

this evening. Therefore it's useless to torment myself." "None of this is of the slightest importance"—I had not been content merely with giving myself this assurance, but had tried to convey the same impression to Françoise by not allowing her to see my suffering, because, even at the moment when I was feeling it so acutely, my love did not forget how important it was that it should appear a happy love, a mutual love, especially in the eyes of Françoise, who disliked Albertine and had always doubted her sincerity.

Yes, a moment ago, before Françoise came into the room, I had believed that I no longer loved Albertine, I had believed that I was leaving nothing out of account, like a rigorous analyst; I had believed that I knew the state of my own heart. But our intelligence, however lucid, cannot perceive the elements that compose it and remain unsuspected so long as, from the volatile state in which they generally exist, a phenomenon capable of isolating them has not subjected them to the first stages of solidification. I had been mistaken in thinking that I could see clearly into my own heart. But this knowledge, which the shrewdest perceptions of the mind would not have given me, had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like a crystallised salt, by the abrupt reaction of pain. I was so much in the habit of having Albertine with me, and now I suddenly saw a new aspect of Habit. Hitherto I had regarded it chiefly as an annihilating force which suppresses the originality and even the awareness of one's perceptions; now I saw it as a dread deity, so riveted to one's being, its insignificant face so incrustated in one's heart, that if it detaches itself, if it turns away from one,

*Modern
Library
excerpt!*

this deity that one had barely distinguished inflicts on one sufferings more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself.

The first thing to be done was to read Albertine's letter, since I was anxious to think of some way of bringing her back. I felt that this lay in my power, because, as the future is what exists as yet only in the mind, it seems to us to be still alterable by the intervention, at the eleventh hour, of the will. But at the same time, I remembered that I had seen forces other than my own act upon it, forces against which, even if I had had more time, I could never have prevailed. Of what use is it that the hour has not yet struck if we can do nothing to influence what will happen when it does? When Albertine was living in the house I had been quite determined to retain the initiative in our parting. And then she had gone. I opened her letter. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

Forgive me for not having dared to say to you in person what I am now writing, but I am such a coward, and have always been so afraid in your presence, that however much I tried to force myself I could not find the courage to do so. This is what I should have said to you: Our life together has become impossible; indeed you must have realised, from your outburst the other evening, that there had been a change in our relations. What we were able to patch up that night would become irreparable in a few days' time. It is better for us, therefore, since we have had the good fortune to be reconciled, to part as friends. That is why, my darling, I am sending you this line, and I beg you to be kind enough to forgive me if I am causing you a little grief when you think of the immensity of mine. Dearest one, I do not want to become your enemy; it will be

Penguin
Allen Lane
excerpt 1

CHAPTER I

Grieving and Forgetting

'Miss Albertine has left!' How much more sharply suffering probes the psyche than does psychology! A moment earlier, as I analysed my feelings, I had thought that leaving her, without ever seeing her again, was exactly what I wanted, and comparing the mediocrity of the pleasure which Albertine gave me with the richness of the desires which she prevented me from achieving, I had concluded my subtle heart-searching by finding that I no longer wanted to see her, that I no longer loved her. But these words: 'Mademoiselle Albertine has left' had just caused such pain in my heart that I felt that I could no longer hold out. Thus something which I had thought meant nothing to me, was quite simply my whole life. How little we know ourselves. I must immediately put an end to my suffering; feeling as gentle with myself as my mother had been with my grandmother on her deathbed, I told myself, with all the good will that we lavish on those we love in order to spare them from suffering, 'Be patient just one moment, we'll find a remedy, don't worry, we won't let you suffer like this.' It was in this realm of ideas that my instinct for self-preservation sought the first balm available in order to apply it to the open wound: 'None of this is of any importance, because I shall get her to return straight away. I'll have to think of a way, but in any case she will be here by this evening. Therefore there is no need to worry.' 'None of this is of any importance', I was not content merely to persuade myself of this, but I tried to give Françoise the same impression, by not revealing my torment in her presence, because, even at the moment when I suffered so violently, my love would not let me forget the importance of making it appear to be a mutually happy love affair, above all in the eyes of Françoise, who did not like Albertine and doubted her sincerity. It is

true that a moment earlier, before Françoise had appeared, I had thought that I no longer loved Albertine, believing that I had taken everything into account, that I was completely lucid and that I had plumbed the depths of my heart. But however great our intelligence, it cannot conceive all the elements that constitute it and which remain undetected as long as no event capable of isolating them makes them start to solidify out of the volatile state in which they exist for most of the time. I was mistaken when I thought that I saw clearly into my heart. But this knowledge, which the finest insights of my intellect had not given me, had just been brought home to me, as hard, dazzling and strange as crystals of salt, through the sudden stimulus of pain. I had become so accustomed to having Albertine beside me, and now I suddenly saw Habit in a completely new perspective. Until now I had considered it above all as a negative force suppressing the originality and even our awareness of our perceptions; now I saw it as a fearsome goddess, so attached to us, with her inscrutable face so grafted on to our hearts that if she detaches herself and turns away from us, this deity, whose presence we were barely able to discern, inflicts upon us the most terrible suffering, and then she is as cruel as death.

The most urgent thing was to read Albertine's letter, since I needed to consider how to bring her back. I imagined that this was within my grasp, because, since the future exists only in our minds, we think that we are still able to control it by a last-minute act of will-power. But at the same time I remembered that I had seen the future inflected by powers other than mine, against which, even with more time available, I could have done nothing. What does it avail us that the hour has not yet struck, if we can do nothing to prevent what it will bring? As long as Albertine was still living with me, I was determined to maintain the impetus of our separation. But now she had left. I opened Albertine's letter. This is what it said:

'My dear friend, do forgive me for not having dared to say to your face the few words that follow, but I am a coward, I have always been so afraid of facing you that, despite my efforts, I was unable to pluck up the courage to do so. This is what I would have liked to tell you: "Life together has become impossible, besides, you must have realized from your tirade the other evening that something in our

relationship had changed. What could have been remedied that evening was to become irreparable over the next few days. It seems better therefore, since we have been fortunate enough to settle our differences, to leave each other on friendly terms"; that is why, my dearest, I am sending you this note, and I beg that you will be kind enough to forgive me for causing you a little grief, when you think of the far greater pain that I shall suffer. My dear old friend, I do not want to become your enemy, I shall already find it difficult enough to see you gradually, but all too swiftly, becoming indifferent towards me; and so since my decision is irrevocable, before asking Françoise to hand you this letter I will already have asked her to bring me my trunk. Farewell, I leave you with the best of me. Albertine.'

All of which means nothing, I told myself, it is even better than I had thought, for since she does not believe a word of all this, she has obviously written it only in order to make a scene, to frighten me, so that I will stop behaving unreasonably towards her. The most urgent thing to do is to make sure that Albertine returns home this evening. How sad to think that the Bontemps are corrupt people, using their niece to extract money from me. But no matter. Were I to offer half of my kingdom to Mme Bontemps in order to have Albertine back here this evening, enough would remain for Albertine and me to live in comfort. And at the same time I was calculating whether I would have time that morning to go out and buy the yacht and the Rolls-Royce that she desired, and, abandoning all hesitation, did not consider for a moment that I had thought it rather unwise to make her this gift. Even if Mme Bontemps's agreement is not sufficient, and Albertine refuses to obey her aunt and stipulates as the condition of her return that she shall henceforth enjoy complete independence, well then, however much sorrow it should cause me, let it be; she may go out unaccompanied, as often as she likes; we have to accept the need to make sacrifices, however painful, in the interest of what we hold most dear, which for me, despite what I believed this morning in the light of my precise and absurd calculations, is that Albertine should live here with me. Should I, however, add that granting her this freedom would have caused me great distress? I would be lying. I had often previously felt that the suffering caused by leaving her free to do wrong far away from me might well be less than the kind of sadness which I sometimes

have forgiven Hippolyte and turned a deaf ear to Oenone's advice had she not learned that Hippolyte was in love with Aricie. For jealousy, which in love is equivalent to the loss of all happiness, outweighs mere loss of reputation. It is then that she allows Oenone (who is merely a name for the baser side of herself) to slander Hippolyte without taking upon herself the "burden of his defence" and thus sends the man who will have none of her to a fate the calamities of which are moreover no consolation to herself, since her own suicide follows immediately upon the death of Hippolyte. Thus at least it was that, reducing the part played by all the "Jansenist" scruples, as Bergotte would have put it, which Racine ascribed to Phèdre to make her appear less guilty, I saw this scene, as a sort of prophecy of the amorous episodes in my own life. These reflexions had, however, in no way altered my resolve, and I handed my letter to Françoise so that she might post it after all, in order to carry into effect that approach to Albertine which seemed to me to be essential now that I had learned that my former attempt had failed.

And no doubt we are wrong when we suppose that the fulfilment of our desire is a small matter, since as soon as we believe that it cannot be realised we become intent upon it once again, and decide that it was not worth our while to pursue it only when we are quite certain that our attempt will not fail. And yet we are right also. For if that fulfilment, if the achievement of happiness, appears of small account only in the light of certainty, nevertheless it is an unstable element from which only sorrows can arise. And those sorrows will be all the greater the more completely our desire will have been fulfilled, all the more impossible to endure when our happiness has been, in

defiance of the law of nature, prolonged for a certain time, when it has received the consecration of habit. In another sense, too, these two tendencies, in this particular case that which made me anxious that my letter should be posted, and, when I thought that it had gone, that which made me regret the fact, have each of them a certain element of truth. As regards the first tendency, it is only too understandable that we should go in pursuit of our happiness—or misery—and that at the same time we should hope to keep before us, by this latest action which is about to involve us in its consequences, a state of expectancy which does not leave us in absolute despair, in a word that we should seek to convert into other forms which, we imagine, must be less painful to us, the malady from which we are suffering. But the other tendency is no less important, for, born of our belief in the success of our enterprise, it is simply an anticipation of the disillusionment which we should very soon feel in the presence of a satisfied desire, our regret at having fixed for ourselves, at the expense of others which are necessarily excluded, this particular form of happiness.

I gave the letter back to Françoise and asked her to go out at once and post it. As soon as it had gone, I began once more to think of Albertine's return as imminent. The thought did not fail to introduce into my mind certain pleasing images which neutralised to some extent the dangers I foresaw in her return. The pleasure, so long lost, of having her with me was intoxicating.

Time passes, and little by little everything that we have spoken in falsehood becomes true; I had learned this only too well with Gilberte; the indifference I had feigned

defend him' and thus sends the man who refuses to love her to a fate which, however calamitous, still offers her no consolation, since her own, self-inflicted death follows swiftly on from that of Hippolyte. This, minimizing the share of all the 'Jansenist' scruples,¹⁵ as Bergotte would have called them, which Racine has allocated to Phèdre in order to make her seem less guilty, is at any rate how this scene appeared to me, almost as a prophecy of the kind of love-scenes that I would come to enact in my own lifetime. None the less, these reflections had not altered my determination in the slightest, and I held out the letter to Françoise for her to take it finally to the post, so as to have made this approach towards Albertine, which seemed indispensable to me the minute I heard that it had not been accomplished. And we are doubtless wrong to believe that fulfilling our desires is of little account, since as soon as we believe it possible for them not to be fulfilled, we need them once more, and it is only when we are quite certain that they cannot escape us that we feel that they are not worth pursuing. And, in a way, we are not wrong. For if this attainment of our desires and our happiness seem trivial only when they are secure, they none the less contain unstable elements from which nothing but sorrow can emerge. And the more completely our desires have been realized and the longer the happiness has been prolonged, against the laws of nature, and has been consecrated by habit, the stronger the sorrow, the more impossible to bear. In another sense too, the two tendencies, in this case the one which made me want my letter to be sent and, when I thought that it had been, to regret this, are both true in their way. As for the first tendency, it is only too easy to understand that we should pursue our happiness – or our unhappiness – while hoping at the same time, through the consequences of this new action as they start to unfold, to maintain expectations that will not leave us in total despair, in a word, which might manage to transform the misfortune which afflicts us into other forms that we imagine we must find less cruel. But the other tendency is no less important, for, born of our belief in the success of our enterprise, it is quite simply a beginning, the anticipated beginning of the disillusionment that we should soon experience if faced with the satisfaction of our desires, our regret at having settled on this form of happiness at the expense of excluding

others. I handed the letter back to Françoise, telling her to take it quickly to the post-office. As soon as my letter had left, I again envisaged Albertine's return as imminent. This brought into my mind a constant stream of graceful images, whose sweetness could not help neutralize the dangers that I saw in this return. I was intoxicated by the prospect of recovering the long-lost sweetness of having her by my side.

Time passes, and gradually all the things which we have falsely alleged come true, an experience which had affected me only too strongly with Gilberte; the indifference that I had feigned while I sobbed day and night had come to exist; gradually, as I told Gilberte in a mendacious dictum which had retrospectively come true, life had driven us apart. I remembered this and thought: 'If Albertine waits for a few months, my lies will come true. And now that the worst is over, would it not be in her best interest to allow that moment to pass? If she returns, I shall have to renounce my true life, which I admit that I was not yet able to enjoy, but which could gradually start to become more attractive as the memory of Albertine becomes gradually weaker.' I cannot claim that the process of forgetting was not already at work. But one of the effects of forgetting was precisely to make many of the unpleasant sides to Albertine's character and the hours of boredom that I had endured at her side, no longer figure in my memory and thus cease to be reasons for me to wish that she were no longer there, as I had done while she was still with me, and to give me a summary image of her, embellished with all the love that I had felt for other women. In this particular guise, forgetting, although still working within me to accustom me to our separation, only made me see Albertine as sweeter and more beautiful than ever, and made me desire her return all the more.

On many occasions after Albertine's departure, whenever it seemed to me that I would not look as if I had been crying, I rang for Françoise and said: 'We ought to make sure that Mademoiselle Albertine has not left anything behind. Don't forget to clean her room so that everything is ready for her when she returns.' Or simply: 'Actually, it was only the other day, I suppose it must have been the day before she left, that Mademoiselle Albertine was talking to me about...' I wanted to

always, even before I began to love, each season had made me a different person, having other desires because he had other perceptions, a person who, having dreamed only of cliffs and storms overnight, if the indiscreet spring daybreak had insinuated a scent of roses through the gaps in the ill-fitting enclosure of his sleep, would wake up on the way to Italy. Even in the course of my love, had not the volatile state of my emotional climate, the varying pressure of my beliefs, had they not one day reduced the visibility of the love that I was feeling, and the next day indefinitely extended it, one day embellished it to a smile, another day condensed it to a storm? We exist only by virtue of what we possess, we possess only what is really present to us, and many of our memories, our moods, our ideas sail away on a voyage of their own until they are lost to sight! Then we can no longer take them into account in the total which is our personality. But they know of secret paths by which to return to us. And on certain nights, having gone to sleep almost without missing Albertine any more—we can only miss what we remember—on awakening I found a whole fleet of memories which had come to cruise upon the surface of my clearest consciousness and which I could distinguish perfectly. Then I wept over what I could see so plainly, though the night before it had been non-existent to me. In an instant, Albertine's name, her death, had changed their meaning; her betrayals had suddenly resumed their old importance.

How could she have seemed dead to me when now, in order to think of her, I had at my disposal only those same images one or other of which I used to recall when she was alive? Either swift-moving and bent over the

mythological wheel of her bicycle, strapped on rainy days inside the warrior tunic of her waterproof which moulded her breasts, her head turbaned and dressed with snakes, when she spread terror through the streets of Balbec; or else on the evenings when we had taken champagne into the woods of Chantepie, her voice provocative and altered, her face suffused with warm pallor, reddened only on the cheekbones, and when, unable to make it out in the darkness of the carriage, I drew her into the moonlight in order to see it more clearly, the face I was now trying in vain to recapture, to see again in a darkness that would never end. A little statuette on the drive to the island in the Bois, a still and plump face with coarse-grained skin at the pianola, she was thus by turns rain-soaked and swift, provoking and diaphanous, motionless and smiling, an angel of music. In this way each one was attached to a moment, to the date of which I found myself carried back when I saw again that particular Albertine. And these moments of the past do not remain still; they retain in our memory the motion which drew them towards the future—towards a future which has itself become the past—drawing us along in their train. Never had I caressed the waterproofed Albertine of the rainy days; I wanted to ask her to take off that armour, in order to experience with her the love of the tented field, the fraternity of travel. But this was no longer possible, for she was dead. Neither, for fear of corrupting her, had I ever shown any sign of comprehension on the evenings when she seemed to be offering me pleasures which, but for my self-restraint, she might not perhaps have sought from others, and which aroused in me now a frantic desire. I should not have found them the same in any other

woman, but I might scour the whole world now without encountering the woman who was prepared to give them to me, for Albertine was dead. It seemed that I had to choose between two facts, to decide which of them was true, to such an extent was the fact of Albertine's death—arising for me from a reality which I had not known, her life in Touraine—in contradiction with all my thoughts of her, my desires, my regrets, my tenderness, my rage, my jealousy. So great a wealth of memories borrowed from the treasury of her life, such a profusion of feelings evoking, implicating her life, seemed to make it incredible that Albertine should be dead. Such a profusion of feelings, for my memory, in preserving my affection, left it all its variety. It was not Albertine alone who was a succession of moments, it was also myself. My love for her was not simple: to a curiosity about the unknown had been added a sensual desire, and to a feeling of almost conjugal sweetness, at one moment indifference, at another a furious jealousy. I was not one man only, but as it were the march-past of a composite army in which there were passionate men, indifferent men, jealous men—jealous men not one of whom was jealous of the same woman. And no doubt it would be from this that one day would come the cure for which I had no wish. In a composite mass, the elements may one by one, without our noticing it, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate, until in the end a change has been brought about which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person. The complexity of my love, of my person, multiplied and diversified my sufferings. And yet they could still be ranged in the two categories whose alternation had made up the

whole life of my love for Albertine, swayed alternately by trust and by jealous suspicion.

If I found it difficult to imagine that Albertine, so alive in me (wearing as I did the double harness of the present and the past), was dead, perhaps it was equally paradoxical in me that this suspicion of the misdeeds which Albertine, stripped now of the flesh that had enjoyed them, of the mind that had conceived the desire for them, was no longer either capable of or responsible for, should excite in me such suffering, which I should only have blessed could I have seen it as the token of the spiritual reality of a person materially non-existent, instead of the reflexion, destined itself to fade, of impressions that she had made on me in the past. A woman who could no longer experience pleasures with others ought no longer to have excited my jealousy, if only my tenderness had been able to come to the surface. But it was precisely this that was impossible, since it could not find its object, Albertine, except among memories in which she was still alive. Since, merely by thinking of her, I brought her back to life, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman, the moment at which she had committed them becoming the present moment, not only for Albertine, but for that one of my various selves thus suddenly evoked who happened to be thinking of her. So that no anachronism could ever separate the indissoluble couple, in which each new culprit was immediately mated with a jealous lover, pitiable and always contemporaneous. I had, during the last months, kept her shut up in my own house. But in my imagination now, Albertine was free; she was abusing her freedom, was prostituting herself to this person or

I had successively formed of Albertine, of the physical appearance with which I pictured her at each of these moments, and of the greater or lesser frequency with which I saw her in any particular season, making the season itself seem more or less diffuse or concentrated, of the hours of anxious waiting that she had provoked, of the desire that I felt for her at certain moments, of hopes nourished and then lost; all this modified the nature of my retrospective sadness just as much as the impressions of light and scent which were associated with it, and complemented each of the solar years that I had lived through and which even with just their springs, autumns and winters were already so sad because of their memory being inseparable from her, augmenting it with a sort of sentimental year where the hours were not defined by the position of the sun but by time spent waiting for a rendezvous; where the length of the days or the changes in temperature were measured by the rise in my hopes, the progress of our intimacy, the gradual transformation of her face, the places she had visited, the frequency and style of the letters that she had sent me during her absence, her greater or lesser eagerness to meet me when she had returned. And finally if each of these changes of weather and season yielded a different Albertine, it was not only through the evocation of similar moments. But we should not forget that, even before I fell in love, each season had made a different man of me, with different desires because he had different perceptions, a man who, having dreamed of nothing but storms and cliffs the night before, awoke ready to leave for Italy, once the indiscreet light of springtime had let the scent of roses seep through the cracks in the shutters of his uneven slumbers. And even when I was in love, had not my changing mental atmosphere and the varying pressure of my beliefs from one day to the next diminished the visibility of my own love, was it not one day high and rising, another day steady and fair, and another, falling to storm point? For we exist only through what we possess, and we possess only what is actually present, since so many of our memories, moods and ideas leave us and travel to faraway places, where we lose sight of them! Then we can no longer enter them into the accounting system whose sum is our whole being. But they find secret ways of returning within us. And some evenings, having fallen asleep hardly missing

Penguin/
Allen Lane
excerpt 3

Albertine any longer – we can miss only what we remember – I awoke to find that a whole fleet of memories had sailed into my clearest consciousness and had become marvellously distinct. Then I wept for the things which I saw so well and which for me the day before had been utterly absent. Albertine's name and her death had changed their meaning; her betrayals had suddenly resumed their old significance.

How could she have appeared dead to me, when now in order to think of her I had at my disposal only the same images that I saw alternately when she was alive: bent over the swiftly turning mythological wheel of her bicycle, harnessed on rainy days into the vulcanized warrior's tunic that made her bosom bulge, her turban-helmeted head swarming with serpents, as she spread terror throughout the streets of Balbec; on the evenings when we took our champagne out into the woods of Chantepie, her changed, provocative voice, her face lit by a pale fire reddening only at the cheekbones, which, since I found it difficult to see in the car in the darkness, I drew towards the moonlight and which I tried now in vain to recall or to visualize in the endless darkness. A small statuette in our crossing to the island, or a peaceful figure with her coarse-grained skin as she sat at the pianola, she was by turns swift and stormy, provocative and diaphanous, or an unmoved and smiling angel of music. Each Albertine was attached to a moment, to a date where I was transported when I visualized her again. Then again, past moments do not stay still; they maintain in our memory the momentum which was driving them towards the future – towards a future which itself has already become the past – dragging us in their wake. I had never caressed Albertine in her wet-weather rubber-wear, I wanted to ask her to remove her armour, in order to explore with her the love of life under canvas, the fraternity of travel. But it was no longer possible, she was dead. And then again, for fear of corrupting her, I had pretended never to understand her on those evenings when she seemed to offer me certain pleasures; pleasures however which, had I not adopted this attitude, she might not have sought elsewhere, and which now excited the most frenzied desire in me. I would not have felt them in the same way if they had been provided by someone else, but I could travel the whole world over in search of the girl who might do so without ever meeting her, for

Albertine was dead. It seemed that I had to choose between two facts and decide which was true, so blatantly did the death of Albertine – which arose for me out of a reality which I had not known, her life in Touraine – contradict all the thoughts that linked me to her, my desires, my regrets, my tenderness, my rage and my jealousy. Such a wealth of memories borrowed from her life's inventory, such a profusion of emotions evoking or involving her life, seemed to make it unbelievable that Albertine could be dead. Such a profusion of feelings, for while my memory preserved my affection it also preserved its whole variety. It was not Albertine alone who was only a succession of moments, it was also myself. My love for her had not been simple: to curiosity about the unknown had been added a sensual desire, and to my feelings of almost domestic sweetness, feelings sometimes of indifference, sometimes of jealous rage. I was not one single man, but the march-past of a composite army manned, depending on the time of day, by passionate, indifferent or jealous men – jealous men who were never jealous of the same woman. And doubtless this would be the source of an eventual cure, which I did not desire. The individuals in a crowd may without our noticing be replaced one by one, and others again may come to suppress or supplement them, so that at the end of the day a change has been accomplished which it would be impossible to imagine in a single, unitary being. The complexity of my love and my identity multiplied and diversified my suffering. And yet they could still be classified under the two heads whose alternation had ruled the whole life of my love for Albertine, ruled in turns by confidence and jealous suspicion.

If (bearing as I did the double yoke of the present and the past) I found it so difficult to accept that Albertine, who was so alive within me, was dead, perhaps it was just as paradoxical that my suspicion of misdeeds committed by Albertine, who today was stripped of the flesh that had enjoyed them and who was no longer capable of them or responsible for them, should excite in me such suffering, which I would happily have blessed if I could have seen in it the proof of the spiritual presence of a materially non-existent person, instead of the inevitably fading reflection of impressions which she had caused me in the past. A woman no longer capable of experiencing pleasure with other

women should no longer have excited my jealousy, if only I could have brought my affections up to date. But this was impossible, because they could locate their object, Albertine, only in memories where she still lived on. Since at any moment when I thought of her, I resuscitated her, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman, for the moment when she had committed them became the present moment, not only for Albertine but also for whichever of my selves was suddenly enlisted to contemplate her. So that no anachronism could ever separate the indissoluble couple where each new guilty woman was immediately matched with a woeful, jealous, but always contemporaneous, lover. During her last few months I had kept her locked up in my house. But now in my imagination Albertine was free; she used this freedom ill, she prostituted herself to all and sundry. Previously I had never stopped thinking about the uncertain future that unfolded before us, and I tried to read it. And now what was cast before me like the shadow of the future – as worrying as the future, because it was as uncertain, as difficult to decipher and as mysterious but even more cruel, because unlike the future, it did not allow me the possibility or the illusion of intervening to change it, and also because it would unfold as far as my life itself, without my companion being there to alleviate the suffering that it caused me – was no longer Albertine's future, but her past. Her past? This is not the right term, since in jealousy there is neither past nor future, for what it imagines is always present.

These changes in atmosphere cause other changes in the inner man, awakening forgotten selves, counteracting the lethargy of habit, reviving the force of memories here, of suffering there. How much more so for me if this new climate recalled days in Balbec when Albertine, despite the threat of rain, for instance, had set out, God knows why, for a long ride, strapped tightly into her rubbers! If she had still been alive today, she would doubtless be setting off, in similar weather, on a similar expedition in Touraine. But since she was no longer able to do so, I should not have suffered from this thought; but the slightest change in the weather renewed my aches and pains, as it would in the missing limb of an amputee.

Suddenly there came a memory which I had not seen for a long time, for it had remained dissolved in the transparent, fluid expanses

I.

Mais à ce moment, par une de ces inspirations de jaloux, analogues à celle qui apporte au poète ou au savant, qui n'a encore qu'une rime ou qu'une observation, l'idée ou la loi qui leur donnera toute leur puissance, Swann se rappela pour la première fois une phrase qu'Odette lui avait dite il y avait déjà deux ans. (G [CS], p. 289)

II.

Oui, tout à l'heure, avant l'arrivée de Françoise, j'avais cru que je n'aimais plus Albertine, j'avais cru ne rien laisser de côté, en exact analyste: j'avais cru bien connaître le fond de mon cœur. Mais notre intelligence, si grande soit-elle, ne peut apercevoir les éléments qui le composent et qui restent insoupçonnés tant que, de l'état volatile où ils subsistent la plupart du temps, un phénomène capable de les isoler ne leur a pas fait subir un commencement de solidification. Je m'étais trompé en croyant voir clair dans mon cœur. Mais cette connaissance que m'avaient pas donnée les plus fines perceptions de l'esprit, venait de m'être apportée, dure, éclatante, étrange, comme un sel cristallisé, par la brusque réaction de la douleur. J'avais une telle certitude d'avoir Albertine auprès de moi, et je voyais soudain un nouveau visage de l'Habitude. Jusqu'ici je l'avais considérée surtout comme un pouvoir annihilateur qui supprime l'originalité et jusqu'à la conscience des perceptions; maintenant je la voyais comme une divinité redoutable, si rivée à nous, son

visage insignifiant si incrusté dans notre cœur que si elle se détache, si elle se détourne de nous, cette déité que nous ne distinguons presque pas nous inflige des souffrances plus terribles qu'aucune et qu'alors elle est aussi cruelle que la mort. (G [AD], pp. 1919-20)

III.

Jamais non plus, par peur de la dépraver, je n'avais fait semblant de comprendre, les soirs où elle semblait m'offrir des plaisirs que sans cela elle n'eût peut-être pas demandés à d'autres et qui excitaient maintenant en moi un désir furieux. Je ne les aurais pas éprouvés semblables auprès d'une autre, mais celle qui me les aurait donnés, je pouvais courir le monde sans le rencontrer, puisque Albertine était morte. Il semblait que je dusse choisir entre deux faits, décider quel était le vrai, tant celui de la mort d'Albertine—venu pour moi d'une réalité que je n'avais pas connue, sa vie en Touraine—était en contradiction avec toutes mes pensées relatives à elle, mes désirs, mes regrets, mon attendrissement, ma fureur, ma jalousie. Une telle richesse de souvenirs empruntés au répertoire de sa vie, une telle profusion de sentiments évoquant, impliquant sa vie, semblaient rendre incroyable qu'Albertine fût morte. Une telle profusion de sentiments, car ma mémoire en conservent ma tendresse lui laissait toute sa variété. Ce n'était pas Albertine seule qui n'était qu'une succession de moments, c'était aussi moi-même. (G [AD], pp. 1971-72)