataea. I would not pursue him, but I still would pursue his shadow. It had already changed into a laurel like Daphne - *inhuman laurel*, of which not any *laurel of glory* would comfort me.

The laurel and the glory... I had told him that we would go together to the tomb of Virgil ~ *Alexis and Corydon*. Where had not we planned to go to? To Cumes too, in memory of Petronius.

In my reading of the *Satyricon*, I was at the appropriate passage. I resembled Encolpius, abandoned by Giton, and who withdraws to weep “in a secret place, close to the shore” ~ this same shore. Thinking about the “fugitive,” I could “beat my hurt chest,” ward off “the earth to bury me, the waves to devour me”; I had been betrayed for “an adolescent,

soiled with all the debaucheries and with the dignity of an exile” ~ the exile on Capri.

The “fugitive” had not come home in the evening and had not called me. I eased my exasperation to grant him two days of mercy. With the one that finished by passing by, that would make the “three days” spent by Encolpius in his “inn”: the triade of Apollo, of Priapus and of Saint Janvier.

The next day, not any message, not any call in the morning. Walking to the national Villa, I seemed to wander in front of the horizon of Capri. Maybe, the two lovers were on the terrace of the villa of Tiberius, from where there is such an admirable view of Naples. They were two people in love, but we were “two lovers.” Put on the bottom again by the “great love,” he was gormandizing with the “approximate.” For a being to whom I had given myself and to whom I would have given everything, I did not repeat the Balzacian formula: “How right one is to have a lot of money!” But the idea that I could have killed myself because of him last year, made me say, “How right one is not to kill himself!” When Encolpius, in his desperation, put up his bed against the wall of his room and hung himself with his belt, Giton appeared in time to save him. I contemplated all the less to imitate him; I would not have had the same chance.

In the evening, I found an *espresso* from Capri:

“My darling,

Yesterday, my sister, calling the German girl, has known that I was there. She will call back this afternoon to give me news about my family. That delayed me for one day. If you have something urgent to tell me, telegraph me poste restante.

I love you.”

And this was the second day.

On the third, another express at noon:

“My love,

What a surprise! A letter that was sent after me from Naples, notifies me that the girl from Reims will come to Capri tomorrow. I called her at Positano. It is her stepmother who answered me. I am a bit confused by the prospect of this encounter. Me, meeting a girl! and on Capri! What an absurdity! But this will be a place that will facilitate your encounter with my parents. So, I must stay one more day.

Don't worry, I have been immunized against all insanities. It is because I have seen you, because you have talked to me. And you wanted to let me be trained alone?

My darling, how happy I am! the big moment is coming closer: within two weeks, my family will be in Naples.

I love you... and only love you.”

In the afternoon I left for Florence.

VII

I had sworn not to think of him anymore, but that was difficult. His photograph was not beside my bed anymore, but his image had been pegged in my heart. I did not re-read his letters anymore, but some of their sentences sometimes sang to my mind. During my walks on the hills, I believed to see his silhouette disappearing into the night of Naples, after he had left me. I shuddered when the mail was brought to me, in which his handwriting was lacking. Undoubtedly, he had called my hotel and learnt about my departure. He had judged every explanation superfluous.

One morning, I could not prevent myself from looking at the two photographs, which he had given me as a present at our return from Pompeii. The first one only showed me his face: he put up an arrogance that did not reduce his beauty. On the other one, he smiled, leaning on the rail of the yacht, in his outfit of Pompeii, but on his feet he had sandals where the toes were uncovered, and the second one jutted out the thumb, like on Greek statues. The long locks of his hair drew a triangle on his forehead, joining his black glasses. Foamy waves formed the background of the picture ~ waves of the bay where our love had

gone down. One would have said a young prince, leaving for exile: this was always the word of the end.

On August 17th, in memory of his vows of the preceding year, I telegraphed to him on Capri my address of Fiesole, as he could have forgotten it. It was a bottle, thrown into the sea.

On the 28th, I received an express from the island of Tiberius and of Fersen:

“My darling,

It is while making a new visit to Capri that I found your telegram. At last, I know where to write to you. Anyway, I was not in a hurry to tell you that your plan has failed. My parents have had an accident at fifty kilometers from Naples. A lorry hit the Mercedes, which has been harmed at the point. My father got out of it with scratches that cosmetic surgery will take away without difficulty. Mum has nothing, neither has my sister. But it was not the occasion to tell about my affairs and now it is a bit too late.

I will return to Paris next Sunday by plane, with mum; dad and my sister, by train. Next week, we will recover from our emotions in Deauville.

My darling love, always yours more than ever.”

Those were the remains of this shipwreck. He kept a rest of love terminology, but did not even have an excuse for his lies and his silence. Would I attribute belief to these “emotions” that required a rest in Deauville ~ probably in Normandy? It was really secondary, but I would have had scruples to end up on a sign of insensibility. I wrote, on my turn, some purely formal lines, that means of goodbye. I gave him my wishes for the health of his father, the continuation of his holiday and.... installation on Avenue Foch.

Despair overwhelmed me, when I had sent this letter that would not have a reply ~ the despair of the death of a love, equal to the one that I had felt at “the death of a mother.” This reconciliation would be a blasphemy, if the unique loves were not consecrated. I evoked the sonnet that had crossed my memory, on the day of our first encounter: “What could have been,” had been, but “What had been,” had become “Never again. Too late. Goodbye.”

In the pocket of my desk blotter I took the envelope, containing the razor blade with which we had cut a vein of one another. The two blood stains that showed themselves, fascinated me, but did not appeal to me: they had lost their true colour to acquire the one of the dream. To me, they seemed fixed there since a fabulous era, like a prehistoric insect in a piece of amber.

Putting the envelope back in its place, I dropped the two entrance tickets to Pompeii, that I had arranged with them. Suddenly, what two faded tracks had not managed to tell me, these two bits of paper were shouting to me. The disappeared realities rose from the dead. On one of the tickets I had written, next to the date of the stamp: *Via dei XII*

Dei. Would I still believe in the gods ~ in my gods? I tore the two tickets up in a gesture of rage. But what pieces of paper would mean so many things to me? I bent over and gathered them, more piously than relics.

I went to chisel a reliquary for them. The messages that had been my joy or my torment, were the gold in it and the precious stones. Like after the last loss that had made me get acquainted with grief, a book would serve as a revenge on love.

I was in front of the most beautiful white pages of my career.

EPILOGUE

The work was completed, when a letter came to me, which was the comment on it and the final point:

“It is only today that I have the courage to write to you.

Not to ask you for forgiveness for what has happened, but to tell you about the fall that I have been making since ten months.

Now, I am not on the supreme level where you put me. Undoubtedly, I was not prepared for it.

There are people like me who need to stomp on what is dearest to them. But our separation was fatal. I have only enlisted before call-up.

What would I have been to you in a few years? You would have loved me, I am sure, but like a memory. A very sweet memory, so be it, but it would not have been that important to you, this sweet memory. I would have been too much. I would only have been a friend and that is not possible, for I love you, like you were here yesterday and like you will be in twenty years. Would you say the same thing about me? I am changing and did not I change in one year? We would have lived in ambiguity, which would have been hypocritical. Isn't it good for you that we have left each other in Naples? For you I made my heart transparent. You know everything about me. From now on that cannot be anymore. I have also sacrificed myself for you.

Antinous inspired my acts, but I did not have the strength to accomplish everything...

However, I want you to continue to believe in Love ~ in our Love. Nobody did serve it better and will serve it better than you did. My unhappiness must not be useless. Remember! One year and more of perfect happiness!...

I have searched to take advantage of it longer and desired then to live close to you. But you did not appreciate the true worth of my reasons. My love underwent this test... and the one of a fountain-pen.

Above all, do not imagine that I acted out of interest. I would prefer to die rather than knowing that you could have thought this. It is

therefore that I did not write to you. I would have too much trouble to read your reprimands. By the way, out of respect for you, I will give back to you one day what I so badly borrowed from you.

Tell yourself that it only depended on me to exploit your generosity a lot. I only had to implore you and you would have agreed. If you had refused, that would not have been for long. You loved me too much! And I too, I loved you, as I did not start again.

It is true that I had from then on an insatiable appetite for money and for easy pleasures. Wasn't this natural, with the resources that my parents put at my disposal and you within my means? But these temporary things were nothing, in comparison with our love.

You had to recap my "lies." Certainly, sometimes I exaggerated details of my family's life, but it was not altogether lying ... even if we did not live on Avenue Foch. All this was flooded by the sentences of truth about our love.

You are lucky, you! It is easy for you to comfort yourself. You have your art, your books; you dive into a world and you come out of it a victor. I, I only have life, low life (yes, low in relation to "our life," to us). I will always be alone, as nobody will be able to replace you. I tried several times, out of despair, in order to not fall lower. But I have never written and will never write letters like the ones you have from me.

I have lost the object of my love and I have lost everything which made that you loved of me: my enthusiasm, my freshness, my rest of naïveté, my awkwardness.

As for my study, there obviously has been no talk of that.

I went to trade my lassitude and my sadness for indifference in England, in Austria, in Iran. When I came back from Iran, I flew over beautiful Greek clouds and I thought of you so deeply that I liked to throw myself out. I will never return to Italy and Greece. In Paris, too many memories besiege me, torture me ~ burning memories. One year ago...

The day after tomorrow I will go to Morocco. Why?

From now on my life will only be this “why?” A wall separates us, all the more impassable as it is I who constructed it.

For you I will be a shadow among other shadows. It has to be like this.

P.S. I have not seen the girl from Reims and did not answer her. She still writes to me and cannot understand “our silence.” I guessed that, you too, you enveloped her in our disgrace...”

Reading this letter, like more than once while writing this book, I felt on my cheeks the tears, the “real tears,” of our love.

This love that I had made relive, I saw it divided. Even the impossible love was stronger than death. Even a boy was able to feel it and to keep it jealously in his heart. But his lucidity was now, alas! equal to mine. Like me, he knew that one does not come back on what

is finished. We only had to consult each other to use the word of despair. We would live distant from each other forever, believing in Love and knowing that we had nobody to love anymore.

Under my eyes his images were sparkling. I had put them back there, adding the two last ones: the ones of his departure for the exile of life. They symbolized the place that fate had granted me at the banquet.

Between Rome and Tivoli, not far from Adrian's villa, the mausoleum of the consul Plautius raises itself. The inscription enumerates his titles and his triumphs. It ends with these words: "Has lived for nine years." It only left a memory of the years that he had been happy... "One year and more of perfect happiness... !" That is a lot, in the world of impossible love, and it is almost a dream.

This letter could not remain without answer. I got his new address and called one morning. The Spanish maid told me that he was back to school. I called again in the evening, at the hour that I had called him for a certain signal, the other day. It was he who answered. I did not need to tell my name, nor did he. However, I mumbled as a precaution, 'It is really you, isn't it?' Just like I had recognized his voice, I recognized his silence. 'You wrote me the letter that I expected... You did me a huge pleasure...' I prolonged the resonance of these words, in which our love was flowering again. I repeated, '... A huge pleasure...' It seemed to me that I heard his heart beat. I counted mentally, 'One... two... three...', like on the bygone days of our conversations on the telephone. And I hung up.

