

a novel by

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**The
Planetarium**

A "MASTERPIECE OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS"

BY ONE OF FRANCE'S FOREMOST WRITERS



like the door... but one thing at a time... she's coming to that, there's no need to hurry, it's so delightful to go back over things, to relish them—now that everything has turned out so well, that all obstacles have been cleared—to go back over each thing, one by one, slowly... this door... while the others were admiring stained glass windows, columns, arches, tombs—nothing bores her so much as cathedrals, statues... ice-cold, impersonal, distant... nothing much to be got from them, not even from the stained glass windows which are nearly always too bright in color, too gaudy... as for paintings, they're not so bad, although the color combinations are more than often strange, disconcerting, or just plain ugly, shocking... however, you can still occasionally get ideas from them, as for instance those fleagreens and purples in the dresses of the women kneeling beside the cross, they were really darned nice, although you had to look twice, and be very wary, you risk something in the way of disappointments... that day in that cathedral, she would never have believed it... but she had really been repaid for her discomfort—it was freezing cold—and her boredom... that little door in the thickness of the wall in the back of the cloister... made of dark wood, solid oak, in a delightful oval shape, and glossy with age... it was that oval shape especially that fascinated her, it was so intimate, so mysterious... she would have liked to take it, to carry it away with her... have it in her home... but where?... she had squatted down on a piece of broken column to think about it, when all at once, and why not? nothing was simpler, she had found the very

even to have imagined it, but she had begun to see oval doors everywhere, she had never seen so many, it's enough to think about a thing for you to begin to see nothing but that—nothing in common, absolutely nothing, with the oval doors she had seen in suburban bungalows, in country houses, hotels, even at her hairdresser's... her fright when, seated under the dryer, she had noticed just in front of her, an oval door of veneered wood, it looked so faked... so vulgar, pretentious... she had had a shock: the oval opening was all ready, it was too late... she had run to telephone... why, of course not, one gets upset over nothing at all, her decorator was right, everything depends on the surroundings, so many things enter into play... this beautiful piece of oak, this wall, this curtain, this furniture, these little odd pieces, what has all this got to do with a hairdresser's parlor... one should rather think of the romanesque doors in stately old mansions, or in châteaux... No, she has no need to worry, the whole thing is in perfect taste, quiet, distinguished... she feels like running... now is the moment, she can go home, they've had ample time to finish... everything must be ready...

The exquisite excitement, the confidence, the joy that she feels as she goes up the stairs, takes her key from her bag, opens her door, she has often noticed it, they're a good sign, an auspicious portent: it's as though a fluid emanated from you that acts upon things and persons from afar, an amenable universe, peopled with favorable genii, falls harmoniously into place about you.

The apartment is silent. There's nobody. They've left. Their jackets and caps are gone from the bench in the front hall. But they haven't finished, everything is in disorder, sawdust on the floor, the tool-box is open, there are tools scattered here and there... they didn't have time to finish... And yet the curtains are up, they are hanging on each side of the bay, and the little door is in its place at the end of the dining room, on its hinges... but it all has a strange, skimpy, lifeless look... It's that green curtain against the beige wall... it looks crude... a dull, facile combination, you've seen it everywhere, and the door, there's no doubt about it, that oval door in the midst of these square openings has a faked, added-on look, the whole thing is ugly, common, trashy, the stuff in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine would be no worse... But she must combat this impression of distress, of collapse... She must beware of herself, she knows herself, this is just nervous irritation, the reverse of the excitement she felt a while back, she often has these ups and downs, she goes so easily from one extreme to the other... she must concentrate her thoughts, examine it all calmly, perhaps it's nothing... But of course, that's it, it hits you right in the eyes: that handle, that awful nickle-plated doorhandle, and that horrible aluminum fingerprint plaque... that's the cause of it all, that's what ruins everything, what gives it such a vulgar look—a real wash-room door... But how could they?... of course it's her fault too, what madness to have gone away, to have left them, she has only got what she deserves, she'll never learn her lesson, and

ible, as one does with a good dancer. It was curious, this sensation she often had, that, without him, before, the world had been a bit inert, grey, formless, indifferent, that she herself had been nothing but expectation, suspense...

As soon as he was there, everything fell back into place. Things assumed form, molded by him, reflected in his glance... "Come and look..." He took her by the hand, lifted her up from the bench on to which she had dropped to rest her swollen feet, looking, without seeing them, at the tedious rows of frozen-faced Madonnas, of large, nude women. "Do look at that. Not bad, eh? What do you think of it? He certainly knew how to draw, the old rip. Take a look at that draftsmanship, those masses, that balance... Not to mention the color..." From out of uniformity, chaos, ugliness, something unique emerged, something strong, alive (the rest now, all about her, the people, the view out the windows overlooking gardens, seemed dead) something vibrant, traversed by a mysterious current, organized everything round about, lifted, sustained the world...

It was delightful to delegate him to do the sorting, to remain confident, in abeyance, acquiescent, to wait for him to give her her beakful, to watch him looking for their feed in old churches, in the book-stalls along the Seine, in old engraving shops. It was good, it was cheering.

Little by little, a sense of relaxation, of recovered security, overspread her suffering, her fear. He is so eager, so

alive, he throws himself into things with such enthusiasm... That is what permits him to make discoveries, to invent, it's that fervor, the intensity of his sensations, his unbridled desires. She feels quite well now. The tottering, unstable edifice has little by little found its poise... It's what she lacks, this enthusiasm, this freedom, this boldness, she's always afraid, she doesn't know... "You think so? In our place? Somehow I don't see it..." He laughed, held her arm tightly... "Over there, silly, no, not that one, that's a Voltaire arm-chair, no, there, upholstered in pale pink silk, that *bergère*..." She had suddenly felt excited, she had joined in right away, it had touched one of her sensitive spots, hers too, the building of their nest; she was a little frightened... "It must cost a fortune... Not that in our flat, Alain! That *bergère*?" Like her mother, she would have been more inclined to put comfort, economy before everything else, but he had reassured her: "Do look at it anyway, it's a beauty, a magnificent piece of furniture... You know, it would change everything in our place..." Only marriage permits such moments as these, of fusion, of happiness, during which, leaning on him, she had gazed at the old silk with its ash-rose, its delicate gray tones, the large, nobly spreading seat, the broad back, the free, firm curve of the elbow-rests... A caress, a consolation emanated from its calm, ample lines... at their fireside... just what was needed... "There would be room, you're sure?—Of course, between the window and the fireplace..." Tutelary, diffusing serenity, security

that sensation of flabbiness in her entire body, the shiver running up her spine... Hadn't she already experienced them at the moment when they went back to look, while they waited, leaning against each other, soaking up what emanated from the sheen of the faded silk, from the soft lustre of the mellowed wood, from the free, powerful curve of the arm-rests... Already at that moment, she had suddenly felt a sort of weakness, a pang in her heart, anguish... something like what the characters in a play she had once seen must have experienced. The scene was the bar of an ocean liner. The passengers gathered there were drinking and chatting, at first everything seemed commonplace, harmless enough. And then, little by little, something disquieting, slightly sinister, began to make itself felt, it was hard to say from where it came, perhaps from the strange manner of the pallid bartender standing behind his counter... Suddenly the hand of one of the passengers began to tremble, the glass it was holding fell and rolled along the floor... He had just realized that this liner on which they were drinking and chatting was the boat that transported the dead, they thought they were alive and they were dead... somewhere out there living persons had looked at them, touched them, examined them, turned them over, carried them... and they themselves didn't know they were dead... she too had suddenly understood at the moment when they were standing there waiting in front of the shop window... she had seen herself, she had seen themselves, the two of them, as others, her mother, the living, saw them... They were dead. They

are both dead, embarked they don't know how, swept along, carried away without their knowing it towards God knows what country of the dead... a dream, all that, Louis XVth *bergères*, antique-shop windows, visions that cross the minds of persons in a swoon, of drowning, frozen persons... She must ask for help, call out, she must pull herself together, break away from all that, from these drowsy shops filled with things that are long since dead, she had drawn aside abruptly, she had felt like running away... "Oh, listen Alain, it doesn't matter, why insist, let's drop it, let's go home, shall we, don't you think we'd better go home?"

Complete fusion exists with no one, those are tales we read in novels—we all know that the greatest intimacy is constantly being traversed by silent flashes of cold clear-sightedness, of loneliness... what her mother had seen, she too had seen, during the brief second when she had come to herself again, when she had come to her senses, the two figures coincide, no mistake is possible... it suffices to step away from ourselves and see ourselves as others see us, and immediately it knocks your eyes out... her mother has just tried to resuscitate them both, come to your senses, I beg of you, pats on the cheek... Life is flowing by all round them while they are numb with sleep, clinging weakly in their dreams... to what? I ask you... what is all this morbid excitement, this sudden necessity? why?

Quick, she must go home, throw herself on her bed, examine it all closely... she almost runs... the little empty street is sad, dreary, like this whole neighborhood, she hates it. The entrance to the house, the neat, overheated stairway, remind one of a nursing home, a mental hospital... and the little nest, well, it's even smaller than she had remembered it... that enormous *bergère* in here would look absurd, ludicrous, it was ridiculous to think it could change the meager, cramped look, it would even bring out all the more the diminutive size of the room: a real little tenement. She runs to her room and drops face down on her bed... Lets herself sink, farther, still farther down... voluptuousness of going down... down to the very bottom... It's all a fraud... she sits up in bed: she and Alain are a fraud. Imitation, sham, pictures supposed to represent happiness, and there's something on the back... the old witches' laughter... And her father's shrug, the way he hissed the day they showed him that they didn't much like the glass-doored book case he had bought himself... "Oh, that estheticism of yours..." It was like the over-flow of an acrid vapor that had filtered between his clenched teeth... Frivolous, weak, spoiled child... His contempt for all serious ambition, his amateurishness... already disenchanted, bored, at twenty-seven... and she clinging to him, she being swept along towards death...

That contemptuous smile of his, that sneer when she had said to him as they passed in front of the *Collège de*

France... "Who knows? perhaps one day you will go in through that door to give your lectures..." He had drawn away from her, the better to see her, his lip had curled in that contemptuous expression he can have... "What do little girls dream of? So that's what you have in mind... What a joyful prospect to see me one day, bald and rotund, go and mumble a lecture before a lot of idiotic society women, tramps... No, really, you disappoint me... that makes me think of that poem of Rimbaud's, you remember? She, replying to all his invitations to go voyaging: and my office?" And she had felt herself blushing... How mature he was already, how clear-sighted, pure, strong... he sat enthroned, solitary, disillusioned, bitter, on the heights... all the others, dashing about somewhere down below, running stupidly hither and thither, with a busy air, comically lifting enormous burdens... She had snuggled up against him, they were alone, the two of them, very high up, she was a bit dizzy, she was a bit afraid, the air was hard to breathe, raw, rarefied. An icy wind blew against the bare peaks. She would have preferred—but she hardly dared to admit it—she would have loved to go down in the valley with the others, in that tiny miniature world that she saw in the distance, where everything was made for her, to her measure... peaceful villages, calm evenings, dreams of the future... He would have energy, ambition: you'll see, I'll be somebody... They would talk about their children's education, choose names for them... Everybody longed for that happiness, it was normal, it was wholesome... that was what she had ex-

alone, he must not allow her to suffer far from him... "Listen, Alain, I'm going to tell you. I have the impression, at certain moments, but you're not going to be angry? You know I can't hide anything from you... I am talking to you as I should to myself... It seems to me that we care a little too much for all that, for those *bergères*, those handsome things... we attach too much importance to them... You would think it was a matter of life and death, whether to take that or something else... Sometimes it seems to me... how shall I say it to you?... that we are a bit on the edge of life, that we are wasting our strength..." If only he would wake up, if only he would come to his senses... His face is inscrutable, frozen, he'll have to be given a shaking... Other people are there, all round us, other healthy, calm, clear-sighted, normal people, they see us... They pass judgment on us... They are right... "Alain, listen to me, my mother spoke to me about it... I felt that it really hurt her when I refused her leather chairs... Not for herself... I assure you... for us... She is anxious..." He laughs with a laughter that rings false... "Ha, ha, and if we accepted the leather chairs, would that reassure her?—No, but what would reassure her would be for us to attach less importance to all that... The leather chairs are sturdier, more comfortable, less expensive, and that's that. And for her, it would give her such pleasure..." He should come, he should join them, they're all there about him, they are calling him, they are stretching out their arms to him, he should understand, he should finally see things as they are, he should see himself as he is: weak, childish,

*T*hey're upon him. They've encircled him. No way out. He's caught, locked in; at the slightest movement, at the faintest stray impulse on his part they spring up. Always on the watch, spying. They know where to find him now. He himself has submitted to their law, given himself up to them... so weak, confident... he's theirs, always within their reach... And she, supple, malleable—a tool fashioned by them, which they use to bring him to heel. Stupid faces, eyes shining with curiosity. Moist glances... It's such a touching sight... these turtledoves... so young... their little nest... Brief incursions, furtive leaps, prudent withdrawals, shy touchings, little surprises, pres-

dialing this number: a simple telephone number like any other in appearance, and this commonplace appearance has something thrilling about it, it heightens its magic character: it is the talisman that he carries with him always—his safeguard when he feels that he is threatened. It's the password divulged to the privileged few: permission to make use of it is conferred as the highest of distinctions. And he has been given it, he has been deemed worthy, he, quite so... But don't rejoice, don't boast too soon, all can yet be lost, in an instant he can be ignominiously hurled back to them, humiliated, vanquished, immediately taken possession of by them—this time, their prey for ever... He feels like a hunted man on foreign soil, who is ringing the bell of the embassy of a civilized country, his own, to ask for asylum... The bell echoes in empty space. Each regular, prolonged buzz holds his life in suspense... A click... Someone has taken down the receiver...

It's astonishing to hear his own voice, as though detached from him, who is nothing now but disorder, confusion, palpitating shreds, answer of its own accord, very calmly: "Is Mme. Germaine Lemaire in? This is Alain Guimiez speaking..." That name, Germaine Lemaire, which he has just spoken so calmly, constitutes a scandal. It's an explosion. That name alone would make them retreat. It would make those very perspicacious glances they're continually turning on him, those knowing smiles, disappear from their faces, the mobile end of his aunt's nose would stop wiggling, it would become set, tense, puzzled... But a few words can still make them rush upon

yours does heat, tell me... What make is it? A Godin? They heat like a house afire, those things do..." The waiter nods approval, looks interestedly at the stove. No hard kernel in him, that's obvious. Inside him everything is soft, everything is hollow, anything at all, just any insignificant object from the outside fills it entirely. They're at the mercy of everything. He had been like that himself a few moments ago, how had he lived? how on earth do all these people live with that enormous emptiness in them in which, at any moment, just anything at all surges in, spreads out, takes up all the room... The waiter stoops down and turns the knob that regulates the draft, stands up again, looks at the stove affectionately: "Oh, you can say what you want, Godins, there's nothing like 'em, they're as good as a furnace. They never go out. You fill them full at night, in the morning all you have to do is to empty the ashes... They'll never make anything better than those things. And to-day the weather is mild, but if you had come when it was really cold... it's so warm in here I can never stand a sweater... —Oh, you're lucky, I'm always frozen, I could wear two sweaters in mid-summer. —Well, that depends on what work you do. But in our job, we are on the move, running back and forth all day long... Oh, I can guarantee you, there's no risk of our getting stiff. It's good for your circulation..." Rubbing, merry crackle: "Oh, with me, it's the same thing whether I move about or not. I've always been like that. Already, when I was a tiny child—no blood in my veins. My

thing... and the entire face... how could one mistake it? who would dare deny it?—radiates a secret, exceptional beauty.

From the effort he has just made to perform this sleight-of-hand with such ease, such speed, from the certainty he now has of finally being worthy to belong to the little cohort of the initiated, something has begun to ooze, it is that same note of annoyance he had heard in their voices when, in reply to the good people who, like himself at one time—he's ashamed of it now—expressed naïve surprise, didn't understand... "Not at all, Germaine Lemaire is a real beauty, how can you say that?" It's even, in his case, a bitterer, sharper feeling, it's exasperation, hatred almost, he can't bear, he is ready to exterminate, the ignorant, the faithless—those repugnant creatures who prefer to let their idle gaze wallow basely among the insipid curves, the facile and misleading sweetness of the noses, chins and cheeks of cover-girls, of stars.

But something remains, nevertheless, of his very first impression—this uneasiness, this painful sensation, he retracts a little, exactly the way he did the first time he saw her... In the corners of the lip which cuts a little too deeply into the cheeks, which curls up a little too high, in the movement of that thin mouth, something is creeping, fleeing... he doesn't know what it is exactly, he has never tried to name it, he doesn't want to, one must not, it's nothing, no one but he sees it, it's a mirage, an illusion, bred of his uneasiness, it's his own fear which he projects, his own apprehension which he sees cowering there, hiding... he must not let his glance pause, settle

of insane audacity had he let himself be roused by the impulse that had made him climb to these heights... he feels dizzy now, perched up there on the highest peak... one false move and he'll fall, he'll crash to earth... She's watching him, clinging there, not daring to budge, quite petrified, she must feel like smiling... how comical he is, really... she's not accustomed... usually the people about her have stouter hearts, their lungs are more used to breathing this tangy air. He's so weak, so awkward, he must make her feel sorry for him... how ridiculous he is, how tiresome... But there's nothing to be done about it, she rouses herself, pulls herself together. She must bear up, set to work. These are weighty obligations. She smiles at him, makes him a sign with her hand: "Now then, why don't you come and sit here, near me..." don't be frightened, it's nothing... you'll see, you won't fall... "There now, you'll be more comfortable near the fire, in this easy-chair... It's been an age since I saw you..." do stop looking under your feet, think about something else... "What have you been doing that's interesting? Tell me..." now then, things are better already, aren't they? feeling calm again? make one more try... "What have you been up to? Has your work been going well?—Well, no, I haven't done very much lately..." At the sound of his own voice—the way it used to be when the examining professor had just asked a question and, his head empty and not knowing what to say, he heard himself reply—at the sound of his own voice, like sleeping soldiers who, at the sound of the bugle, jump up, shoulder arms, run, fall in, all the scat-

wants her to draw upon. And she obeys him. He looks, enchanted, at the picture resembling them which he sees in her, his portrait which, he knows, he is sure of it, she is engaged in sketching... He leans towards her and looks deep into her gray-green eyes... "What joy, if you knew, what pleasure it is for me to be here with you, in your house." Now he can do anything he wants. He can strip naked. No more ridiculous fears, no more shame, no thought of his dignity. He can tell her what he wants. They understand each other over and beyond mere words... "It's a long time now since I've told myself stories, you know, those "continued stories" such as adolescents and persons suffering from depression tell themselves, but I did like to imagine myself coming to see you, seated like this near you, talking, very brilliantly, of course... they both laugh... holding you spellbound. But I didn't very well see what your place was like... At that point, I always hesitated. At times..." all at once he has the impression—it's very fleeting—that inside her a long, avid arm with grasping fingers is reaching out, he doesn't know very well, he hasn't time to know, how he detected this movement in her... and right away, within himself, with the return of a sense of danger, that rapidity of adaptation—he himself is surprised by it...

In one second he has given up the idea, all dreams of intimacy are forgotten. Squatting at her feet, he shows her, he spreads out before her, his gifts, his offerings, all he possesses... of no great importance, but he's ready to give her everything, she should choose what she wants...

my aunt, an old crank... she would amuse you no end if you knew her... she's a character for you... I'll introduce her to you one day... You should have seen her when she came to see us. Sweetness itself. Deeply moved. But her eyes were taking it all in..." He imitates her walk: "The end of her nose moves the way a dog's does, she keeps wiggling it: Why, children, it's as cute as anything, your place is. That towel rack, it's marvelous... A quick look at the view out the windows. Just here there's a smell of heresy. Here, rebellion smoulders. I tease her, I provoke her: Come and look, auntie, isn't it lovely, that view, and those old roofs, in the distance, over there... Right away she gets her back up: I think that's what you paid for especially, that view... Because the rest, it's very cute, but when all's said and done... in a few years, ho, ho, let's hope so, anyway, you're going to be cramped for space. With that she gets a hold over us, my wife and myself. We're caught. We're disarmed. Bound hand and foot in no time. And then she begins to amuse herself a bit, it's too tempting: But you know, children, what you should have? My apartment, why, of course... It's exactly what you need... We don't dare believe our ears, we tremble, we crane our necks, we stare at her with eyes filled with the most despicable cupidity, we ask her: But auntie, how is that possible? Do you mean it?"

She settles upon him a gaze in which he sees a gleam of recognition, of approval. He comes to a halt in front of her. She can look closely now. He feels this is the moment. Luck is with him. All his gestures are sure, bold, free, he is free, he does what he wants, he is skipping

hand... "Well, I'll see you very soon, you won't disturb me. So call me one day about this time. I am nearly always in. She sticks her head through the door and smiles at him archly... And above all, get to work, do you hear? I'm counting on you, you know. Work hard."

Astonishing how everything had taken place according to the plan he had drawn up somewhere within himself; how everything from the first moment had converged towards this, towards this disaster, this collapse... he is rejected, reduced in rank... Ah, it was magnificent, that superiority... but how do all these people live?... to think that less than two hours ago he was asking himself that... How can they live without that hard kernel inside them, that little compact mass, preserved secretly, that certainty, that security... The waiter in the café, poor man, so per-vious, so soft... the stove is not merely an object for his eyes, for his hands, which he must attend to while waiting for the big moments that count, no, things occupy him entirely... And he himself, how does he live? that's what they might ask themselves, if they knew, but they're too innocent... the bus conductor rushing through the aisle, ringing the bell, calling out the names of the bus-stops, is pure, hard, nothing can scratch him; not a crack between his gesture and himself through which the slightest impurity might enter. Not the slightest trace of an experience of this kind. Never. In none of these lives. You have to be him, possess his exceptional skill, his clever-

ness, to treat yourself to such pleasures as these. The buffoon must have been amused, so self-assured there, quite at home, well settled in complete security, to see him, like someone descending the moving steps of a Luna Park stairway, reeling, holding on tight, one foot in the air, a haggard look in his eyes... Good lesson he gave him... the important thing, you see, is not to be afraid. Watch what I do... And that hearty hand-shake to mark the nobility of all of them there, their sense of equality, even with regard to him... or rather, it meant—an enormous sudden flush submerges him—that hearty hand-shake, that look deep down into his eyes... Come, come, pull yourself together, be a man, hang it! Are you so impressed as all that by celebrity, by fame...

Gisèle, my love, my wife... Gisèle... This name is an exorcism. Keep repeating it... Gisèle... it means solace, it means security. That is what's true, that is what's healthy. They're right, all the same, with their old conventions; it's the rest that's false, so much trash. And he, idiotic, childish, playing the rebel, indulging in nerves... "Gisèle, I'm stupid, I don't deserve you... What ever would become of me if I didn't have you, tell me what I should do, Gisèle, tell me..." He presses her firm, round cheeks, still warm with sleep, between his two hands, under his pressure her mouth puckers and grows round in a moving little circle as naïve as that made by

out to you, once, at the movies.—Montalais?—That's right... Rather antipathetic, at first, but later on, he was very nice... He has something direct, frank about him. He seemed to know who I was... I like very much the way he shakes hands... He said he would like to see me again... He left almost immediately.—Tell me what you talked about. You certainly stayed a long while...—Yes, I was horrified to see how late it was when I left... But I didn't sense that time was passing. I don't know how to explain it... You have an extraordinary feeling of excitement with her... Perhaps I do, because I am so sure that she understands me... I let myself go... And yet... you know... I tell you everything... underneath, there is at times a sort of uneasiness... all at once you feel you're being watched, you have the impression, how shall I describe it, that you must always be giving her something... there's something she demands all the time...—Oh, Alain dear, that's certainly one of your ideas.—No... I assure you... that doesn't just come all by itself, fame, a reputation... there's a sort of unsated hunger, a need for adulation... you never can give her enough... she supervises, she takes people's measure, she must put them in their place at the slightest lapse...—Did she put you in your place?—No... imagine... she was friendliness itself... simplicity... but I think it would be a mistake to count on it.—Tell me, what did you say to her?—Oh, I don't know. Nothing in particular... As I told you, I had the impression that she understands everything... I told her stories, just anything at all, the things I had on my mind, I was still full of all those stories

about house furnishings, the apartment... you know the subject doesn't matter much.—For you, darling, naturally... You must have been at your best, you must have been very brilliant... When you get started on things like that... She probably listened to you wide-mouthed...—Yes, perhaps... I don't know... But I'm going to tell you something... if you take away all that, the varnish, the glamor, people's opinions... well, the old girl herself is a bit... you're going to hit the ceiling... how shall I say... it's not that..." She puts her arms about him, rests her head on his breast, she snuggles up close to him, her laughter is like the shimmer of dew-drops, like warm, fragrant spring rain... "Alain, I adore you... I know why I love you, among other things, my darling... it's because of just that kind of thing, if you want to know: you're marvelous, you know. That's what I love in you, that purity, that honesty... and you, you really are 'that'. When I think what a state any other young man of your age would be in, anybody else, to whom Germaine Lemaire had written what she wrote you, whom she would allow to come to see her like that, with whom she would sit and talk for two hours about just anything... and you, you're already dissatisfied. You haven't an ounce of vanity. You dominate every situation... Nothing can spoil you..." He draws back from her and holds her at arm's length to look her straight in the eyes... "Gisèle, do you think so, really? You know you're the only one who gives me confidence in myself... I often tell myself that you are blinded... But just now, talking to you, I felt it: I'm the one who is right. I play her game, but I never feel that I am caught. I'm not awed by her...

in her presence, perhaps, a little... that's my diffidence, my lack of confidence in myself, the slightest thing sets me up, a little flattery intoxicates me at the moment... but afterwards... no really, even at her house, I felt all the time a sort of uneasiness, something wanting... it's perhaps for that reason that, even in what she writes, there's something... at times, I wonder...—Oh, there, listen Alain, this time you're going too far.—No, believe me. All those things don't just come by themselves. She must have known what to do. She knows how to play her cards, believe me... She keeps her accounts straight, she sets up hierarchies... oh, yes, she does... she never wastes her time... and that's what she pays for, elsewhere... there is a frozen, studied side to her famous sparseness, to her severity... a side that's cautious... miserly... that's it.—But listen, Alain, you, why would she have written to you? Why does she ask you to come to see her like that? There she showed enthusiasm, complete disinterestedness...—Yes, of course, things aren't so simple... It's just possible that I interest her... it's probable... she wants to be influential... have a côterie of young people about her... But rest assured, she's never carried away, she never loses her bearings... there's something about her that's cold and a little petty... practical... she sees every little side...—That, darling, I don't believe... you have to depreciate everything, especially what belongs to you, what's given you... With me, you know perfectly, it's the same...—With you, Gisèle, my love, but how can you compare... You know, I'm going to tell you everything... But, darling, don't you believe that that's what happiness is, the only real happiness, this

absolute confidence, this fusion... one single being... I don't know any more where I finish and you begin... they're right with all their old myths... they've known for so long... When you scolded me, a while ago, about that armchair affair... forgive me, dearest, I went into such a rage because I knew that, in reality, you were right... indirectly I wanted to tell her, Germaine Lemaire, to see what she would think about it...—You told her about those chairs?...—No... Not exactly... I spoke to her about our presents... About the family... My aunt... I told her about how she came to tempt us with her apartment... The meaning of all that... How they try to keep us down... That we should have to free ourselves from it all...—What did she say?...—She seemed to be fascinated... Those are things she understands very well... And then she had a moment of inattention... she was called to the telephone... she began to think about something else... anyhow, I don't know, but it was disagreeable to me, the way she reacted... Do you know what she said? that surprised me... Why, go ahead, take it, take the apartment. It's darned convenient, why be embarrassed? That shocked me, it's silly, I felt humiliated...—But why, Alain, I don't understand...—I don't know... there was something about her tone... Not in what she said... On the contrary, she said that she herself would have done it, that you had to be egotistical, know how to take things, that it was only my due... but there was a sort of contempt...—Oh, listen, Alain, you're crazy, I assure you, you make me feel desperate. There couldn't be any sort of affront in what she said to you, that's lunacy,

one moment... I had told her that I thought her place was very lovely, all those things brought back from all over everywhere, made you think of an enormous, sumptuous booty pile... she said... only you can't understand, it's nothing you can lay your finger on... I just felt it... she smiled in a certain manner as she looked about her... she said: But go ahead and take it, don't refuse, since that gives you such pleasure, all that, since you like that so much, "pirates and conquistadors"... she thought that impressed me, that sort of thing, that aspect of her which was the one I had imagined... I felt I was being ridiculed, sullied, I don't know how to explain it...—Darling, now we have it... so that's where it comes from, that hunted look, that unhappy expression... I've been wondering... now I understand... But Alain, you're losing your perspective. You're funny, you know. You don't realize the impression you give. Why, you are the last person in the world about whom one could think that, I can guarantee you. Germaine Lemaire would have to be stupid. And that she is not. One look at you is enough. Why do you think she appreciates you? Why do you think she sees you?"

"That's true, Gisèle... you must be right... and I must be crazy. I am crazy. I must always destroy, spoil everything. It's true that she has something generous about her... something warm-hearted. She told me very simply what she thought. She, in my place, would certainly not have hesitated. That must have been what amused her, all those scruples, that rebelliousness... That's very adolescent..."

alone, holy relic preserved from impious eyes, from impure hands... but he's so sharp... The slightest word, an allusion, a too excited manner, a too clamorous show of enthusiasm... and he has caught the scent... But it was she... she herself, in a moment of madness... impossible to resist the temptation... when he had said: "If you want me to, I can ask the Férauds to speak to Germaine Lemaire about Alain. They know her. They are neighbors of hers." That was too much. She hadn't been able... her dignity demanded it, her own self-respect, her respect for her father, her regard for the truth... "But papa, Alain doesn't need that. He knows her..." Imprudence. Madness. Shame. She had blushed right away. Perched up there, ludicrous, looking down upon them, strapping cabbage-monger, fishwife sitting in state on her float disguised as Queen of the Carnival... everybody was embarrassed, they had all looked elsewhere... she had regretted it right away.

She knew she would pay for it one day, she would lose nothing by waiting, nothing could keep her from paying, and now, suddenly, the moment has come at a time when she herself has forgotten, when she thought it had all died down... "Why papa, what suddenly made you think of her? —Oh, nothing... an article about her in *France Soir*. I saw a picture of her... You can say what you want... he's sneering... she's a pretty woman..." He doesn't need to say more... "a pretty woman"... a short formula, but he has a well-trained, very gifted pupil, he has taught her well—there... she works out the formula instantly: a pretty

"Alain is right..." The gentle, loving mother understands nothing of all that... "What on earth is the matter with you, all of a sudden? What has got into you?"... The devoted old wife intervenes, tries to separate the combatants with her weak hands... "Stop, I beg of you... You are mad to get worked up like that. And over what, I ask you, over Germaine Lemaire's good looks, a woman as old as I am. Robert, you shouldn't... The children come seldom enough as it is, you miss them, you want them to come, and then when they're here, you can't resist, you simply have to tease them..."

King Lear, Père Goriot. His shy tenderness. His diffidence. Alone, old, deserted, unknown, left out, cast off by her, his darling daughter, his only child... But she loves him, he knows it... She will never like anything so much as to take the fine warm skin on the back of his hand between her fingers, pull it gently and watch it as it becomes detached from his flesh and remains a second in the air, forming a slight roll; smell his peculiar odor, which she recognizes right away, his nice odor of shaving cream and tobacco; run her hand over the silky, white ringlets on his neck... let it grow, I beg of you, don't go back to the barber's, papa, I like you too much this way... How could outsiders separate them? What can all the Germaine Lemaire's together do to the two of them? Usurpers. Impostors... She doesn't want him to let himself be dethroned. That's why she grows angry, becomes indignant,

beseeches him... If he only wanted, he could be stronger, wiser than they: her omniscient, benign father. He would give her his approval. Bent low before him, as is proper, she would receive what would mean peace, would mean happiness: his benediction... "Maman is right. It's true, it's stupid, I'm crazy. Forgive me, papa. None of that matters. Nobody cares. Only listen: I forgot about it, what with all these arguments. There's something far more interesting that I wanted to talk to you about. I have something marvelous to tell you. You know we are perhaps going to get it, Aunt Berthe's apartment..." He scowls even more. He is making his contemptuous, disgusted grimace: "Aunt Berthe? You must have fallen down off the wardrobe, as they say... That crazy old woman. Don't you see she's making fun of you.—Oh, Robert, why say that... that's not at all sure, with Berthe you never know... Her mother, immediately all excited, rushing from side to side, trying to bring them all together, clucking, her feathers all puffed up... Berthe is so fond of Alain, you know that. Personally, I shouldn't be surprised if they got it. Think of it... it would be such a good thing for them. You couldn't wish for anything better. They would be quite near us. It would be marvelous..." He should take a look at them, they're so handsome, so moving. Their darling daughter and her Prince Charming, heir to a powerful name, laden down with gifts... He should give in... "Certainly, papa, you'll see, what will you bet that one day we'll get it? But that won't just happen all by itself, I realize that. There will be certain difficul-

can certainly find one... with short legs, sort of dumpy, an old bench all shiny with age, the sun would strike it... it should have a perfectly straight back... or rather no, no back... Why, you're crazy, Alain, people can see us... what must they think...—They must think that I adore you... that we are like two lovers...—That's true, that will set their minds at rest. A little while ago, I said to myself... didn't you?... that we gave the impression of two burglars, looking over the premises. Getting ready to do the job... We were hiding there like two criminals..."

"Old people should not be moved about. They're delicate, you know, old people are. It's dangerous to transplant them." These words, deposited in him, he doesn't know by whom, now, all of a sudden, the way things happen in dreams, someone is speaking them, a man whom he can barely distinguish: a vague figure in a dark overcoat; he utters them as he is leaving, walking towards the door without turning to look at him, in that soft tone, beyond blame, that priests use, in the tone indicating distance, that doctors assume, their manner of not wanting to touch upon certain things, not wanting to commit themselves, in which may be heard a tiny note of disapproval, of aversion... "They're delicate, you know, old people are..." Something that hurts very badly, a deep-cut image forming inside him, that of an old woman with white hair... It stands out sharply: the pain that flows into him fills up, sets off its outlines like the colored liquid that fills the

though relieved. All alone. In the silence of night... Whispering... Where did you put the knife? the ropes? Bring the shovel... He has taken off, he's rising... Alone. All ties are severed. Human beings are far away... he is floating along, released from gravitation. Alone. Free. Slight dizziness. Nausea... Why no, he's not afraid; he's strong... "Suppose she refuses... You know she hasn't the right, you know if we wanted to... Your father knows the owner... Look at me, Gisèle..." He takes her by the neck, he forces her to turn her head towards him and he looks deep into her eyes... "Gisèle... you hear me. He sets his jaw. We are a pair of gangsters... Decent people will be afraid of us... He grits his teeth, rolls his eyes like the murderers in the silent films... We're going to rob old women. Their swanky apartments are ours. And the parties we'll give... He's coming down. He lands. He's on solid ground once more. The crowd greets him like a conquering hero. People surround him, applaud him... Parties, Gisèle dear... they'll come running... only too flattered... Fiestas, my friends."

will never want to speak about, diffidence keeps him from doing so, respect... "She's nice, my daughter-in-law", that's all he says, but she feels that, with him, she can let herself go, she can take any liberties she wants... she can let the words come out just any way... "Well, I wanted to talk to you... Alain would never know how... I said: I'm not afraid..." She laughs and he encourages her, on her cheeks she feels the warm, dry cushion of his fingers. "What is it you are not afraid of, my child?—Well, to ask you... Alain's afraid of you, you know..." His nod expresses indulgent, tender good nature: "Really, Alain's afraid of me? That's something new, it seems to me. When did you invent that?—No, I assure you, it's true. But I said: I'm going to speak to your father. It's about Aunt Berthe. She suggested... Oh, yes she did, I assure you, she came herself to talk to us about it... So we said to ourselves... you, she's so fond of you. She listens to you. It would be wonderful for us to have that apartment. You know where we are now, it's all right for the time being, but it's really too small. We can't invite anybody..."

It's as though he had become, all of a sudden, steadier, heavier, as though something, a precipitate, had formed inside him and fallen to the bottom. He leans back, puckers his eyelids and looks at her. A piercing, hard look. She knows what he sees: she feels her own face congeal under this gaze. A sly, voracious expression appears, she feels it, on her own features, in her eyes, she has the glazed eye of a bird of prey, of a small buzzard, all its claws tensed... She turns her head... "Oh, you know, per-

sonally, what I say, it's not for me..." But he stares at her pitilessly: come on there, no fuss, you've pretended enough... they're all alike, the dear little Madames, he knows them, that's why they get married, parties, invitations, stupid daydreaming, special little dishes, she's going to make a moron, a society dummy out of him, he has already been sufficiently dulled, sufficiently demeaned, humiliated by those people, spending too much time with them, letting himself be set up in an apartment furnished by them, deteriorating, easy life, Capuan delights... It's too unjust, it's wrong... How he loathes her at this moment. But he has hated her from the beginning... Jealous, really, that's it... Defend herself, repulse him, he should let go of her... "Oh, personally, what I'm telling you, it's above all for Alain. He can't work when I'm at home. Even though I make no noise... It would do him a world of good..." Words are forming, they come crowding... Yes, Alain is humiliated, demeaned, and for once that he has the opportunity, before my parents, to pull himself up a bit, to contribute something on his side, you won't move... you've never lifted a finger... you washed your hands of him at the very beginning... all you've done was to put spokes in our wheel... but he's your son, after all, it's not up to me to beg you, it's up to you to help me... you know better than I do... she restrains, stops all that and only allows the carefully molded words to come out, words she chooses cautiously: "It would do Alain good to be able to invite people to the house. He needs... You know Alain..." He looks elsewhere, stares at an object

reality she has been trampling under foot frees itself, swells, she feels a lump in her throat... always hanging on to her skirts, she must continually be giving him a lift, reassuring him, consoling him, Germaine Lemaire, his latest obsession... other people's opinions... continually throwing himself into her arms, when he needs protection... poor, frail little chap who trembles if you flick your finger at him... Is this worth while? Do you think I really have talent? Why certainly, my darling... you are the cleverest, the most intelligent of all... Drawing off her sap like that... Sucking her life away... "Yes, you know him as well as I do. You know how he needs to be reassured, upheld..." She feels that everything inside him is moving and changing place, she has made a shrewd thrust, he stiffens all of a sudden, in his heavy jaws, his fixed gaze staring straight in front of him, there is virile, courageous resignation, he reminds one of a gore besmeared bull as it lowers its head and faces the matador: "That's true. You're right. And you think that it will suffice to change apartments... No, Gisèle dear, neither you nor I will succeed in changing him. People are what they are... His voice hoarsens... He was like that already when he was knee-high to a grasshopper, when he was no bigger than that... I tried everything, believe me. But nothing can give him confidence in himself. He's terribly diffident, Alain, uneasy... That's his nature, he's like that, so there you are." His voice is hollow, he lowers his eyes, she has the impression that the blows he is giving her in return quicken, at the same time, his own suffering, but it can't be helped, since he wanted it, he must keep on until the end... "No,

TL 73 Full

An air of happy surprise. An air of unconstraint, of warm, gracious ease. The words form just any way, they gush forth, transparent and light, gleaming bubbles that rise up into a pure sky and vanish, without trace... "Ah, fancy that, I really am delighted, what luck to meet you, it's been so long... You see us, my father and me, hunting about... It's a book which I must have, very hard to find... How very glad I am... But true enough, you don't know each other... May I present... My father... Madame Germaine Lemaire..." Clear, well-pitched voice. Glance in which there hovers a modest gleam of filial devotion, of quiet pride... "My father..." And right away his father... the slightest sign of affection touches

No one bends an inch too low, or draws himself up the tiniest bit too high before this noble-faced woman, with the calm, direct gaze... Why, she's still very handsome, Germaine Lemaire, you had never told me that... and so simple. One has the impression of having known her for a long time. A courageous woman, there's no denying, who must have worked hard all her life, and so direct, such a decent sort. She opens wide her limpid eyes, with a broad gesture she holds out her strong hand: "I'm glad to know you, Monsieur, I'm so fond of your son." Happy smiles... looks filled with friendliness... exquisite scene... delightful comedy, entrancingly acted by such well-matched partners.

And but for almost nothing—just a certain movement on his part, this charming spectacle would have taken place, to the joy of his soul and of his eyes. But it's not a mere nothing that is wanting, it's innocence, purity, goodness, pride, it's all that together that he would have had to possess. Yet, no, sainthood itself would not have permitted him, at the very outset, to make this little movement. Nothing in the world could have—the odds were so evidently fixed in advance, the roles prepared a long time ago, the scene outlined so many times in his mind's eye, prefigured, glimpsed in a flash, experienced in striking summaries—nothing could have prevented that, instead of the happy surprise, the air of warm unconstraint, there should appear on his face and at once meet the gaze of his father standing opposite him, on the other

side of the counter, an expression of fear, of distraction, when she appeared—but through what ill-luck, through what unforeseeable blow of fate, just at that moment, on that particular day—on the other side of the glass door to the bookshop. His father watches him a bit surprised and, turning to follow the direction of his glance, sensing something already—it was all prepared, this too, carved in deep-set letters a long time ago—his father sees coming towards them along the aisle, between the tables piled with books and reviews which she is sweeping with her wide, black silk mantilla, a large, strangely got-up woman with rough-hewn features, looking like a second-hand clothes dealer, or an out-of-date actress, dressed in outlandish garb. She holds out her hand in a broad gesture by which she seeks to express, which expresses, one feels it, in her own eyes, regal simplicity... And he, abashed, panicky, dragged and hurled there in front of them, in a ridiculous pose, pushed on stage by means of kicks... Go on, what are you waiting for? It's your turn to play... reeling, stammering, in a voice that flits and knocks about: "True, you haven't met... May I... my father... Madame Germaine Lemaire..." And right away, what he had foreseen, the half-smile, the fierce gleam in the narrow eyes, under the heavy lids, that reaction which he perceives on the part of his father, a quick, silent displacement, as though something were coming apart, then became recomposed otherwise, assumed another form: "Ah, so that's it..."

He's an insect pinned to a cork plaque, he's a corpse laid out on the dissecting table and his father, adjusting his

glasses, is leaning over him. Yes, that was it, the diagnosis was correct, everything functioned exactly as might have been expected when one was familiar with the patient's organism, when one had always been able to observe him so closely, to study, to remember, from birth, all his little diseases, all his most insignificant aches and pains... His father could not have mistaken it for a single moment: so that was the meaning of that haggard, dazed look, all of a sudden... Imagine, Mme. Germaine Lemaire entered, and the wretched upstart, ashamed, trembling, what is she going to see? surmise? think? won't she be disappointed, shocked? will they be polite enough? deferential enough?... Nothing is too good for other people, for this idiotic female, not a line of what she writes will remain, thirty years from now no one will remember her name, and he knows it perfectly, you can bet, the little snob, not so dumb as all that, but little does he care, that will do for old fogies, what they sneeringly call "immortal values, masterpieces..." life is too short, they're all in a hurry, nobody's eternal, quick, bestir oneself, kowtowing and flattery, infinite precautions, anxiously following the progress in her of each word, of each nuance... Never enough respect... But with one's father, one is not so considerate... all I'm good for is that, to pay for the art books he'll show her, which he'll make her admire, lay on her knees... shall I hold it for you, it's not too heavy? while he turns towards her, staring at her face, the motionless, shining eyes of a dog who has found the scent, on the lookout for the slightest movement of interest, of satisfaction, awaiting patiently the moment when he must turn the

page for her... but I, his father, once he has made use of me, quick, I can disappear, it would be so convenient if he could get rid of me, but as it happens, this time bad luck has intervened, we were taken by surprise... a cruel blow of fate... we must try to put a good face on things... "My father..." since it has to be done... how can you hide this large protuberance, this enormous embarrassing appendix which pulls you back, interferes with your movements... a cocoon tree, of course that would be perfect, only the trouble is, that it's a bit too early, I'm still alive and kicking and young, hang it, and, thank heavens, independent... "May I present... Madame Germaine Lemaire..." And that manner... that look... Can you believe it, the young scamp, his ears need a good boxing, holds inspection, am I well enough dressed? clean hands and collar, get into your best bib and tucker, my friend, you're going to be introduced... He does me the honor... to me... I don't give a rap, for his Germaine Lemaire, I never did strive, the way he does, out of pure snobbishness... That marquis, that time at Aix-les-Bains, and yet we were friends, he wanted absolutely... but it was I, as soon as we got back to Paris, who didn't want to... that society set... I myself cut things short... but he, in my place, the little good-for-nothing.

All of that swirling about, overlapping in disorderly fashion... But he knows all about these tiny particles in movement, having observed them countless times. He has

Aunt

frightened voice of lonely old women, the distrustful, hostile voice of avaricious old coupon-clippers for whom cunning assassins lie in wait on silent stairways, fake salesmen coming to sell brushes, washing-machines, fake inspectors coming to read their gas meters... a voice that is quite changed, which he hardly recognizes, asks "Who is it? —It's me, your brother, it's Pierre..." He hears a sort of peeping noise, a happy stirring about, a quick click, the light, cheerful noise of a chain, the door opens... "Ah, so it's you..." He had forgotten that look beneath the worn, made-up lids, a kindly look welling with fond emotion... "So it's you, Pierre... Why, of course not, you're not disturbing me... I'm delighted to see you, you come so rarely... But let's see, let me look at you, let me see a bit how you're looking. Why, you're looking fine, I must say, you know you really are a wonder... you don't change at all, you'll live to be a hundred, you'll be like Grandma Bounioul's... —Grandma Bounioul's... no, my dear Berthe, I don't think so, I think, if anything, that I have aged considerably recently..." While she goes ahead of him through the entrance hall, the parlor, he is unable to take his eyes from the frail back of her neck, the little livid hollow between the two prominent sinews, a bit hollower still... a very vulnerable spot, innocently exposed, into which the assassin's knife could plunge without meeting any resistance... He feels like leaving, how could he have agreed?... She runs a caressing hand along his arm... "Come now, do sit down, sit there, why don't you... you look a bit uncomfortable..." He blushes, he bends down to

Gisèle came to ask me... The children say..." But it's her own fault, after all, why be so upset, she's the one, after all, it was she, with her own hands, who prepared it all, it's her own fault that he should be driven to doing what he's doing now... so much the worse for her, as we make our bed so must we lie in it, let her straighten it out with them now... "It seems that you promised to let them have your apartment..."

He expected it, he dreaded it... it was bound to happen, he had blown too hard... the faint little flame that had lighted up in her when he came in, that had trembled weakly, has now relapsed, lain down, died... inside her, it's dark again, as before, as always... her poor drawn face under its make-up... her eyes in which no light shines... if only he could revive, rekindle it... it was true that he had felt happy when he had seen her a little while ago, that he is happy to be here, he doesn't see her often enough, what a mess, we are stupidly neglectful of the people we like best, we think that it's enough to know they exist, we feel so sure of them... she's like a part of himself, she must know that, she's all that he has left of his childhood, of their parents, they are alone both of them now, for always, two elderly orphans, he feels like stroking the thin silky film of her very fine hair, like mama's hair, real down... they are indestructible between them, those ties, they're stronger than everything else, more to be counted on even, than those that bind you to your children... "Those little monsters have got that into their heads now, you set them all agog... that's all they dream about... Aunt

perhaps, say anything to you about it?... —Ah, no... She didn't say anything to me... But you know, I think you're imagining things... There's nothing to get upset about... When I say she lets people drop for mere trifles, it's a manner of speaking... I don't know what your father is like, but it would surprise me if he had displeased her in any way... You see Maine doesn't observe people very closely... Yes, it is surprising... I know nobody who is so often wrong as she is... No, she knows how much you admire her... And that's what matters above all else to her. She must have thought that your father was awed... You see, for Maine, people are mirrors. They are foils. In reality, she doesn't care a rap about people... What principally matters to her is herself, she alone..."

He seems to have become gentler, drawn closer, there's something intimate, almost fraternal in his tone... Is this a prudent probe? A discreet sign? An appeal? It will have to be answered, the temptation is great. Why not take the risk, try one's luck... "But if she's like that, as you say, so self-centered... isn't that, for a writer...?" Here is a pledge. It's dangerous to give it without being entirely certain, but no matter, one shouldn't hesitate any longer. The suddenly recovered taste of freedom produces a burst of insanely rash words... "Quite frankly, isn't that a failing which can become rather serious... A real shortcoming..." Chin up. The enormous statue is going to fall from its pedestal with a great hollow noise, roll on the ground, break into pieces... There'll be no more statue... The prison gates will open... One must dare... for the sake of

Am. Yellow

dignity, for the sake of truth... "Don't you think that it's because of that that there is, in her work... something...?" The poor insane creature feels a horror-struck gaze leveled at his face: "What, for instance?" The alert has been given. The observation posts are searching the darkness. The hounds are yelping. There's a sound of hurried footsteps, of machine guns rattling: "What have you to say against her, against her, too?" Nothing. It's over. Order has been restored. Back to your cages, back to your jails, back in rank. Nose to the wall. Who moved? No one. Beat drums: "She's a very great female, is Germaine Lemaire."

knocks over a small center table which, calmly, skilfully, they catch just in time, set straight again, all his gestures are jerky, awkward, his eyes must have a feverish light in them... "Just now, when you telephoned..." they must have been amused, they surely spoke about it, it was so ludicrous... "I didn't understand, I didn't quite take in..." it's best to tell them the whole thing, show them... "it was a surprise, I was so far from expecting it, I mistook you for an old pal of mine..." They know, they've seen it all; his amazement, his humility, not believing his ears... "Who? Germaine Lemaire? Oh, listen here... that doesn't take with me... Why not the Pope?" Did he say that?... Yes, he said it, he hears his own idiotic laughter: "Come on, old boy, drop it, don't try so hard... Why not the Pope?" and the surprised tone of the dry voice at the other end of the wire... "Hello... Can you hear me? Is this Alain Guimiez?..."

Yes, show them everything, it's better so, they will perhaps feel pity, be a little embarrassed to see it exhibited, they'll turn their eyes away, they themselves will try to hide it, to forget it... that's the only way to foil this cruel trick that a facetious fate has played him... these are tricks that it plays only on him, this is not the first time, something similar, already... but where? when did it happen? he doesn't remember, it's not the moment to try... he must present them immediately with all the relevant evidence, explain it all to them, confess: I was so surprised... I seemed to recognize the voice of a friend... go all the way: I thought he was playing a trick on me, it's quite like him,

I've often spoken to him about you... Why hesitate, since they know everything... Now it's a matter of limiting the damage, of saving what can still be saved, he'd better hurry, quick, undress and leave in their hands this old rag, this grotesque clown's costume he's got up in, they can do with it what they want—it's an old skin which he has sloughed off, like them, he's going to hold it up with the tips of his fingers, examine it in a disgusted, pitying manner...

But he can't do it, he hasn't the nerve. Impossible to run this risk, to trust them, he'll be apprehended, snatched up entirely by them, he, his rags, his nakedness, they have no mercy, no pity, they've proved this to him each time he has tried to rely on them... it's better to speculate on their absent-mindedness, their inadvertence, conceal, hide everything he can, they have perhaps noticed nothing, understood nothing, it may have rolled off them, it has perhaps already faded out, they are so ignorant of such things as these, that are so remote from them—people accustomed to life in the open, who can't understand that he should be suffocated, upset, the way a child whose constitution has always been accustomed to the shut-in atmosphere of a dark tenement, cannot stand the out-of-doors, the light of the sun...

It would have been better for him if he had remained locked in, steeping in the lukewarm, slightly nauseous liquid of his loneliness, his forlornness... It was so he would not have to leave it that he had played that mean trick on himself: the outside air frightened him... "Why not the

Pope?" He said that to try to ward them off, he realizes now, it was surely to make them flee that he had said it: "Oh, drop it... Why not the Pope?" in that waggish tone... But he hadn't put them off, he had got them rather a little more excited, they made haste, they came running, they're settling down everywhere, sniffing... their eager, sly looks are creeping about, worming their way in... they are like dogs that smell in every corner to discover the prey they're going to carry away between their teeth and which, in a little while, they will lay, all warm and quivering, at the feet of their mistress... she will lean over... approving little pat, caressing glance... "Ah, when was that? where? How funny... I didn't notice"... greedy-eyed, she will relish in advance the tasty meal to be devoured later, once she's comfortably settled at home, with them under the table...

She lays her hand on the desk... "Is this what you work on? —Yes, it's there, nearly always. —Ah, you prefer that, to have your back to the window, and sit facing the wall?" She looks at him attentively, and this flatters him, she must sense it, she does it on purpose, looking at him in this attentive way, filled with regard, she doesn't like to do things half way: if you do things, isn't it so? they should be done well... it's so delightful to be able to burst in upon one of these confined little existences and throw it into confusion, transform it all of a sudden, for a long time to come... He would like to turn away, frown, but the words she has just spoken, the sound of these words—like the famous tinkle of the little bell that induces salivation in Pavlov's dogs—makes his eyes beam, stretches his

increasingly louder... it's the elevator coming up, now it's passing the first floor... in a few seconds, they'll hear the click of the iron gate, a key being slipped into the lock... the door will open and she will come in, stop on the threshold, dumbfounded, a statue... if he could only run to meet her halfway, warn her, prepare her... but take care, they're watching him, they're wondering what's got into him all of a sudden... Why nothing, absolutely nothing, he turns his head like someone whose ear is cocked, he holds up one finger: "I hear the elevator, that must be my wife coming home... she's going to get a surprise, she'll be glad..." She's going to look at them wide-eyed, mouth agape... Her coat with the big checks... but it was exactly for that reason that she had chosen it, there was no dissuading her, it was that naïve, unsophisticated look she had liked, and in fact, if you looked at it from a certain angle... But a few drops, let fall by their glance, by that sort of re-agent which they have within themselves, will bring out immediately the slightly embarrassing, slightly vulgar aspects of the big showy design, of the coarsely woven cloth, of the gesture she's going to make to smooth her hair, an uneasy, timid, abashed gesture... he always feels like stopping her... but that kind of thing... even with the persons closest to us, we don't dare... He's going to feel her stuck, welded to him like a Siamese twin, he's going to double in size, form with her and spread before their view an enormous, heavy mass whose movements he will be unable to direct, in which they will be able to plant their gaze, their sting... but the throb continues, the

they feel for him wells up towards him, from the look they plunge deep into his eyes... "We must get together again soon, and for a longer time... You call me... No, you call... Whenever you want.—Fine. Yes. And you'll come again? Only, it's so small here, it's rather tight quarters, but perhaps we're going to move... it will be bigger, quite differently furnished... —Ah, so you did it, your aunt gave in?... —How charming! you haven't forgotten... No, my aunt has not agreed, not yet, but it may go through, there's hope. —So much the better, you must go after it, not be afraid... Remember: the conquistadors." Her hand resting on the stair-rail, she turns her head towards him, she bestows upon him, one last time, her friendly, almost tender face... "I'll help you furnish it, I adore that. We'll go to the Flea Market... Yes, I do too, that's my passion, how we understand each other..."

coddling him the way she used to do, hugging up close to him.

But as soon as she was left alone, the image which, for a moment, had been erased, reappeared, the kind, very affectionate brother was again metamorphosed: he was hurrying, surely... Before he had reached the street door, all trace of her emotion of a few moments earlier had disappeared—the furrow left in us by reactions of this sort often vanishes very quickly, as soon as we're alone again—he was rushing over there to tell them, he's so volatile, so vacillating, sways with every wind... They were waiting for him, impatiently... So what did she say, Aunt Berthe?—Well, children, there's nothing doing. She didn't go along. I warned you, I was certain. I know her pretty well, believe me. Cranky. Egoistic. Her things, you know... Her comfort. The entire world can perish... The story of the bicycle she wouldn't lend, the candy she hid away. That must have been included, he hadn't failed to tell them all that...

At enemy headquarters, they listen attentively to this report, weigh all the arguments presented, make calculations, draw up plans...

And then, in that false quietude, that ponderous silence, again this sign, this sheet of paper she has just found, twice folded, slipped under her door while she was out. Each word written in his good, firm, clear handwriting gives notice that danger is about to return... Another, more forceful attack has been launched... "Dear Aunt Berthe, what a shame not to have found you in... I wanted

thing rather, that was too quick, too immediate in that surprised manner of theirs, in their delight... as though everything had been ready inside them for a long time... the words she had spoken fell like a fruit they had watched ripen... They were calculating... waiting... watching her... cruel eyes concealed all round her were spying on her... ominous rustlings, whispers... five rooms for her alone... a useless old woman... shut up there all alone... never entertains, never... for her alone... If that isn't a shame, if that isn't disgraceful, and here are these young people, her own nephew, her only heir... the canny smile that the old lady in the black picture-hat had worn, on the very day of the wedding, her shrill, thin voice... "And where are they going to live, this young couple? Not with you? Ah, I thought... I was told it was so spacious..." She had drawn herself up, bristling, immediately furious: "With me? I don't know who could have told you that... what sort of an idea is that... at their age, I was living in a garret, a tenement... and I didn't complain, it meant independence, it meant happiness... But these days... she feels like shouting... I'm entitled to be left alone, I've got a right to live in peace..." The old lady had acquiesced with a smile of bogus understanding, bogus good humor... "Of course... I should say you have!" But there's nothing you can do about it... They're stubborn... Their vise is going to tighten...

There's the door-bell. What is it? Who is it? What's that? What's it about? Why it's the door. Which door?

Why, the door she ordered, the door she had had taken back to be repaired... it had been spoiled, there were holes, marks, but they don't show any more, it has all been fixed, they've planed it, sand-papered it, polished it... they've brought it back. It's there on the landing. They should go now, they should leave her alone... this is really not the moment, she feels like driving them away. But there they are, impassible, inexorable, the blind tools of a mocking fate. They lift the door by holding it between their widely stretched arms, they turn it, to make it go in... the mechanism has been set in motion, it's working, there's nothing to be done about it, she herself set it going, there's no way now to stop it, she acquiesces, she nods yes... oh, very well... oh, yes... she clears the way for them, draws aside everything that might be in their way, the tables, the chairs, she guides them... come this way, it's more convenient... they speak a few brief words under their breath... Watch out... easy now... a little lower... No, not there... you'll knock it... There now, go ahead, there, that's right, you've got it... their gestures are very prudent, they advance by setting their feet down gently on the polished floor... They remind you of pallbearers carrying respectfully, cautiously, a heavy, solid oak coffin. With one movement, they slowly lift the door up then lower it, letting the hooks slip on to the hinges. They try the handle. They step back a bit, look at the door with satisfaction: "There now, I think, this time, it will be all right." But the solid oak door has a piteous look surrounded by these thin, too light-colored walls... It looks like the preten-

She says nothing. She keeps her eyes leveled on him.

But that look of hers doesn't frighten him any more. The time is long passed since that look, like searchlights peering into the darkness to discover the fugitive, made him stand stock-still, completely dazzled, he had felt he was done for—no salvation, he was caught: a low, wretched, repugnant creature...

Now he is protected, now something arises which comes between that look and him—a picture, that of a dark mass, of a very indistinctly outlined figure which is moving beside him on a garden walk... He knows who it is, of course, he could answer right away, if he were asked: it's Berthier. But in his mind, he speaks no name. What sort of face did Berthier have? And the face would be there immediately: a pink-cheeked face, with a snub nose, large, rather thick mouth, big clear, innocent eyes. Who was Berthier? Berthier was his chum at the *lycée*. Which *lycée*? Lakanal. What was he like, what impression did he make, this Berthier fellow? He was a shy, self-effacing lad, he seemed, at times, to be a bit bewildered. M. Lamiel, the philosophy professor, had said to him in a moment of anger: You're an idiot. But he was very sensitive, he had certain divinatory powers. What were the two of you doing on that walk? We were crossing the Luxembourg gardens, going to take the train at the Port-Royal station, to go back to the *lycée*. We had just had lunch with Aunt Berthe. She had stuffed us with all those tasty little dishes she serves, we felt a bit drowsy, a bit congested. The weather was hot, the path was sunny. All that and many other images, other more precise, detailed bits of in-

formation are there, just behind, all ready, like filing cards placed one in back of the other in a filing cabinet. But these cards, he doesn't take them out, he doesn't need to at this moment, he knows generally, if somewhat vaguely, what they contain, and that suffices for him; what he takes out now, is the figure with the indistinct outlines walking beside him on the path, he only hears its voice, no, not even its voice, just the words that the nearly vanished figure spoke. It stopped suddenly on the path, it said: "You know, your aunt is hard. She's contemptuous." Like that. For no reason whatsoever. Just a simple statement. Dumbfounded: "My aunt? Contemptuous? Hard? My aunt?—Yes. Hard. She has a contemptuous manner." The words resounded the way the rescuer's pick-axes resound in the ears of a trapped miner. He was released. Saved. Embraces. Tears of joy. People were flocking about him. Your aunt is hard. She's contemptuous. It's a fact. That's how she is. That's her nature. Now he need only call out. Immediately they come running from every side. She's surrounded, captured, a large crowd gathered about her is looking at her, people are pointing at her, look: she's hard. Contemptuous.

He turns a calm, severe, gaze upon her: "There's no use looking at me like that, Aunt Berthe. What I just said has nothing offensive about it. You would make a mistake to refuse. It would be bad for you and not nice for us, I assure you. There would be no sense in it. I don't ask you to say yes right away, but at least go and look at it, that won't commit you in any way... Well, say something, after all..."

"I have nothing to say, Alain, you know that. I've already said it to your father. I don't even need to look at it. It's all decided."

Heavy. Inert. All shrunk into herself. Enormous motionless mass lying across his path. He would like to dislodge it, give it a good punch and kick it hard, to make it move... "Why of course... his voice is hissing like a blow-pipe that's trying to perforate a thick, steel wall... Of course. How stupid of me... Poor fool that I am... Of course you're not willing. Not even to go to see it. That was to be expected, it's enough to ask something of you—and it's all over, there's nothing doing, you can't give in. It's like the day I asked you for that friend of mine, that was no joke, he was starving... Of your own accord, you might perhaps have helped him, but it's seeing somebody... However, you know I'm going to warn you, you haven't the right. Fortunately, there are laws..." He's not alone, everybody will stand by him, all decent people are on his side. Parasites that choke everything that's supposed to grow, everything that wants to live, that absorb to no purpose all the new sap that's rising, should be pulled up by the roots... "You know it's against the law, you know you haven't the right... His voice is trembling with rage, with indignation... You haven't the right to do that... The law itself protects... at present, when there are so many young people, the law, you hear me, forbids you..."

She appears to be reviving a bit. She nods her head slowly, with raised eyebrows, and a bantering, almost amused look: "Ah, indeed?"

to her forehead... The love of truth, of justice, the thirst for knowledge, the generous desire to give, to share, even with them, break down all the dikes inside her, overcome the last pockets of resistance, uplift her, heedless of everything, she leaps into their midst... "Well, yes, believe me, I heard some pretty things about them... They're a nice pair, the Guimiez's are. Do you know what they did, in connection with the story about that apartment? Their aunt's? They're trying to take it forcibly. The poor woman is like a hunted animal... She told the Delarues that her nephew was threatening to have her put out... It's disgraceful..."

The chair creaks under his too heavy, elderly man's body, as he leans over, raises his big, hairy hand and slaps it down flat on the table with a triumphant bang. His jowls are shaking with slightly false, spiteful laughter... "Ho-ho-ho... I was sure of it, sooner or later, that was bound to happen. I always predicted it, I knew it. They've made a little scoundrel out of him. There you have the result of that ridiculous up-bringing, molly-coddling, nothing could be discussed before that child... Everything was impure, you always risked corrupting the little angel, his father used to tremble... he made me stop, I remember, I was talking about I forget what, it was absolutely harmless, you can believe me... his father blushed... Oh, no... afterwards, not before the child... He

kept an eye on everything... And that idiot of an aunt spoiled him, stuffed him in secret, to make him like her... The result, I always predicted it: Alain wears his ego in a sling, and he's running wild... When he wants something, nothing can stop him, there's nothing he wouldn't do. In fact, they're all like that, all that young generation, she, he's not an exception..."

"A lapsus! hee, hee, you made a lapsus."

"What lapsus, my dear lady?"

"Why, you said 'she' in speaking of Alain... sharp little voice like a mouse's squeak... Yes, you did... little laugh... I heard it... you said..."

"No, I said 'he'."

"You said 'she'... Without realizing it..."

Ah, he'll see, that bumptious gentleman... She feels upset by his great hulking laughter. The satisfaction, the self-confidence with which he delivers his platitudinous remarks irritates her. Fortunately, she possesses something with which to protect herself, a real treasure similar to those that divers bring up from the bottom of the seas and which she has brought up after endless trials and endeavors, endless dangerous, painful, consternated incursions into the suddenly yawning abyss of her unconscious... It's about all she was able to collect, it's all she has kept, but she has no regrets—it's like something magic, a talisman: it confers a power upon the persons who pos-

sess it that is not shared by common mortals, and it places other people at their mercy.

Nothing is more amusing than to see them—like ostriches, with their heads hidden under their wings and their buttocks pointing upwards, displaying with touching naïveté, in her presence, that which best gives them away: a word spoken in place of another and immediately made good, but it's too late, she has heard, an apparently harmless gesture, an object they've lost, the simple fact of forgetting, the most innocent of little gifts and which they think they have chosen haphazardly, a liking they have shown, at times disarmingly ignorant and oblivious, and right away, thanks to her magic power, she catches them, there's no use for them to struggle... how red he is, that very self-satisfied gentleman, he's fidgeting, he protests, he almost splutters with rage... "I did not say 'she', I'm certain of it... But when all is said and done, let us suppose that I did say it, what is there to it, anyway..."

Who is that crazy female... What she needed was not to be psychoanalyzed, that made her crazier than she was before, she should have been locked up, she's insufferable... and not only crazy, stupid, spiteful... What was she after? She's watching him with her delighted, idiotic smile... They all look at him as though they were accessory to something she has done to him, but which he doesn't see—some ridiculous joke... like an April-fool

fish that she's pinned on his back and which they all see, highly amused, swinging harder and harder, while he struggles to catch hold of it... "What's it all about, anyhow? I said 'she', very well, let's admit it, and then what, what about it? What crazy thing will you invent next, that what?... he's about to catch it, it's there, they're all watching him, he's going to take hold of it... that I think Alain is... so what next, what is there more ridiculous... there now, he's got it, he pulls it off, he's holding it in his hands... Ah, it's that too perhaps, that, without realizing it, I'm in love with Alain? Well, I consider that Alain is a perfectly virile young man, believe it or not... And as for myself, my dear lady, until I was past fifty years old... no, really, it's too idiotic..." So here's how I treat your cardboard fish, now watch, it's torn up, and I'm scattering the pieces to the four winds.

But how enraged he is, how he resists... "I was teasing you, you know that... Calm down... We all have in us... See here, who hasn't... it's well known... No, seriously... What I do think, though, is that Alain... You know what the symbol of the apartment means... Alain is an orphan, he's been deprived of his mother since he was a little boy... I realize that his aunt replaced her, but for just that reason..."

That's too much... They all protest at one time... They have shown great patience, they weren't averse to this suspense, these shilly-shallyings, these bits of byplay that

best part... the poor woman had a telephone call supposedly from the owner's agent, who told her, just in passing, that she was occupying an apartment that was too big for her, and she recognized her nephew's voice... —Is that possible?—She's sure of it. And you know, what I myself think?... She's very nervous, rather delicate... At one time she had several serious breakdowns... What they're trying to do, I'm going to tell you... If they were trying to drive her crazy, well, that wouldn't surprise me."

They experience a strange sensation, as though they were chewing on those seeds the Indians take, peyotl seeds, or smoking hashish... the picture that appears before them resembles somewhat that reflected by deforming mirrors in street-fairs... A curious, grotesque, slightly disturbing picture... They turn fascinated eyes upon it... It's they themselves, they recognize themselves perfectly, down to the slightest details, only queerly distended, deformed, misshapen—hideous dwarfs broader than they are long, with short legs, low foreheads; they have something extraordinarily heavy about them, shrunken up into themselves; something narrow, stubborn, brutish in their sly, criminal faces... But they have only to turn their eyes and there, in another mirror, there they are again, bursting out of all ordinary dimensions, endlessly stretching, growing huge, their high foreheads disappear beyond the edge of the mirror... Compared with these giants, the people walking about them look like children's dolls... For an instant, they look at themselves, almost attracted,

with my own eyes. And even then... I think the Guimiez's are absolutely charming. So there. They're handsome. Intelligent. Affectionate. Alain adores his aunt and she reciprocates..."

The noisy, self-assured voice reverberates in their ears like a loud-speaker making announcements for the travelers in a railway station. They give a start. They sit up. What is it? What happened? Where have they been brought to? Where are they? They stare wide-eyed.

Here are the Guimiez's. A charming couple. Gisèle is seated beside Alain. Her little pink nose is bewitching. Her pretty periwinkle eyes are shining. Alain has one arm about her shoulders. His delicate features express rectitude, kindness. Aunt Berthe is seated nearby. Her face, which must once have been beautiful, her time-yellowed eyes, are turned towards Alain. She is smiling at him. Her little wrinkled hand rests on Alain's arm in a tenderly confident manner.

But as we look at them, we feel a sort of constraint, a certain uneasiness. What is the matter with them? We should like to examine them more closely, to stretch out our hands... Only watch out. They're roped off. That makes no difference, we must see. We must try to touch them... Yes, it's surely that, one could have suspected as much. Those are wax effigies. Those are not the real Guimiez's.

Watch out. No nonsense. You're not allowed to touch the dolls. You're supposed to look at them from a distance.

There are attendants everywhere. They have already directed their vacant stare at the inquisitive visitors. If they lean over the rope, if they stretch out their hands to these mock Guimiez's, the attendants will set off the alarm system. Police cars will arrive. The policemen will shake their doll-like heads: Why did you want to touch the mock Guimiez's? Answer. They don't dare answer. Was it to damage them? Were you trying to damage, to soil the mock Guimiez's? This charming couple. This doting aunt who loves them so. You were trying to destroy the Guimiez's. They were in your way. Oh, indeed. The Guimiez's were in their way. Will you tell me why? You won't? You don't dare. Very well, I'm going to tell you. You wanted to destroy them out of meanness, out of envy, out of an unhealthy need to defile, to pillage everything that is beautiful, noble, charming. They remain silent. They're afraid. They realize that all this can lead to no end of trouble. They'll be dishonored, marked for life, pointed at, ostracized, led about under the hostile gaze of crowds in an ignominious get-up. Wax-like fingers will be pointed at them. There go those wretches who tried to defile, damage, destroy what is a source of joy for all decent people, the object of their contentment, of their delight, that adorable family: the Guimiez's. They feel a guilty smile appear on their faces: "Oh, after all, you are perhaps right, here we are, all out to knife them... Personally, I like them very much, the Guimiez's... —I've always thought highly of them... I must admit that they're very nice, very attractive... —Perhaps Fernande is wrong,

come along, let's lend each other a hand... those two lovely rooms—they're right: it's exactly what she has needed for a long time—looking out on a quiet courtyard with a big tree; beautiful old floors, no more dusty, lifeless carpets, everything's going to change, the devil take all that, she's had enough of it... by the way, that old *bergère* you like so much, take it, Alain dear, it's yours, I don't want it... and the big wardrobe... take it, what should I do with it in the new place... Oh, is that true, Aunt Berthe? How kind of you!... Leaps of joy, strong, soft arms round her shoulders, young laughter, carefree, confident... all together facing the future... truth, wisdom lie there, in this eternally new life, in this march forward with them, hand in hand... she leans towards him... "You know how much I love Alain... If he had behaved differently, I should perhaps have given in. Actually, it might be the intelligent thing to do. I'd have to think about it..."

He turns on her a look which suddenly envelops her entirely, nothing can escape, he half closes his eyes the better to encompass her, nods his head as though weighing her in the balance... "Why, of course, don't I know it? But you'll surely give in. They need have no cause for anxiety. It's as good as settled. She feels that he's making an effort to contain the contemptuous rage that has crept into his voice, but he doesn't succeed, it escapes in a thin whistle... You've never done otherwise than to give in to all his whims... You made him what he is, a rotten, spoilt child. There's nothing anybody can do now. Only, I'm going to tell you..."

So it's still there inside him, after so many years, as virulent as it used to be, when it frightened her so that she didn't dare take the child to a pastry-shop, buy him a toy... the poor little fellow knew quite well that it was useless to ask his father—he was much too self-centered, too petty—the poor darling turned to her, to his Tatie... But that was precisely what he couldn't stand, that affection the child had for her, their joy when they went out together, the pleasure it gave her to spoil him a bit, poor little chap, always a bit sad, who had never known a mother's love... Now he's off, she knows that old tune, she knows perfectly, it's her fault, of course, look what she has made of him: a weakling, a good-for-nothing... "What Alain needs just now is not your apartment... The very idea is absurd, I've thought so from the start... But they pestered me so about it, begged me... I was delighted that you refused... I'm going to tell you, shall I, what he needs... Do you realize the position he's in? He would do much better, believe me, to hurry and finish his thesis and get himself named just anywhere, to just any out-of-the-way hole... He would at least have a regular salary, and a pension later, which is not to be sneezed at, that would be better than to live off odd jobs, by his wits, or to ask help from his parents-in-law... A modest future, ah, certainly..." Now he's happy, he has torn them apart, they're separated, holding one in each hand, he is squeezing them tight, he turns them towards each other and forces her to look: there's the knave she was going to join up with, with whom she was going to prepare the future, walk

when they want to be, as intelligent as anybody, as all the rest—all those outsiders. He should help her. It belongs to him too, after all, what she owns, it will go to his son, everything she has, it's their common property: "Jardot advises me to sell those shares now and to buy them back when the price goes down." He raises his head: "Well, isn't he smart, Jardot. What makes him think that they won't go higher still? That's stupid, what he told you there, there's no sign that the advance is about to stop. On the contrary, if you want my opinion, I think it has only just begun. If you sell, you're going to find yourself with your assets on your hands watching the market rise..." She loves his eyes when he gets excited: exactly their father's look, a bit hard, sharp, piercing, the slightly wily look of a peasant from good old stock—intelligent as the devil, both of them... If they had been willing to do what they should have... but in their family they're eaten up with pride, they're unsociable, independent, not the least bit ambitious... If they had wanted, they could have climbed high, they too... "But for goodness sake, Berthe, you're not going in for speculating, are you? What's got into your friend Jardot?—My friend Jardot..." She watches him, amused, as he sends that scamp running. Her brother is there beside her. He's smart. Let anybody try to plague her, to cheat her now... "That's just how it looked to me too, which is why I wanted to talk it over with you... I thought... —But see here, it's perfectly obvious, there's no need to think. There's a golden rule, I've always told you that: never relinquish a

stock you're sure of... He leans back in his chair, looks at her almost tenderly: You know, I've already told you old Vanderbilt's secret: never sell, always buy." Yes, she remembers. As she listens to him she has a delightful sensation of well-being, of security. It's as though she were on ground that, having been devastated by a battle, had now been cleared, de-mined, leveled... Still a bit fearful, she proceeds: "So then, Pierre, about that other matter, about that apartment, you agree? I believe you are of my opinion... she looks where she's walking, sets each foot down cautiously... I'll have to think about it, but in principle... well... Silence. She can detect nothing. She takes another step. There, that's surely dangerous, you can still see the traces of enormous shell-holes... Only, what I wanted to ask you... just here, be careful... why no, it's ridiculous, there's nothing left... is to tell Alain. After what has happened, you understand, I don't feel like doing it. If you would tell Alain to come to see me..." She stops, all ears. This time, she has knocked against something, she has stumbled on something hard... He throws his head back, rises... "Well, I must be leaving. It's time..." and then the explosion takes place, only a very slight one... hardly a few scratches, a little dust... "No, Berthe dear, this time I'm not going to mix in it. You're both old enough. I think you'll both get along very well without me."

we feel when a wound is cauterized, when a gangrened limb is amputated, it has to be done, till the very end, it must be cleanly cut, this tumor, this sick flesh which is contaminating him must be torn from him, he must not allow himself to rot entirely... he's almost shouting, she draws back, frightened... that's what he needs, our Alain, if you really want to know: to think of his future... His parents-in-law will leave them almost nothing, all that is just so much window-dressing, all that luxury, dust in your eyes... and it's not brilliant, his future, if you really want to know... I'm telling you exactly what I think... that marriage has stultified him, and that snobbish, silly set, that Germaine Lemaire, I've seen her, an old fake celebrity who surrounds herself with young morons like him for the sake of their adulation... Ah, don't talk to me about luxurious apartments... The future he has before him—I know what I'm saying—isn't very bright and he'll have to be satisfied with it... now the pain, although sharp, is beginning to diminish... a very modest future, meager security, a pension, a salary. He'll be lucky at that, if he succeeds in getting some sort of appointment, he hasn't his doctor's degree, as for his thesis, I don't know what it will be worth... if he's able to get a position as substitute, or assistant, he'll be fortunate... The pain is becoming duller, little by little, it appears to be calming down... Don't talk to me about settling in Paris, in five rooms, in a swanky neighborhood, entertaining... giving parties... as they say... fiestas, as he says..."

No, really. After all, there's such a thing as order, thank

God. As justice. Even in this world. It's still there, where it should be, everything upon which he has built his own life, in the name of which he has had the strength to overcome all obstacles: he has had to deprive himself, drudge, there have been of course hard moments, but he has never doubted, and that has been his salvation, he has never ceased to believe that there exists, in this world, a golden rule, a law to which all must submit... otherwise, everything totters, collapses, soft, crumbling ground on which we lose our footing... Order must reign, good must triumph, endeavor, work must receive their just reward, all gate-crashers must be punished... He's willing to suffer, to execute his own son, to offer in sacrifice, if need be, what is dearest to him, his child's life... "Don't worry, Alain will be made to understand. I hope, for his sake, that it won't be too late. Life will teach him, as it does everybody else. He'll see. He won't act like a child forever... And it's better like that. Even for him, it's much better that way."

She smiles with a meager, slightly ironic and indulgent smile, she sets her upper lip and the mobile end of her nose moving first to one side, then to the other, she's looking in front of her, she seems to be figuring something out, computing... "Listen, permit me to tell you, there you paint too black a picture, you know perfectly well that it's not like that, you see the gloomy side of everything. To hear you talk, you might think they risked ending their days in the poorhouse. Even if Gisèle should have nothing, later on—and that's not sure, either—Still, let's

had progressed considerably. When do you expect to finish it?" Not a trace of envy in him. Not the slightest thirst for conquest, for destruction—he doesn't need that, obviously... he lets others live as they want. He seems so invulnerable, so powerful.

Ensnared in some little attic room, furnished with a torn couch with the stuffing coming out, a plain deal table, old packing cases piled high with books, pamphlets, papers, he turns his clear, cool gaze upon the world. Upon these beings who dash excitedly about, driven by passions that are childish, vain. At present his gaze is turned upon this thing that is wriggling there in front of him, upon this young Alain Guimiez... a very nice lad, dissatisfied, anxious... a very pure product of his class: a young bourgeois intellectual married to a spoilt little girl like himself. But what's to be done about that? They are as they are. Neither better nor worse than others would be in their place. They can do nothing about it, poor children. They're caught in the mechanism. Squirrels going round and round in their golden cage. From time to time, probably, making touching efforts to escape. But too weak to break the bars. Help would have to come from the outside; everything would have to be smashed: an immense upheaval. But that's not going to happen today. And meanwhile, they have to be taken as they are, helped even—why not?—if need be... "Ah, already? It will be finished by next May? You've got that far?—Yes, it's nearly finished. It'll be none too soon. Given the length of time... I'm impatient now to get through with it and do

something else more interesting. I've really had enough of it..." Yes, he has had enough of it. Enough of all these pretenses. Enough of feeling himself slipping, clutching at things that give way, enough of this wretched seeking which leaves him more unsated, more indigent than before. Enough of apartments, of Gothic statues, of friends whose very names cause to bend, then straighten up in people, something flexible, something as light as grass which is beaten down for an instant by a breath of wind, then rises up instantly and reaches towards the sun. To leave all that. To change his skin. To change his life. To be seated, he too, on the peaks where a bracing wind blows. To drink at its very spring, a water that nothing can pollute. To be allowed to share in this certainty, this security. To watch from a distance the gyrations of these creatures similar to what he himself was, wretched, anxious...

He tries to come a little closer. He bows respectfully and lays at the feet of him whom he begs to be allowed to follow, to redeem himself, to save himself, all that he can give him, a very modest offering, a mere trifle, he can find nothing else... "I wonder if you saw, if you read the article about you in last month's *Sources*... In connection with your essay on Hüsserl?—No, I didn't see it, I don't know..." He doesn't even glance at what has just been brought him. His face retains the smiling impassibility of a Buddha: "You know one doesn't see everything. It's been years since I subscribed to a clipping service. Well, good-bye..." Oh, no, don't leave me... Everything

about me is wavering and trembling, I'm beyond my depth... One moment more... Don't let go of me... "I'm glad to have seen you. I should like so much to have a talk with you. I should like to have your advice. I've been working on an article... I should like to show you..." But the smooth, dry fingers have loosened their hold, they are slipping, trying to free themselves... "Why, certainly, I ask nothing better. Only, just at present, I'm a bit rushed... Proofs of a book that's coming out to be corrected... and the *agrégation* papers which are due any day now. But do give me your address. I'm not sure that I have it. He feels in his pocket, takes out a notebook. Let's see... Alain Guimiez... He looks up, all of a sudden... By the way, what about Germaine Lemaire? What's become of her? Do you ever see her? It's a long time since I've seen her... She gives me a feeling of remorse... Every time I see her, she chides me a bit. I keep promising myself to go to see her. To telephone her..."

Everything is crumbling... everything that he has so skillfully, so patiently constructed, at the cost of constant, anxious endeavor... each detail, however minute, worked out with apprehensive care... Little rustic bouquets cautiously chosen... no, not that, just these poppies, the corn-flowers, some big daisies, perhaps... no, she won't like that... that might spoil it... rare editions unearthed for her alone, to see her lay one hand on top of the other, look at him wide-eyed... "Oh, that's too lovely... You're mad, really... Where on earth did you find that?" Notes torn up a hundred times before they achieved that free, spon-

"When you see Germaine Lemaire, remember me to her. Tell her that I haven't forgotten her. I must get in touch with her. But there's so little time... And then, I must admit to you... It's funny... I'm always a bit bored at her house..." The enormous, thick, reinforced hull of the big liner, of the battleship, barges ahead, crushing everything... "And yet she's not stupid, intelligent even, if you like, but I don't know why, she bores me..." A huge explosion reduces everything to a powder, all at once... "And then her vanity... She thinks she's a little too Germaine Lemaire, ha-ha-ha... But she's a good sort, really... ha-ha..." Everything sinks, everything is engulfed, while the big liner goes on its way... It must not have received the slightest shock. There must not be the slightest trace, the tiniest scratch, on its beautiful, shining hull...

He must let this sensation wear off... As though the ground were giving way beneath him... this vague nausea... before estimating the extent of the disaster... While he walks mechanically along, without knowing exactly where he's going, on the pavement behind him, he hears hurried footsteps... "Hey, there, Guimiez..." The big face is red, the voice a bit breathless... "Tell me, Guimiez... One thing more... It just occurred to me, I forgot to ask you when you mentioned it: that article about me, it's in which issue of *Sources*? Who wrote it, do you remember?" The smile he had been wearing so heroically a few

a sense of reality, of true proportion... go stand with all those, and they're innumerable, whose hungry eyes avidly devour her picture when it appears on the television screen, on the covers of luxury magazines, in bookshop windows, project himself farther still, very far from here, from this rather vulgar woman, right beside him, pointing her large forefinger with its painted nail towards the cupboard, and see her as they see her, all those who, scattered in every corner of the earth, alone in their rooms, holding one of her books in their hands, their eyes raised towards her, gaze at her the way the faithful on their knees gaze at the Madonna, trembling and sparkling in the candlelight, crowned with precious stones, arrayed in satin and velvet, covered with gold pieces brought as offerings... He feels welling up in him the emotion, the surprise, the awe that they would feel if Germaine Lemaire in person were standing in the middle of their kitchens, pointing her finger towards their cupboards, stopping to admire the view from their bedroom windows... he has been too spoilt, he's been given too much, he's unworthy, he doesn't deserve it... he would like to retire into the background... she should look, rather... he's dancing attendance, he steps to one side, pulls the curtains farther apart... if she would be so gracious as to let her gaze... "That way, look, when you stand here, you can see, it's lovely, isn't it? The Seine, the barges, the reflections in the water..." She nods with an air of approval, of admiration, then turns, starts examining the room... "What beautiful proportions, and what a lovely light."

He takes hold of her arm, all excited... "But you haven't seen anything yet, that's nothing... Come and see the dining room, my study"... Pride from some distant source, he's none too sure from where, surges up inside him, rolls its high waves... See my estates, my châteaux, these marks of my power, my titles of nobility, the valorous acts of my ancestors who were the first of my glorious line... admire my courage, my noble deeds... "This woodwork... ah, you like it? I thought it would be nice... It's quite ordinary wood, African okoumé. It all depends on how it is handled... That's a miniature my great-grandfather picked up in Persia... Here we've put a curtain for the time being. Later, we're going to put a sliding door... Ah, there, don't look at that... that was what drove my aunt to desperation. —By the way, what about your aunt? How is she getting along? She's not sorry?—My aunt? Certainly not, she's delighted... She's fixing up her new flat: she likes nothing so well. She looks twenty years younger. She wants the whole thing to be modern... the very latest style... She decided to get rid of what she calls her old rubbish... This chest of drawers, for instance, and this *bergère*, she left for us... The *bergère's* nice, isn't it?—Yes, I had noticed it... It goes very well with the other one, that's a piece of luck, they match... And what about the leather easy-chairs, are they forgotten?—Yes. Thank goodness, I think I won that round... And we've succeeded in getting rid of all the knick-knacks... Oh no, don't look at that door... —So, that's it, the famous one you told me about, you were so amusing... That's the one that caused your aunt such suf-

fering?—Yes, she was sick over it, she called me in the middle of the night... —In the middle of the night? She laughs... Yes, yes, that's true, you told me about that..." He laughs too, he feels happy, very free, relaxed... "Yes, about the handle. The decorator—can you imagine it! had put a chromium-plated handle! But I must admit that chromium, or not chromium... Even with this one... I think one day we're going to have to..." She looks very attentively at the door... "No, really, I must say I like it... They're lovely, those old handles... Advancing a few steps, she takes the big heavy handle made of smooth solid brass, in her hand... Some people might find that a little... far-fetched here, but I must admit that I like that oval shape very much, the effect is very soft... it's a change from all these straight, rather cold lines... There are any number of doors like that in the South... You see them everywhere... in lovely houses... elsewhere, too, that's true, in those awful little bungalows they're building beside the road that follows the coast... But what difference does that make? It has to be seen here. And here, well, personally, I am not shocked by it, I think it's very agreeable, the effect is very nice." In one second, the most amazing, the most marvelous metamorphosis takes place. As though touched by a fairy wand, the door which, as soon as he had set eyes on it, had been surrounded by the thin papier-mâché walls, the hideous cement of surburban houses, like princesses whom an evil spell has changed into toads, reverts to its original aspect, when, resplendent with life, it had appeared framed in the walls of an old convent

cloister... From the curved lines of its apex, of its polished oak medallions, there flows a shy, tender gentleness. It's a delightful surprise, it's the nicest of gifts, he performs a joyful pirouette, calls out: "Did you hear that, Gisèle, Maine thinks the oval door is very pretty. She thinks it looks very nice here." Delighted, emboldened, self-confident, he nods, pointing towards the little dark oak bench in the corner by the window: "And that, that corner under the window, do you like that?" She looks, she's considering it, and he feels anxious, the solid ground on which he was standing, starts to move... she hesitates... what does she see? what can she be thinking?... He waits. Finally, she makes up her mind: "Now there, really, I don't know. It seems to me that a good comfortable easy-chair in front of that window, that view..." He stumbles, he's reeling, he hangs on... "Ah... Whereas we, that is, I... thought it was so pretty... it's an old church bench... —Yes, I see that... But I'm not so sure..." Something is swaying, trembling over there, too, in the slender, silent figure that is busy-ing itself about the tea-table, something in it too has begun to totter, from one instant to the other, something may collapse... he perceives, coming from there, directed at him alone, in a mute language, their own language, an appeal, more than an appeal, an objurgation not to betray, not to cast under the heel of the outsider, in a moment of weakness, in a moment of despicable cowardliness, under the heel of the insolent, unmannerly intruder, their secret treasures which together, both of them, they have

is exactly what he had been dreading, he must forestall the danger, quick, take to shelter, protect himself, before it's too late... "I hesitated a long time, I went back several times.—Oh, was it very expensive?—Why, no, on the contrary, it was an extraordinary bargain... But I felt that there... she turns a blank gaze on the restored arm, and he beats a hasty retreat... Really, I can't say, that arm... it may be authentic... I thought, myself..." But she doesn't stir. She stares fixedly at the shoulder, the arm, she swallows them stolidly, her strong stomach digests them easily, her eyes maintain the calm, indifferent expression of a cow's eyes... Surprise, disappointment mingle in him with a sensation of relief... something changes place... there is a breach, a sudden cleavage... he feels that he is out of his element... the oval door is floating, uncertain, suspended in limbo... massive old convent door or that of a cheap bungalow... And the bench?... He would like to look away, to pretend that he has seen nothing, that he has not detected this embarrassing thing about her, like a ridiculous defect, a secret infirmity... "Come on, let's go, tea will be cold... But speaking of this statue, do you know whom I ran into? He slapped me on the shoulder just as I was wondering whether I was going to buy it or not. No other than Adrien Lebat, imagine. But he's not one whose advice I could ask, you know how he is... —That's true, for that sort of thing... How is he, anyway? What's he doing?—He seemed very well. Pleased, very self-assured, as usual. He asked me if I had news of you. He said that he would like to come to see you, that he

tachment, and I was like you... quite... quite... awe-struck... Then, afterwards—we had already left each other—he ran to catch up with me, all out of breath: “Hey, there, Guimiez, about that article, tell me, who wrote it? what’s the date?”

She doesn’t move. She plunges a hard gaze deep into his eyes: “Oh, that, really... Everything in him, everything about him is coming apart... You’re very severe... I think we’re all of us, really, a bit like that.”

The planets:

The young man of his wife

the in-law

permeate her

These moments

offenses of, vanity -

and there he goes -- ready
to murder her (100)

This constant hitting & ribbing -- the & coming
a rage, the very symbol of wit, then the visit
with Tom, follows the minute offense --
anything changes immediately -

This incredible non-consideration that results from
Society & Intellectuals

"I'm not alone in"

The apartment -- not to live in but to invite

The worst thing: everybody knows what is going on &
with will take, Tom says -- "we're all of us
a bit like that." Everybody calls the bluff of
everybody else.



Feller introduced to penmanship --
how it should have been if how it
was - 14/29

The Feller; the standard of 7 feet through his sister's
eye - (1.205 ft.) 28400. → 252' ^{the in wall} unrolled out

~~One~~ One the simplest level: what goes on
in those who are "social" -- other
that determines means means to meet
& somebody else.

Oh, she can tell us! how innocent
Riesman looks -- let alone the
lesser business

up with genuine embarrassment: The 12

The game: Jeder 2. Absatz jeder

In Travis 10x The same but looked at
from the point of view of the object.

The penmanship - dolls: 231

The handwriting - about - 232