

THE SEVEN COLORS



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BOOKS



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THE SEVEN COLOURS

Anyone who has thought about the technique of the novel has noted the extreme freedom of the genre, and its ease in accepting all forms. Over the centuries, narratives, fragments of diaries, collections of letters, poems, purely ideological constructions such as *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert*, and dialogues such as those that were fashionable before the war have all been considered to be novels. A surrealist interior monologue may be a novel, and a series of documents placed end to end (as was done, for example, for Tolstoy's death) may pass for another form of this art. In most novels, moreover, narrative, dialogue (even transposed dialogue), essays or maxims, documents, letters, diary entries, interior monologue, are blended into a single work, and the leaflets of César Birotteau, the letters of Mme de Merteuil, the speech of Ulysse, are an integral part of the novelistic genre. It seemed to me that Von could try at least once to present these various elements no longer confused, but dissociated as far as possible, and that each of these forms might be better suited than another to describing a particular episode in the course of time that is slipping away.

R. B.

I - RECIT

*In Rome, where I was born, the unfortunate fate
of a Roman knight captivated my courage;
His name was Severus...*

CORNEILLE, *Polyeucte* (Act I, Scene III)

I

THE LICENCE IN THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE

It's barely eight o'clock and it's already hot on the rounded lake in the Bois. Catherine watches her companion row, a little askew, across the island. Not many people around them yet. From a boat they passed, two young men raised their oars in greeting, and Patrice replied.

- It's a noble custom," he declares, "to spend your licence in the woods. You've very kind to have accompanied me.

She laughs, a little embarrassed, a little ashamed of herself. This is probably the first time she hasn't told her parents the truth. She didn't bother to lie, because they never ask her anything, but it's true that she left this morning, around seven o'clock, as if she was going to take her bachelor's degree, and the oral exam doesn't start until this afternoon, and she's there, in the Bois, with a boy she doesn't know very well. In philosophy, the following year, he prevented her from confusing Descartes' provisional moral rules with Kant's imperatives, but on the other hand, she dissuaded him from using Atwood's machine for measuring the expansion of bodies under the effect of heat. Then she lived in England for a year. She didn't see him again until last week, when the fortunes of alphabetical order had them sitting next to each other again, and he helped her, for free this time, to get through a few particularly concise sentences from Thucydides. She agreed to come to the Bois with him this morning.

- It's better in March," he decides. You should have come. But you didn't take a certificate in March? Nor last year.

- No, it's the first one.

- And you start with Greek

- I'll be out of your hair.

- a funny idea. It's true that I end up taking Greek. In March, I passed philology. I came to the Bois at least seven mornings.

- Is that a wish?

- No. I have friends who are boarders at Louis-le-Grand. It's an old habit. At licence time, particularly in March, they tell the invigilator that they're going to sit an exam. We never check. They are given a breakfast omelette and jam, and the doors open for them at quarter past seven. They go canoeing in the Bois. The two you saw earlier belong to this breed of candidates. In June, however, they are rarer, because they actually have exams.

He fell silent. The great masses of trees on the island stood out against an already bright sky, all laughing with young birds. Catherine was sitting in front of him, in the big flat-bottomed boat. She wore no hat, and her brown hair was cut in the same style as a boy's. A lock of hair crossed her forehead, but she was not wearing a hat. A lock of hair crossed her forehead, which she threw back from time to time. She was wearing a plain, straight dress that showed her knees. She looked up at him with big brown eyes, big pink cheeks and a childlike roundness.

- We'd board, all right," he continued, "but it's very difficult here. There's a corner over there. I think it's forbidden. We'll have to be careful not to slip.

- We can stay here. There's no need to approach. He

looked at her contemptuously:

- So you don't like islands?

- Yes, it is.

- No, you mustn't like them. Personally, I can't see an island without wanting to land on it.

She laughed, shook her hair, opened her mouth to speak, to tell a messy story about her life with her brothers and sisters, the wooden tub that was her island when she was six, the Redskins' quarrels. But would he understand, this insolent, unknown boy rowing in front of her, taking great care not to disturb her hard, half-centimetre-high collar and her astonishing yellow and pink printed batik tie?

- How old are you?" she asked

- Twenty years. How old are you?
- Eighteen.

Patrice has been in Paris for two years, studying for a degree that will probably be finished this afternoon. He thinks in the autumn he will have to do his military service, and then, no doubt, more serious decisions to make. But these two years have been most welcome. If need be, he could explain to this little girl sitting in front of him how he, an only child, an orphan since the age of fifteen, has lived with the little money provided by a neglectful but sympathetic uncle. Would she be able to understand the ironic pleasure he always found in the little boarding house in the rue Saint-Jacques, not far from the Val-de-Grâce, which he never wanted to leave? His friends prefer more freedom, the four-and-a-half-franc restaurants and hotels of the Latin Quarter. But he liked being with the Misses Souris, in the middle of a strange crowd where he was often the only young man, or at least the only student. He is probably the only one to have retained the memory of a few passing acquaintances, and those who remain are no less pleasing to him. When he has left Paris, he will no doubt still remember with complacency Auguste Pentecôte, the professor of radiesthesia, M. Sénèque, the watchmaker, the vigorous Léontine Gorgiase, whose occupations are ill-defined, the dwarf maid whose name is Théodore, and the two frightened and hard-working old maids, the Misses Souris. He has a room in this house, the most beautiful and the smallest, from which all he can see is a tree in flower, all white in May, miraculously growing in the middle of the paved courtyard. And he loves this very courtyard, where in the evening he sometimes brings his phonograph, a chaise longue, in front of the columned door, a glorious wreck of the seventeenth century. Next year, he'll have no trouble remembering that he spent a few marvellous, baroque months there.

For the time being, all he has to do is look up at the June sky, which smells of lime and acacia, strike the flat surface of the lake with gentle strokes, amuse himself with the idea that he is walking this pretty little girl. He wasn't looking for much when he invited her up the dark staircase to the Z room the other morning. As soon as he arrived, he recognised her, a little taller, her hair cut much shorter. Last year, he hadn't even thought of her. But it amused him to give a memory to his eighteen years, to his seventeen years. She was very young the first time, a child. And yet he remembers her slightly frightened face when she spoke, and her smile. It was because of this memory that he asked her to accompany him to the Bois one morning, that he put on his best tie and his old pink suit. He let his oars drip gently, the boat did not move, between the two of them, they were alone on the lake, alone in the world. He may never see this little companion of a moment of his youth again, but this is his youth, his fleeting twentieth year, inscribed in the eight o'clock morning sky, in a setting of trees, birds, water and light wind.

They start talking, telling each other stories about exams, courses and theatre. She didn't seem to know that the Pitoëffs were putting on a wonderful play by Pirandello; she didn't even seem to know who the Pitoëffs were. He must stop this scandal at all costs. But he has to admit that he doesn't know how to dance the Charleston.

- It's a ridiculous dance.
- Not at all, it's great fun. I'll teach you, you'll see.

She told him very quickly, and yet she's not very sure she'll ever see this almost unknown boy again. So they exchanged toys, the names of actors and the places where they had worked and loved. He thinks about being indignant when she tells him that she really liked Rudolt Valentino. That's not what cinema is, it's a world. She's never been to the Vieux Colombier, she hasn't seen Cavalcanti's *En rade*, with its beautiful images of harbours and narrow streets where clothes dry, she hasn't even seen *Variétés*, or *Jazz*, or *Les Rapaces*, she doesn't know German cinema, or Swedish cinema, or *La Charrette fantôme*. He shrugs his shoulders at the immense task ahead of him. Yet he is ready to undertake it. He will take her to the Vieux Colombier, explain to her what pure cinema films are, he will take her to the Ciné-Latin, to the little cinema with the hard benches at the end of the Sainte Geneviève quarter, and to the Ursulines. She could no longer remain in such ignorance. She listened to him, her childlike mouth slightly open, with an air of marvellous application.

She quickly regains the upper hand because he has never travelled abroad. She had spent a year in England, and she told him about the little town where she had lived, its hills, its ivy-clad houses, its lawns, its games. She tells him that she had dinner at Oxford, and that a young Englishman took her on a tour of the colleges and the city. He is a little jealous, no doubt, not of the Englishman, but of the fact that she has seen it all, even though he knows only a few corners of France and Paris. It is true that he knows Paris well, its streets, its inner villages, that he knows how to bring out the poetry of the most deprived districts, of Vaugirard or Belleville, as well as the poorest in this respect, Passy, Saint-Lazare. The sun was rising above the horizon, and now it was shining down on Catherine, who squinted, but he didn't notice, nor did she. There they are, in the enchantment of this summer morning, exchanging their youth and their treasures. They don't need to land on an island, because this is their island, this heavy, roughly round boat, where they hurl meaningless, almost gentle words at each other, where they seem to be arguing, accusing each other of their differences, drawing parallels between their lives, where they say nothing profound, nothing secret, nothing confidential, where they ignore each other's family, past, dreams, ambitions, - but where they are united, in truth, by what matters most, and that is lightness.

At around ten o'clock they jumped onto the shore, a little dizzy, a little drunk, and ready believe in the future.

JUST THE CITY

When Catherine was asked how many brothers and sisters she had, she counted on her fingers and always got a bit confused, because she hated numbers. When it came to numbers, she made no mistakes: four sisters and three brothers are easy enough to remember. But things were complicated by the fact that the first name Claude, for example, was also borne by a girl and a boy, and that there was a Paul and a Paule. When, on top of all that, the age and birth dates of the children had to be added to the whims of unimaginative parents, it was natural for things to get a little confusing. Catherine knew roughly that she was the eldest, that Monique was her favourite sister, a year younger, and that the latest addition was a little girl of eighteen months, whom she loved with all her heart, little Isabelle. Between Isabelle and Monique lay a no-man's-land of brothers and sisters, full of shouts and trampling in the corridors, from which she sometimes fled in terror, and which her parents regarded with an absolute serenity, placed from the outset above all events. Her father, a teacher at a free college who had never wanted to leave Paris, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives, had given up trying to make his fortune a long time ago. They lived, and that was all, and that was enough, and material worries had no place in the house. Life was a succession of perpetual miracles, happily accepted.

- It's bad enough not having any money," said Catherine's father. If, on top of that, we had to go without...

So we didn't go without, in the particular sense that we gave to this term in the house. In other words, a new dress for one of the girls seemed like a great folly that had to be welcomed with joy and respect. The children were brought up with the help of various grants, the father made classical editions for twenty-five cents, while continuing to work on his great history of *intellectual life under the Merovingians* in several volumes, which he might never finish, and Catherine's mother, in the midst of her eight children, complaints from suppliers, debts, maintained an unalterable good humour, a constantly renewed order, a natural ingenuity, flowers on the tables, excellent meals, and a sort of bourgeois bohemian genius. So, while many of her friends were happy to curl their hair around their families, Catherine had the most sincere admiration for hers, and couldn't imagine that there could be a more perfect bond of enchantment in the world than this four-room flat 'with outbuildings', rue des Fossés-Saint-Jacques, where in the evening the beds and sofas were spread out for ten people, and which sleep carried away into chimerical dreams like an ocean liner loaded with miraculous emigrants.

- There are only two things I fear," said Catherine's mother: the cold and fools.

The house was warm all year round, and other enemies had no access to it.

A few days after the exam and the walk in the Bois, Patrice came to fetch Catherine, and discovered, without too much astonishment, this home of extravagance and serenity. The children hung around his neck, stripped him of his walking stick (in those days students liked to carry walking sticks) and shouted Sioux cries around him. He felt as if he were kidnapping Catherine, and it was indeed a kidnapping. Neither of them was leaving Paris for the moment, and they had decided to start their holidays.

- We'll pretend we're foreigners. We'll visit Paris with a guide, we'll photograph the Eiffel Tower, and we'll even go to the Musée Grévin. And you'll show me everything I don't know," she said. The only thing is, we won't be able to go to the restaurant, because I don't have any money. That's what's missing from our programme.

He had promised to show her a few inexpensive restaurants, and on the first evening he took her to dinner in the Bois. The Auteuil dairy, under the trees of June, offers those with a bucolic soul its glasses of milk and its eggs of the day; he swore to her that the hens were going to peck in the racecourse, and he showed her, in the model stable, the cows with their rumps caressed by the moon. They stayed there, almost alone in this often deserted garden, letting the shadows invade them.

In those naïve days, the literary fashion was to travel and escape. Together they decided to follow it, to travel around Paris, to escape into themselves. It was a game worth playing, and one they promised each other, just the right amount of irony, to warn the *Nouvelle Revue française* about one day. A little pedantic, a little childish, they looked forward to the future, in this almost deserted corner of the Bois, as they would have looked forward to it on the edge of a virgin savannah, and, as poor students, they enjoyed this moment of opulence and equalled the sumptuous couples who, in the books, were then descending from Bugattis and Hispanos.

Patrice tells him a few words about himself, and his life, for the first time. He doesn't know whether he'll enjoy the boarding house of the Misses Souris, which he has assumed he would since he entered the house. His future is surprisingly unclear. Next year, when he has done his military service, he will find himself, penniless, on the Parisian pavement, with a title that has no luster and no use. But what does the future matter at his age? It is so vast, full of such beautiful promises. She herself is more reasonable. She explains quite calmly, in her wise little voice, that she preferred to learn Greek, because everyone knows English to a greater or lesser extent, and it is rarer for a woman to have a classical degree. So it's easy for her to get a job. It's a secure position,

modest and public, that it will be able to wait for the future. But neither of them needs to hurry. There they are, in this setting of leaves and night, with the sweet smell of cows coming towards them, the green milk cooling on the iron table. A boy and a girl from 1926, somewhat naively proud of being free, provincials from Paris who have heard of bars, cocktails and drugs, and for whom the supreme depravity of the spirit is still to have been able to buy the first edition of *Charmes* for twenty francs and to think of dancing some negro dance in a tea house for English ladies. Patrice has sometimes experienced the friendship of young girls, a fleeting friendship, a superficial friendship, which rarely satisfies his whole mind or even his whole heart. With this one, he feels ready to forgive anything, even for not knowing anything about cinema, for appreciating the jazz band too much, for wearing really short shirt-dresses, and for believing that modern painting is nothing but a farce. He will lend him *Poisson soluble* and the *Manifeste du Surrealisme*, he will teach him that Aristide Briand is only a dubious chatterbox and not a pilgrim of peace, he will patiently replace his charming young confusion of mind with his own. If he has the time. And he stretches out his long body, puts his beautiful new shoes with their very pointed toes on the back of the iron chair, spreads his arms, looks up at the black and studded sky: where will he be next year? Nothing is important, apart from gradually amassing a few marvellous images of life and, in the curves and loops of the figures for 1926, closing in on so many pleasures that, later on, you can't think of those figures alone without a pang in the heart. They both went to the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, but without seeing each other; they discussed, they argued, they made up, full of naive admiration for bare architecture, Cubism within everyone's reach, Ruhlmann's furniture and stripped-down aesthetics, full of love for their time and for their youth.

Sometimes, which annoys Catherine a little, Patrice talks politics. She doesn't know what it is, her family doesn't play these games, her father went off to war, was wounded and came back without understanding anything, not to mention the Merovingians. Patrice is seduced by politics. He doesn't belong to any political party, but he always has two or three newspapers in his pocket, communist friends, royalist friends. He spoke with some ardour about Italy, which fascinated him, quoting names that Catherine retained out of politeness. It was a time when people believed in the reconciliation of peoples, universal democracy, the German Republic, the art of oratory and the League of Nations, and many boys of that age were equally enthusiastic about industrial revolutions and teachers' councils, hailing the small republics of Central Europe and burning with a fever that was lucrative. Patrice is not one of those boys: he thinks they're silly to be so passionate about old things. And then, sometimes, he complains:

- To think that we were too young to understand the Russian Revolution, the war between Poland and the Soviets, Mustapha Kemal, the march on Rome. Now we're living in flat, ridiculous times. Do you find it interesting?

She didn't answer, trusting in the fertility of her imagination. He realised that he was boring her, shrugged his shoulders without politeness, and told her about Arabic tea at the Mosque, the cinema and the phonograph.

They have a few days to themselves in these first weeks of summer. They talk about Paris in summer, which has its charm, with its smell of petrol and lime trees. They go to the municipal swimming pools, which are not expensive, and Patrice explains to Catherine the customs of the Butte-aux-Cailles. One day a week is reserved for couples: you see chaste, athletic boys at the door, waiting for an unknown girl and asking permission to enter with her, just as you see chaste, hungry boys also waiting for a companion sent by chance to enter the women's restaurants where, in the evening, you can eat for two or three francs. They both swim, neither well nor badly, the honest breaststroke that those who have learnt to stand on their own two feet on the water can do at this time. But then they know a little better who they are: he's a really tall boy, slim at the waist, with strong arms and round thighs, and she's a girl with square shoulders, solid hips and a childish, full bosom. Then they ran to catch the K bus and got off at Les Gobelins to drink a café crème on rue Pascal, in a little Italian bistro. Patrice began to tell her about his mania for discoveries and magical places, so common at his age. It seems to them that nobody knows the café in that house on the boulevards, nobody knows the hot sausage bread in that shop on rue Montmartre. He takes her to the Russian restaurant, because it costs five or six francs, but also because it's an exquisite place, with pictures on the wall, flowers on the tables, tablecloths, an orchestra, singers, polite servants: what extraordinary luxury, for that amount of money, instead of the boring organisations of charity! The K'nam in the rue Royer-Collard is the lukewarm and nostalgic Providence of the students of that time, for many years to come. This is how youth creates its own empire, and gives value to the simplest places, the simplest names, which suddenly become symbols in the same way as a theatre, a church, a palace or a garden.

He begins to think a lot about this mysterious, wise little girl. He let this friendly thought follow him. Mr Auguste Pentecôte, who wants to make dowsing a universal science, proposed a game the other evening. The players would put their hands under the tablecloth, and the pendulum would guess who was in love and who was not. No one accepted the game, and everyone laughed at the others, but everyone was delighted that the experiment was not tried on themselves.

He found them curious, those first days when one being clings to another, as delicately as two barbed wire ears brought together by the wind. He went on with his usual life, giving lessons in French, Latin, history and anything else he could think of; he continued to meet his friends at the café and play bridge; and then suddenly a small image formed in his eyes. He doesn't suffer from it, he doesn't even know if he enjoys it: it just pops up from time to time, and he smiles inwardly. He'll find her later, of course, that goes without. He wouldn't even think it.

astonish. But little by little, he slips out of his familiar world and invents his own planet of escape and pleasure, to which all the enchantments of the city so naturally contribute.

The world around him is in tune at this hour, the world with its jungle, its rivers, its seas, - I mean the city, which is enough for him, always grey, even under the summer sky, forever unknown to those who live there, village and nation at the same time, with its little people, its mysterious quarrels, its strange occupations, its unknown trades and religions, in the loose belt of its river. He was lucky enough to know it, to be able to lose himself in it and find himself again, never to forget its reality and density in books. Just as last year he carried around his dreams, his plans and his memories, today he carries around his new friendship, and that little image of a girl that suddenly stamps the most famous monuments for him.

III

THE MOUSE PENSION

These are the last days he will spend at the Souris boarding house, and he is amused to find it so different from what it might seem at first sight. Emile and Lucie Singer are just good employees, thirty-two or thirty-three years old, with a baby, the love of their life and the love of their family.

T. S. F., which was beginning to take its toll, and the desire for a country house. He found them annoying until the day Lucie Singer, in search of confidences, showed him a little paper she always keeps folded up in her handbag.

- It's a letter from my mother. The last one she wrote me. She had been dead for five years.

- Dead?

- It's quite a story. When I was eighteen I met an older man on the seashore where I'd been with my father. It was 1912. I had just lost my mother. This man explained to me that you could communicate with the dead. I didn't want to believe him. But I went to see him in his bedroom every night. I was naive, you know, you could have believed things. But he was a long way from evil thoughts, poor fellow. He taught me to stand still, my hand on a blank piece of paper, ready to write with a pencil. And when I got home, I'd stay until two or three in the morning.

- What were you waiting for?

- I was waiting for my hand to write itself, sir," she replied simply. And her husband, still

laughing, but without a trace of scepticism, nodded:

- She was going completely mad, you know. But when you see things like that, lady...

- It lasted six months. The old man told me I had the gift. But I was beginning to get discouraged. Then, one night, my hand started to write by itself. It was my mother. We corresponded every day. I told her everything. When I got married, she told me it was a good marriage. Not, my big cat? But Émile didn't want me to go on.

- Oh no, she was going mad, you know. Show the letter to Mr...

- It's the she wrote me the day before my wedding.

She handed the letter to Patrice, a simple letter, kind and tender, full of unpretentious advice. Patrice had to admit that the handwriting was completely different from Lucie Singer's usual handwriting.

- Oh, I've been a fool!" she said quietly, folding up her talisman.

She said it like she would have said she had measles. And yet this husband, who was never told, accepted his wife's trances as a historical fact for which nothing could be done. Patrice never forgot this ease in the face of mystery.

When he closed his shutters in the morning (because he liked to sleep in the soft light of night), he often saw the dwarf Theodore arrive in the courtyard.

It was six o'clock or half past six. A low form ran along the pavement, a little short in the grey morning, and the two equal sides of a child's muffler beat her knees. She was no little girl, though, hurrying down the street, pushing open a brown door and, with a sigh, crossing the courtyard. Everyone in the neighbourhood knew Miss Souris' maid. She was no taller than a twelve-year-old, although she had long since passed forty. To this disgrace she added the disgrace of being called Theodore, which is generally considered to be a masculine name, even though it was borne by a martyred virgin. She always wore a red ribbon in her hair, and she never wanted to explain why. To complete the strangeness of her destiny... Theodore was married, and her husband was not much taller than she was.

Every morning, she left their shared dwarf house, the oversized made-up bed bought at Galeries Barbes, to go and work for the Souris girls. Theodore's husband left at three o'clock, as he was employed by the City of Paris to collect household refuse. He would be back around noon. By the time Théodore returned home at ten in the evening, he would have been long asleep. She didn't know him well, and would have risked not knowing who he was during the day if they hadn't managed, five or six times a year, to set aside an afternoon of rest together. It may be that such a way of life is conducive to romantic love, but the dwarf Theodore saw it as little more than a further persecution of fate, and every morning she took away a burning melancholy from the consideration of soli sort.

She had been working as a maid at the Souris boarding house for nearly five years. It was a hard job, but it made a lot of money, and Theodore was naively greedy. Without children, she could have lived with her dwarf and spent afternoons at his waist,

small and perhaps delightful. The lure of money had separated the household, and she had preferred to wash the boarders' dishes without respite and help Miss Souris, the eldest, with the cooking. Unfortunately, boarders were becoming rare. Of the four rooms ready to be let, only two were actually occupied. Where were the days of prosperity when the Souris boarding house had to put tenants on the dining room sofa? They say it was the fault of the Cartel, the fall of the franc and fears of unrest. But the dwarf, who was a socialist, said it was simply the fault of the bourgeois. Fortunately, there were still a few faithful bachelors who stayed outside and came to eat at the boarding house. Miss Souris provided them with their rooms and, thanks to a tight network of contacts, only gave out addresses for accommodation on condition that they came to dine with her. Even in Paris, where it seems that freedom is easier, these customs are assured of relative success, because you have to reckon with the desire not to be alone and to find a semblance of family.

- When I came in here," Theodore mused as he opened the shutters of the dining room, "there already Mr Seneca and Mr Pentecost. The latter has been here for ten years," Mademoiselle told me.

She shrugged her shoulders at the thought of him, because she thought Auguste Pentecôte was an old fool. He must have lived on a small income. As for M. Sénèque, he was a watchmaker, and owned a small shop in the neighbourhood, or rather a nook in a corner of the walls, where he repaired more watches than he sold. However, Théodore's thoughts were tinged with consideration, for Mr. Sénèque was generous with his tips.

Since taking up her post, the dwarf had seen a variety of people pass through her door, but they hardly ever stayed long. An Armenian-Russian, with ill-defined occupations, appeared frequently, disappeared, quarrelled with Miss Agathe, whom he frightened and who adored him, forgot to pay, forgot to eat, and yet ended up, at the end of the year, being more or less in order. Theodore didn't like Madranian, who made fun of his small size and the key to his name, and never failed to ask him for matches, a joke that the dwarf never understood.

The green room had been occupied for more than a year by a beautiful autumnal person, whom the maid herself judged to be of little virtue. In truth, there was no basis for this accusation other than the fact that Léontine Gorgiase sometimes went out in the evening, owned a lot of kimonos, laughed loudly and got up late.

The yellow room belonged to the Singers. Theodore still had no opinion of them. Nor did she have one about Patrice.

- If I had any money," Theodore thought to herself, "I wouldn't want to live here...

Theodore had money, but out of prudence and habit, even when she was talking to herself, she began by assuming the opposite. And it's fair to say that the Souris guesthouse was modest. The owner's profits were not considerable. She had to pay a licence fee, and only the leniency of the inspectors prevented her from displaying in the dining room the notice about drunkenness in public places that the law required her to display in order to be able to sell wine. She charged the boarders five francs for meals, not including wine, and two hundred and fifty francs for the room. Luxury was strictly forbidden.

Was it useful for Theodore to go to work at half past six in the morning? The dwarf often asked herself this bitter question. Miss Agathe didn't get up until half-past seven. Theodore thought to himself that it would have been enough to arrive at the same time: she methodically arranged the chairs along the wall, wound the clock, and began to sigh, arms crossed on her shortened broom.

Patrice knew that when she had prepared the coffee, heavily laced with chicory, Miss Agathe, the eldest, would come in. The youngest, Mlle Constance, worked in a printing shop and had her own flat, which she refused to leave. Miss Agathe was a small, faded lady of fifty-five, who must not have been ugly and who wore a delicious little nose above the premature ruin of her face (she had been old for twenty years). Her grey eyes, her soft, slightly dull voice and the look of fear that spread across her features did not prevent her from being very well understood in the thrifty running of her household.

Theodore didn't love him, but who loved Theodore?

They greeted each other according to an unvarying ceremony, exchanged small talk about the weather, and then Miss Agathe declared:

- You can serve me in the room.

Theodore was not used to it. She knew that she was a servant, and accepted that orders were given to her. But she had no taste for luxury, and could not understand unnecessary ceremony. At this early hour of the morning, when Miss Agathe arrived in a faded dressing gown, with a small pale head of hair on top of her head, it was anti-democratic in the first place to distance oneself at dawn and to be served.

However, shortly afterwards, the dwarf would bring a much-loved tray to the dining room and set up lunch in front of Miss Agathe, who had taken her place in a vast armchair with ear-flaps, which served as a throne and where she lost herself a little. Miss Souris ate breakfast alone every day, spreading a little butter on toast with the tip of a stinging knife. Théodore began to peel potatoes. Potatoes were eaten every day at the Souris boarding house. After lunch, the dwarf would appear before Miss Agathe, who would give her instructions for the day and show her the menu. This was often an unpleasant moment for the maid, who was reproached for her misdeeds of the previous day and even reminded of her future misdeeds.

Patrice told Catherine all this, and explained to her that the Théodore dwarf probably hated everyone, and that the next time there was a revolution, she would murder Mlle Agathe.

- People always think," he told her, "that revolutionaries murder because they are driven by great principles, great hatreds and great desires. That they murder the aristocrats, the bankers, the oppressors. Not at all: they murder their neighbours. They murder the man who has a mobile phone, or who makes a noise in the evening when he takes off his shoes. They also murder their bosses, when they are small bosses. Théodore the dwarf will murder Mlle Agathe because, when there are chops on the menu, Mlle Agathe demands that she bring hers to the table, forces her to eat it cold, and always takes the opportunity to cut off a small piece. I hasten to add that it is extremely rare to see chops on the menu at the Pension Souris.

Catherine, who, like Patrice, considered this dish to be reserved for luxurious tables, was amused to hear these stories, and formed a bizarre image of the boarding house where her friend lived, where, under the hateful gaze of a dwarf, a whole world of passions and oddities gave free rein to her instincts.

- It's not that," objected the more reasonable Patrice. It's a bit sad, a bit dirty, a bit boring, like all boarding houses. I went there by chance. I stayed there because I enjoy myself, and people are always more interesting than you think, provided they're not intellectuals, which fortunately isn't the case.

But he did not prevent Catherine, and himself, if he was sincere, from considering the house in the rue Saint-Jacques to be one of those strange places that Paris sometimes hides from everyone's view, and where it undoubtedly harbours its deepest secrets.

THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS

Patrice invited Catherine, twice or three times, to this Parisian courtyard which looked like a garden to him and to her. Before nightfall, he played a few records, tangos and blues on a slightly scratched phonograph, and blamed her for preferring this music to something higher. But he himself, if he was frank, admitted that he put much more of himself into these easy songs, marked by the passing year, than into anything eternal.

When July rolled around, Patrice had little reason to stay in Paris. He gave lessons for a living at a free school in Passy, and usually left at the end of July for the Charentes, where his uncle lived. Two years in a row, he had also signed up as a supervisor at a holiday camp on the Ile d'Oléron. This year he wasn't thinking about anything specific, he didn't have much money and neither did his uncle, a whimsical old doctor. It was Catherine who suggested that they continue their trips around Paris until August.

- Every year," she says, "I go to a village where my grandmother lives. It's two or three kilometres from the sea, and we have a lot of fun. Almost all of us go, although we never have enough room. Almost always, though, my parents find a way to take one or two children to Normandy, to stay with friends of theirs. Naturally, I can't invite you. My grandmother has no money, no one in my family has money, and above all she has no place to put you.

Patrice was pleased that she had thought of it, said nothing about it, and only asked for more information about the beach. He liked to imagine the places where Catherine lived.

- It's a big, ugly beach, which I really like. There are no trees, but the sand is wonderfully fine. The day I stop going there will really be the end of my childhood and my youth. On 15 August, my beach is impossible. People come from all over the country, in carts and cars, and set up tents and wooden huts. It lasts three days, during which they cook in the open air. It's horribly ugly, horribly dirty, and all these people are very vulgar. But I really like my beach.

He could see the heat falling on the long stretch of yellow sand, and, in the vapours that rise from the ground in summer, a line of mountains, darker blue against the blue of the sea. He closed his eyes, breathed in her arm and the smell of fresh bread, and thought of his own childhood, and was so happy that he could almost feel tears welling up in his eyes.

- Every evening," added Catherine, "we have dinner by the sea. Then, when the weather's fine, we stay out for a long time. We usually walk home. It's not far and the tram costs twelve pennies. I'll tell you about my beach. One year, we'll have to find a way to get there.

One year... So she was thinking a fairly long future. He thanked her with a look.

- But for the moment, we have to stay in Paris. Do you think that will be convenient?
- We'll work it out.

S'arranger is the password that opens up the most realms of the mind to the poor. Since childhood, Patrice had been used to working things out. He thought long and hard, made deep calculations, sold books, old suits and an overcoat that he thought he wouldn't need when he was a soldier. He boldly went to the Palais de Justice to get some index cards on which to enter the names of the litigants and their cases, for fifty francs a thousand, and worked four or five hours in the evening. So he would spend the three weeks' holiday in Paris with Catherine, waiting for her departure. He felt himself being dragged along, without paying too much attention to it, and sometimes he felt like rebelling, protesting against the decidedly too important place that the young girl was taking in his life. But deep down he had no human respect, and his love of his own freedom was not so great that he was willing to sacrifice even his own pleasure to her.

Seneca confided in him one day.

- I don't know if you know," he said, "that I was married. I was married to Auguste Pentecôte's wife, twenty years ago now.
- The wife of... ?

- Yes, it was I who married her first. We lived side by side, me a watchmaker and him a seed grower, in Belleville. She was a beautiful girl, called Anaïs. After a year, I realised that she preferred the seed business to the watch business. She went to live with my neighbour and we divorced. I didn't hate them. We just didn't see each other any more, because it wouldn't have been right. It was sometimes difficult: when you're neighbours, you so often have little

services. And I ended up moving. I came to live here and rented a small boarded-up shop in the rue Garancière, opposite a cobbler's shop. Business wasn't very good, but I had a bit of money, and since Anaïs wasn't there any more, I'm living on a shoestring, you know. I, however, leave my address with Auguste. One day, the day after the armistice, he came to find me. I realised that Anaïs had left him. Women were crazy in those days, sir. She had become the mistress of an American and left. We don't know what became of her. I don't think he took her to America. Although she was a beautiful girl. They don't have them like that in America, he should have kept her. I advised Auguste to sell his grain business, we did good business in those days. He's been living here ever since, he doesn't have many needs either, we amuse ourselves talking about Anaïs. We are not unhappy.

- What about dowsing?

- It distracts him. I've got the success stories, and he's got his cuckoo stick. He has fun discovering springs. He went to the provinces, you know, and found water in some properties. He got paid. But it's mainly a distraction. Although he's very capable, basically. No matter how much I make fun of him, I'm quite sure he's not a practical joker. He's in correspondence with some very learned people, even priests. As you can see, he's a well-educated, well-balanced man in very good health.

Auguste Pentecôte, a small man with a goatee, enjoyed robust health, travelled miles and miles around Paris and frequently recounted the sporting exploits of his youth. As for his moral equilibrium, Patrice sometimes allowed himself to doubt it. Recently, he had obtained a letter of recommendation from the director of a municipal department, to whom he wished to propose a grand plan for modern swimming pools. These proposals were already likely to sound rather crazy, and the former seed grower certainly had no title to carry them out. It is true that he was keen to create hot springs in the middle of the Bois de Boulogne. But by misfortune he aggravated his case by presenting himself to the director in a strange way. He had heard that this man was a protector of sports, and he wanted to show him that, too, was not one of those sedentary scientists, enemies of all exercise. And, to put him in the mood, he found nothing better than to enter the office on his hands. The letter of recommendation was of no use, and he was dismissed with a rather hasty politeness. It was he himself who recounted his misadventure at table, in front of the diners, who almost died from choking and laughing into their napkins, with the exception of Mr Seneca, who found everything natural on the part of his friend.

The plaintive Miss Mice listened to their guests with a smile permanently fixed on their lips, ready to accept anything as long as these eccentricities did not take place in their dining room, and above all that the bill was settled punctually at the end of the month. This is how Patrice learned about the funny side of life.

There was not even Léontine whom he did not regard with some sympathy. She was not very attractive, perhaps, and quite strong, especially in these days of thin women, but she amused Patrice when she assumed the thoughtful and weary air of a woman who has lived a long time. She had a large collection of West Indian shawls, one of which she sold at a time. It was not clear what she lived on since she arrived. She always spoke mysteriously of a job that must be waiting for her, sometimes saddened by her memories of Martinique and terrified the Misses Souris a little, who wondered if their honest house was not going to be turned into a bad place by the presence of this woman of perdition. But Patrice was not so displeased as to feel that she was looking at him with undisguised greed. She also sang, in a deep, rather beautiful voice, and sometimes indulged in sentimental romances from the repertoire of Mistinguett and Damia. In front of these wrecks, in this Henri II dining room where honourable provincial traditions were perpetuated in Paris, it was perhaps rather ridiculous, but Patrice tasted infinite voluptuousness in this ridicule. However, he did not want Catherine to be there, and when she did come, he always managed to get her to avoid Léontine. He may have judged his friend on this, for she would undoubtedly have enjoyed herself. But perhaps that was what he didn't want.

DESTINY'S UNDERSTUDIES

Catherine didn't know Saint-Germain de Charonne.

- Besides, you're not too guilty," said Patrice indulgently. Nobody knows Saint-Germain. I discovered it by chance, one day when I got on the wrong bus on my way to Romainville for a military training session. Since we're spending our holidays in Paris, we'll go together.

They set off from Le Châtelet on one of those slightly grey, slightly cool July mornings that already make you think of autumn. Suddenly, halfway up the hill, they saw the little church, with its steeple and rooster, the marvellous wreckage of an ancient village. On its mound, between modern houses, it alone preserves the memory of suburban villages, among the lilacs, and of the old sorrows of men. The square in front of it has been widened, and you can still climb up the stone steps where, in the Charonne village, it must have been nice to see big weddings and first communions. But things haven't changed that much, but you soon forget the tall red brick houses for this grey stone tower, repaired with cement, for this enclosure that dominates the street and from which trees and crosses rise. In fact, I think it's the only place in Paris that has kept its little cemetery, its country cemetery where there's already no room for the future dead. They wandered for a while between the tombs, and stopped in front of the most important one, surmounted by a statue in the shape of a bicorne, under which lies Bègue, known as Magloire, a "house painter", who was also, according to his inscription, "a patriot, poet, philosopher and secretary to M. de Robespierre". People must have come here quite easily from the Faubourg Antoine, at the time of the paving stones of Paris and the barricades.

A little boy accompanied them and they spoke to him. He could well have been seven or eight years old.

- What are you doing here?
- I've got an appointment," he declared with a certain air of importance,

He followed them, turning round from time to time. Then he started to run, and came back holding by the hand a little girl of his own age, very blonde, with big pink cheeks, and wearing a blue-checked apron. He kissed her carefully, as children do, pushing her hair aside with his hands.

- Is she your fiancée?" asked Catherine.
- Exactly. You're also engaged.

He wasn't questioning. He was affirming and Catherine and Patrice laughed, hardly embarrassed. The children were ahead of them now, with a whisper of a source, and they didn't seem to care about them. Yet they never left them. Patrice wanted to question them.

- What are your parents doing?" he asked the boy.
- they're gone for the day. His too. We're on our parents' holiday. My brother is working.
- But who's looking after you?

The boy shrugged his shoulders with a certain contempt, pointed vaguely at a house, and said

- A woman.

Such practical concerns certainly seemed to him to be in vain.

- We're our parents' holiday too," says Catherine. But is she going to give you something to eat?
- She's cooking in the kitchen. We won't see her. She must have gone for a drink.

He said this with great philosophy as one of the most banal things in this world. Not seeing your parents, being entrusted to the care of a forgetful, slightly drunken wife, that must have happened every day.

- Later on, we'll pick up what she's prepared and eat here. A cemetery is like a garden. You should have lunch with us.

Patrice and Catherine smiled. Why shouldn't they let themselves be tempted? It was nearly midday. Who knows if the church would be ringing the Angelus? Who knows if the village in this beautiful working-class neighbourhood would come back to life, with the return of the fields, the sound of horses and the crowing of roosters? In any case, Paris was forgotten here, a city so easy to forget, in any of its walled gardens, at the turn of a wall or a street.

- But they won't tell us anything about having lunch in

the cemetery? The boy repeated:

- A cemetery is like a garden. But first, you should visit the church.

He accompanied them and showed them into the short, narrow chapel, which had been artlessly repaired at every turn. He himself did enter.

- I'm a Communist," he explained.

- What's wrong with that? You don't like the priest?

- Oh, he's not a bad man. But he's not my idea.

He remained as serious as ever, and the little girl shook her head as if to say that it was necessary to respect men's ideas. She herself entered the chapel with the young men and genuflected before the altar.

- What's your name?" asked Catherine.

- Catherine.

She raised her eyebrows in astonishment.

- What about him?

- Patrice.

The young people stopped laughing, a little moved, in spite of themselves, by a charming coincidence. Patrice in particular was not such a common name that they could have hoped to meet their double in the shadow of Saint-Germain de Charonne. Patrice dared to gently caress Catherine's hand for the first time.

Together they went to the house of the woman who was in charge of "looking after" the two children for the day. In the corridor, little Patrice got down on his knees, put his hand through a round hole that served as a cat flap at the bottom of the door, and pulled a string from which a spool hung.

- It's very simple. So you can open it without a key. You can go in.

They went straight into a fairly large, fairly clean kitchen, which looked much more like a village kitchen than a Paris kitchen, and on the oilcloth table they discovered a small parcel, which must have been the two children's dinner. They helped them count their riches: two slices of bread, two gherkins, two bars of chocolate and two hard-boiled eggs.

- A strange menu," says Patrice,

- Why?" says Patrice. It was me who asked her for the gherkins. She's so stupid she'd have forgotten them. You should go and buy some boiled eggs and come with us.

Patrice bought hard-boiled eggs from the nearest bistro, two rolls, some ham, peaches from a fruit car, and two lollies for the children. Then they returned to the cemetery and sat down at the philosopher's feet. Clouds rolled overhead, alternately hiding and revealing the sun. There was perfect silence, a village silence, at the hour when peasants dine and work is abandoned. It was Paris, though, all around them, invisible Paris, twenty metres behind that tree and that low wall, twenty metres behind that paradoxical bell tower: but they couldn't even hear its big, animal city breathing, they had been carried out of its space, they were laughing with their childish doubles in a country garden from which the very idea of death had been exorcised.

- Do you often find yourself on your own?

- Not very often. Our parents are always there. But sometimes they go to the suburbs on a Sunday and they don't take us with them. So the wife looks after us.

- Today is not Sunday.

- My father works and doesn't come home for lunch. My mother has gone to visit her cousin in the suburbs who is ill.

- And you, Catherine

- It's all the same.

- Do you also have a sick cousin from the suburbs?

- No, it's the same. But my mother went with Patrice's mother. She thinks it's better to be two. Another year, the four of them went from the street to look after her. It's very funny, when someone is ill, they always leave us here.

They asked about the strange customs that seemed to govern the rue de Bagnole and the village of Saint-Germain. As cautious as city dwellers in the fields, who wouldn't want to talk too much nonsense, they discovered that every village in Paris has its own customs, laws, flora and fauna. They knew that Vaugirard is the land of Russian popes and grey cats, that Auteuil is the town of curly dogs, Saint-Sulpice that of devout women and yellow cats, Sainte-Geneviève that of children on skates and unbred black and white dogs; Here, they discovered ginger cats, leggy dogs, abandoned children and fickle babysitters, and they were as reluctant to generalise as a conscientious geographer on his first landing on an unknown island. They would never have thought it possible to organise such a lively, and probably gay, *sick party*. But the weather was fine. Why look for anything else? On the graves, in the peaceful friendship of death, as quiet as the Arabs in their cemeteries with their rounded steles, they broke bread, bit into juicy peaches and wiped their hands with herbs. As a lover of nature, the philosopher in his shorts and bicorne must have felt his old sensitive soul awakening.

The children were very amused to learn that the two young zens were also called Patrice and Catherine.

- So you're getting married
- And why?
- were going to get married one day. When we grow up.
- Will you be getting married in a church, Patrice?
- If it makes Catherine happy. Because Catherine is a believer.

He stroked her head protectively.

- And what will you do for a living?
- I don't know. I think that by then bourgeois capitalist society will no longer exist. I won't have seen that.
- Who told you?
- My father is an activist. He knows that.

Patrice didn't dare reply. He was saddened, however, for a second, by the future of this child, and he thought of so many possibilities to shelter and help this plant to grow. But the sun was shining brightly over Saint-Germain, and he preferred to look at his double and Catherine's double, which promised them childlike happiness.

- I'm going to go and get some water," announced little Patrice. We're dying

of thirst here. He returned with a bottle and two white paper cones.

- The cemetery caretaker gave them to me. I like him because I help him close the gates at night.
- He couldn't do it without you?
- I don't think so.

When they had drunk from the white paper cones, the authoritative Patrice suggested they visit the neighbourhood. They set off, the children in front and they in the back, like so many French families, working-class or middle-class, on Sunday afternoons. Like them, they hardly spoke at all, just letting the children chirp in front of them, watching them with their eyes as they went through the rites. For others, this boundary between Charonne and Bagnole would not have been a very picturesque neighbourhood. Sometimes tall new houses, sometimes low buildings enclosing a corner of the garden, a poor, bare tree. But they already loved it, just as they loved the whole of Paris, its industrial houses, its village memories, an unfinished city, a city without harmony, and therefore alive.

Around four o'clock, they stopped at the terrace of a small café and drank lemonade with the children. It wasn't Sunday, but other families were strolling along the wide boulevard, at the foot of the embankment, with carriages full of children, chattering, big oilcloth bags in their hands. The two little ones, very well-behaved in their iron chairs, were playing pigeon-holing half-heartedly, and occasionally tasting their drink through a straw. It was a strange day, and a strange family they formed, thanks to one of those miracles of luck that large cities sometimes create for those who are worthy.

- It's time to go home now," says little Patrice.

Obediently, they took them back to the house of their invisible guardian, who was still absent, and the little boy did his cat's job of opening the door.

- When you come back," he said, "just come here. Look carefully at the number. Ask for us. If there's no one there, you can pull the spool out of the string and go in.

- Goodbye, Little Red Riding Hood.

Patrice and Catherine remained silent until they reached the Châtelet, where they parted company.

CHARMES

Catherine returned to her friend after nine o'clock in the evening. At the Souris boarding house, where dinner was served early, everyone was still at table. On one of her generous days, the eldest Miss Souris had passed round large glasses of fresh water, into which she had poured a drop of a strange and economical liqueur, a combination of orange blossom and mint alcohol. It was what a former resident once called, with undisguised irony, "Your cocktail". Since then, the Misses Souris, who saw no malice in it, have occasionally (though rarely) offered "their cocktail", and no one dared refuse them.

Mr Sénèque had already been thinking for some time of arranging a wireless set for her. We have forgotten that at that time the family wireless set was still in its embryonic stage, and almost as comical as the motor car in 1910. People were still discussing the comparative merits of gaffer sets and framed sets, earphones and loudspeakers. The humorous newspapers were full of comic stories about the set that stubbornly refused to work when there was someone there and worked so well when there was no one. People would invite themselves over to listen to the T. S. F. amidst an appalling din and indestructible screeching. Fanatical fans never heard a whole piece, but their needle would run from town to town, from country to country: "I can 'have Florence, Brussels, Madrid, Nuremberg, Vienna, London.... At night, I have Moscow, I have New York". The forced listener only heard similar sizzling sounds, and was always told that just the day before they had 'caught', no doubt by trickery, and as if on the fly, such a fine German concert. But today, with the storm brewing...

We have forgotten all that, now that the T. S. F. has taken on the proportions of a well-organised scourge; but all that was and gave colour to a time, the time of short dresses, bars, cocktails, square-backed cars and bare furniture, the time that thought itself so far removed from all ridicule, and so protected from the danger of growing old.

Mr Seneca, who had just brought his post with the modesty of a triumphant, did not fail to observe any of the rites that were obligatory at the time. A concert of cats soon filled the dining room as the old man, bent over his pot of sound like a sorcerer, moved various needles and mumbled the names of capitals. He had spent the afternoon installing an aerial and checking batteries. He'd offer up his headphones, rip them out to check for a sound, a small, independent horn that served as a loudspeaker, connected by a wire to the magic box, and all that came out were interspersed sounds that sometimes coalesced into plaintive chords, perhaps similar to those of violins.

A little tense, Catherine and Patrice listened for a few moments to these attempts at savagery. Miss Souris seemed to find the young girl's visits natural, inspiring confidence in her, despite her puritanical morals and suspicious temperament. Amid the high-pitched cries of the instrument, the two young people were thinking above all of their day at Saint-Germain de Charonne and of their childish, friendly doubles. Eventually, however, they went outside into the warm night.

The Luxembourg closed its doors in the evening, although they would have liked a garden, and they followed the Seine up towards Notre-Dame. Each of them was savouring this minute of their lives, the temporary happiness granted to them before decisions of life. But without wanting to admit it to each other or to themselves, they could only think of the words spoken that afternoon by the two children, and wondered if they must have had some advice, some premonition. All around them the night was beautiful, and in front of Notre-Dame, black against the rosy sky, for the first time, and like children, they kissed each other on the cheeks.

Later, he knew now, when he thought of that time, which already appeared to him with its old colours, its outdated colours, he would remember forever, he thought, the days when the first love melted over him, icy, burning, breathless. Could he have defined himself, been defined? They were two first names (they didn't even have names), two young people with no identity. He was just a shadow, and she was just a shadow, and were ghosts without lines, without thickness or limits, simply two moments of youth incarnate. He had let a living woman into his comical world of fabulous little puppets, and she herself no longer sheltered the same tranquillity and the same dreams in her family of lyrical tightrope walkers, in the midst of children's battles. But both of them, at night, withdrawn into their personal domains, into what had been their personal domains, their eyes remained open, and without thought, because they were not even thinking of a face, or a name, but of an absence.

So when they met up again, comrades as they had been in the early days, they threw moorings around their boats, they told each other jumbled stories from a confused and childish past, they also tried, while they were at it, to grasp a little of the future, and in this way they hoped to get to know each other better and merge better. They also promised each other a few light pleasures, walks, games, books and music, so as to build on the fragility that is always the most lasting. He ended up reconstructing Catherine's entire childhood, imagining it as clearly as if he had been there, and surrounding her with familiar houses, sun on the water, sea salt, stars in the sky, blue vines and hills.

The house where Catherine's grandmother lived, he knew, was in a small street opposite the church. High and narrow, it had only two rooms on each floor. Unfortunately, the large room on the second floor had never been finished. It stretched out under a terrace, which was poorly built, no doubt prodigiously beyond repair, and when it rained, the rain poured into the room. This had been one of the great joys of Catherine's childhood. Around midnight in August, it was not unusual for a torrential storm to break out. The children, who slept in the big wooden beds stranded like boats across this sort of attic, with no wallpaper and exposed brick partitions, would wake up with a start. For a few minutes, they held out a little hope. But soon the first drop of water came through the ceiling. Then they had to get up. The electricity was almost always cut off in stormy weather. Candles and paraffin lamps were lit, and the whole house began to swarm like a doobby. Sacks were spread out on the floor, and all the buckets, bowls and saucepans were requisitioned. Long experience had taught us where to find the most dangerous gutters. The most important containers were placed underneath them. Then, most of the time, we'd lie back and listen to the different sounds of the rain, low in the empty basins, high in the full ones, muffled on the bags and crystalline on the enamel. In family jargon, this room has always been known as "the room where it rains".

In early August, however, rain is rare, and Catherine and Monique could enjoy it in peace. From two windows, they could see a little of the sky and the church tower. The chambre-qu'il-pleut was by far the most airy and pleasant room in the house, albeit a rather hot one. The flies themselves, terror of the village, only reluctantly went up there, preferring the streams in the street. And on those solemn, warm early afternoons in the south of France, in the shade of the closed shutters, in a room streaked with a ray of golden dust, Monique and Catherine would tell each other funny stories and invent legends about their family and their childhood. But how difficult it was to make Patrice understand all this!

He himself, oblivious to his childhood, which held little interest for him, and almost convinced that he never had one, preferred to rediscover for her the chronicles of the Souris boarding house. And so, in the absence of more substantial presents, they exchanged the illusory gifts of the passing of time and the scenery that surrounded them. The dwarf Théodore continued to seem to Catherine like a strange object, a sort of Oriental hoard, of which she was a little afraid.

- She's a femme fatale," explained Patrice.

- A femme fatale?

- Exactly. Maybe that's why she has a red ribbon in her hair. She cheated on her husband once, everyone at the boarding house knew, and with a Chinese man.

- Because of the size?

- No, he wasn't. He was a Chinese from the North, and it seems that in the North, you can find some very big ones. In any case, this one was a colossus. He was a waiter in a restaurant on the rue Cujas, and he used to come and wait for her after his shift. One day, the dwarf's husband, who had been warned by an anonymous letter, as in the greatest world, left his job and came too. This caused quite a stir. The Chinese man started shouting, but I guess size doesn't help. The dwarf caned him below the knee (I'm not making this up) and the big yellow devil fell like a stone. The gossips went to the police station, the officers arrived, and it was awful. The Mouse girls were terrified. I was laughing my head off.

- And Theodore?

- She was at the window with her little broom in her hand, and I've never seen anyone look happier. A tournament queen. When her husband came into the house, he didn't dare say anything to her. She looked at him with an unspeakable mixture of contempt and admiration, handed her broom to one of the Misses Mouse without a word, and left without even washing her dishes. The next day she came back, didn't apologise, wasn't asked anything, and the Chinaman was never seen again. This is what we call a drama of the heart.

Patrice used to tell him this in a small hall in the rue Boissy-d'Anglas where he sometimes went dancing. Jazz at that time was becoming languorous, after a crisis of relative barbarity, and on the Hawaiian guitars, the blacks were strumming their irritating tunes. In the secrecy of the Pension Souris, Catherine had taught Patrice the elements of the Charleston. He shrugged his shoulders and said it was a ridiculous dance, but in the end he learnt it. Consciously, he clicked his heels together in front of Catherine, who laughed. They were almost alone, in fact, at this time of year, when a few old ladies still came to have their tea and toast in the drawing room on the first floor. But it was all very well, as they were visiting Paris. The evening before, they had eaten *borscht* and *blinis* an K'nam, and then gone to see Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* performed in an almost empty theatre. Leaning over the last balcony of the Théâtre des Arts, on their dusty benches, they watched a ravishing young girl in a pink dress who was Death - and who was soon to die indeed - operate her electrical equipment. Patrice imitated Georges Pitoëff's voice when, wearing a jumper and white trousers, he dismissed the words of Eurydice:

- Don't talk to me the moon! I am the hierophant of the sun.

And they both laughed, because the oracle had made an acrostic prediction, the initials of which formed a schoolboy joke: *Madame Eurydice Revivra Des Enfers*. They didn't take these oscillations between mysticism and mystification very seriously, but that was their time, their youth, their pleasure, and they whispered to each other that Ludmilla was expecting a baby, and that Jean Cocteau was perhaps not as seriously converted as poor Maritain wanted to believe, and that Death's name was Mireille and that she wrote stories and poems, and that the angel Heurtebise was a pretty boy and that Jean Hugo, who did the sets, was the great-grandson of the poet, whom they also thought was a bearded old buffoon.

On the way out, he would recite to her a page of Claudel that he loved, and which she also ended up knowing by heart:

And now someone is always there, even sharing his bed when he sleeps, and jealousy presses and grips him. He was idle and now he has to work while he can,

Carefree and now worried,

And he earns is not for him, and he has nothing left. And

he grows old while his children grow up.

And where is his wife's beauty?

She spends her life in pain and that's all she brings with her. And who will have the courage to love her?

And a man has no other wife, and she has been given to him, and it is well that he should kiss her with tears and kisses. And she will give him silver to marry her.

They were also told that the youth of the time spent their lives in bars, drove around in cars, took drugs and threw money out of windows: they had no money, they drank water, they couldn't drive, and their only vices were avant-garde plays, Russian actors and absolute films.

Around 10 August, Catherine would leave Paris to return to her Mediterranean beach. Patrice would be leaving too, it was their last day. She had warned him that she would not be going home for dinner, and he had told the Misses Souris not to wait up for her. The boarding house was almost empty, and the dwarf Theodore had only the two old maids, Mr Pentecost, Mr Seneca and the irremovable Miss Gorgiasse to serve. The window was left open, and the midgets swirled around the greenish suspension in the shape of a Carolingian crown. With bitterness,

Miss Agatha thought that the dead of the season had come and that the Lord should be praised for having kept a few guests around his table. The air was muggy and evening had fallen. Mr Pentecôte, who had a tendency to be sarcastic, joked about Patrice's absence.

- We ,," he says, "where he's been all day. This pretty student is no stranger to it.
- She's a very decent girl," said one of the Misses Souris.
- And he's a perfect young man," replied the other.
- We have never doubted it," said Mr Seneca and Mr Pentecost in unison.
- You have to let your heart speak," admitted the femme fatale with weary indulgence. There was a

silence, perhaps reproachful.

- Didn't you hear him go into his room just now?
- I don't think so, we can go and have a look," says Miss Mouse the eldest.
- Be careful with that. It would be indiscreet, and as mademoiselle says so well, you have to let your heart speak. Are you quite sure he's there alone?
- Oh, sir!
- But in all honour, mademoiselle.

Mr Pentecôte extended a conciliatory dexter across the table.

- Let us not argue in vain. Science has given us a weapon in our hands, or rather an admirable instrument of investigation, Give me this young man's napkin ring.

Everyone had already guessed that he had once again seized the opportunity for a dowsing experiment. The napkin ring was handed to him, and he pulled some wire from his pocket. He didn't dare be crossed, and besides, it was hot, dinner was over, so why not let the old man enjoy himself as he pleased? It was the hour and the season when people believe in miracles out of weariness, and when, as long as they don't have to get up, they grant everything they wish to fakirs, canvassers, poets and insurance inspectors. The femme fatale even began to tell stories about revolving tables, but Mr Pentecôte sternly rebuked her: revolving tables had no scientific value.

- And you think the napkin ring? ...
- You'll see.

He drew a square on a white piece of paper, representing Patrice's bedroom, and began to move the napkin ring hanging from a thread over it. He stood with his goatee forward and his glasses raised to his forehead, like a boarding Doctor Faustus. A little green glow wandered across his glasses: it wasn't the genie, or the demon, or the soul of a dead person, it was the reflection of the suspension.

- The experiment I'm carrying out here," he declared, "is my own invention. You won't find it described in any conventional dowsing manual. You need to possess a special fluid, which I'm proud to be able to direct at will. But not everyone can do it.

The little man emanated a strong authority, and everyone leaned on the table to watch him do it. one would have had the idea of simply asking to go up to Patrice's room, and, to tell the truth, they didn't even know exactly what Mr Pentecôte was looking for. For genuinely curious minds, moreover, the result is of little importance, and only the method is of interest.

At one end of the square, the pendulum began to move irregularly, as if pushed by the wind.

- We have to be here by the window," said the officiant gravely. There's air.

He drew a line with a blue pencil, indicating the window. Then he continued to move his pendulum. At the opposite end, he indicated that he felt a tremor. At the end of the wire, the log did indeed begin to twitch, and then, after a few seconds, before everyone's eyes, it began to swing slowly, regularly, in fairly wide oscillations.

- As you can see I'm not moving.

It was all the more easy to agree that Mr Pentecôte had often been seen carrying out similar experiments and that, whatever the explanation, he could not be accused of cheating.

- The person we're looking for is standing in this place, which must be the bed. In relation to the window, this seems fairly likely.

Carefully, he moved his pendulum around his imaginary space. Here it moved, here it didn't. Between the place where Patrice's body lay and the wall, he marked out an empty space.

- Is there a gap between the bed and the wall?

- No.

- So we have to assume that the young man is lying on one side of the bed. Next to him, his pendulum has stopped moving. What is there beside him? Empty space or... someone?

There was no answer. By dint of insistence, we ended up seeing, in Patrice's bedroom, a young body of twenty years old, lying in the heat of the evening. Next to him, we quickly imagined another young body, easily recognisable, and without saying it, all those gathered around the table felt moved. For reasons of economy, at this time of day Mlle Agathe lit only one of the hanging lamps. It shone dimly on Mr Pentecost's goatee, the magic clock and the white paper, and in its greenish glow it was not difficult to reconstruct a fable or a legend from the first floor. Miss Gorgiasse sighed, for she was a romantic. The pendulum began to swing again.

- Please note.

It was in fact performing some strange manoeuvres. It didn't turn, nor it swing regularly in a straight line. But it would move in the direction of the bed, from head to foot, then stop, and swing once again, just as regularly, from right to left. Thus forming a cross.

- I've rarely seen that," murmured Mr Pentecost.

About ten times, the pendulum drew the cross in space.

- What does that mean?" finally asked Miss Agathe.

Mr Pentecost sat down, put his thread back on the table, pushed aside the white paper on which he had gradually drawn the ideal image of Patrice's bedroom, lowered his glasses over his eyes, and answered in a very small voice:

- There's a lot of debate on this point, Miss. This sign is sometimes called the Southern Cross. For some, it means... love, and for others, it means that the person or object you are looking for is not there... is absent...

We should have laughed and asked if this was a defeat. But he added a little hastily:

- If I you, I'd go and have a look in the bedroom straight away.

Patrice and Catherine were lying next to each other, clothed and motionless. The door was unlocked. Miss Agathe and Mr Seneca entered the room, apologising loudly. The young men did not move. We approached them and saw that they had fainted.

When they were woken up, it was very difficult to know what had happened. At the end of the day, Catherine had followed Patrice to his room, and they had lain down next to each other. They hadn't touched. But for a long time they had remained like that, motionless, trembling a little, without even putting their hands close to each other. Their eyes were closed. She knew nothing of the turmoil that had overtaken her and possessed her, standing so close to this boy who wanted nothing from her but her presence. He didn't even know what he could expect, and he fought with all his might against the desire to get close to her, to feel her warmth, even through her clothes, to soothe and melt his own fever. It would be futile to think that he was not thinking of more, but he did not want to give in. There is something magical and inseparable about the approach of two clothed bodies.

The first moments of love: resistance, temptation, shame, regret and hope all mingle in this fake, provisional embrace, where light obstacles symbolise so many more irreducible barriers. And because she was pure, when he moved a little and relaxed, she did not guess that he had reached the height of his desire, that he had taken her in a dream and was calming down. Above them swirled their temptations in a cloud, and they closed their eyes, and they were red. And so tense were they, to approach without touching, to melt without reaching, more separated by that little air between them than by the sword of purity of the legend, that suddenly, at the same moment, something broke inside them and, as the old fool had guessed, they were no longer present.

Patrice must often have thought that, even if he lived to be a hundred, and had more adventures than the Man of a Thousand and Three, he would never achieve more completely the realisation of the masculine dream than in those minutes of total annihilation, that possession in purity.

II - LETTERS

Pauline, I'll see that someone else has you
CORNEILLE, *Polyeucte* (Act II, Scene I)

I

Patrice to Catherine

Florence, 3 November 1927.

Sweetheart, this is my first Italian letter. Would you like me to call you sweetheart? That's what we were called in centuries that I like, and we were even called that in pre-war novels. What situation could be more worthy of a pre-war novel than mine? Here I am in Florence, like one of M. Bourget's characters, and a tutor in a family, this time like one of Octave Feuillet's characters. All that's left for me to do is seduce the mistress of the house, marry her daughter, sow anarchy among the servants, revolt during a well-meaning visit, and pile up thick works by sociologists and political chamberdeurs on my work table. Alas, my heart, I have no vocation for this kind of pastime, and Mr Guido Cajuolo no longer has a wife, since he is a widower, and he has no daughter. He only has two kids aged twelve and thirteen, who wear a little police cap like I used to wear myself (it was during the war), and a black shirt like their father. I teach them French, sweetheart; they speak it as well as I do, if not better, and also history and all sorts of things.

I would never have suspected that in the times in which we live, it could serve a purpose to be reputedly hostile (is that so, my God?) to the government of our country. I missed you in Paris last week, and everything happened so quickly that I couldn't tell you the reasons for my departure. You have only seen me in my glorious uniform, and not very often: seven or eight times in the course of this mortal year, and I know so little about who you are and what you do. But you made me swear a long time ago never to speak seriously, and only to laugh when I wrote to you.

As soon as I was released, I went to the Sorbonne to see this venerable bearded man, a bit of a freemason, a bit of a scoundrel, who my uncle knew. Why shouldn't he find me a job? I had my doubts, I confess: I have many friends who spend the summer, sometimes the year in Geneva. All you have to do, I think, is ask for him, and you'll be lodged, fed and paid, on the shores of the lake, as long as you have some vague university title. We'll find that comical later. But you also have to announce discreetly that you mean no harm to the League of Nations or to the regime. I don't know why; I don't have that reputation. I say: I don't know why because my convictions are not so well established. The bearded man rubbed his beard, looked at me with the astonishment of an ethnologist in front of an unclassified ritual object, and suddenly asked me:

- Do you know Italian?

I hesitated for a second; I could have sworn I knew Italian, Chinese, and even mathematics, which are even stranger to me.

- It doesn't matter after all," he said after some thought, "because it's about teaching French.

I was trembling with excitement. He then told me, in discreet terms, that he had just been asked to find a young French tutor for a family in Florence. I understood very well that he had been asked not to accept any declared enemy of the Italian regime. My good man only has a clientele of socialists like himself, future heads of cabinet in a Cartel ministry. He thought he had remembered that I did not share his ideas: I assured him of that, with all the firmness and delicacy of which I am capable, my dear heart. We exchanged vague and nuanced remarks on the difficulty of judging human governments; I gave him to believe that the enthusiasm of youth did not yet allow me to reach his height of vision he was satisfied, and did not understand that I had seen his trap he thought he had his patented reactionary, lodged in a corner of his memory that I could never be of any use to him in France, but he immediately promised me a bright Tuscan future. Only I had to leave immediately. Immediately, or he'd have nothing to answer for, or they'd send to Italy a policeman from Moscow, a Jew, a socialist, a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, a nephew of Paul-Boncour. I packed my suitcase and left, without seeing you again, sweetheart.

Here I am for a year in this city that I have always loved, before I knew it, and which I won't describe to you. You should know, however, that my room overlooks the Arno, which is not considered a favour, as people here fear the water and the fever. But I can see the Ponte Vecchio with its low goldsmiths' houses, I can also see the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio and the Duomo. It's November, and the weather is mild and fine, like some spring days. Yesterday I spent the afternoon at San Miniato, in the little cemetery overlooking the city. There was a bit of mist, but it was so marvellous in its greyness,

in its light! I'm not going to tell you about painters or museums, because you'd accuse me of copying you from a catalogue. I'll just tell you the most beautiful things I've seen here: first of all the figures with their plump cheeks, their blond, coiled hair, their embroidered garments, who, in a landscape full of animals, trees, rocks and bell towers, accompany the Three Wise Men in the frescoes that Benozzo Gozzoli painted for the Riccardi Palace; and also the images of San Marco, so *violent*, so boldly escaped from the world, that Fra Angelico drew with blue and gold.

That's it, sweetheart: here I'll be a wise boy who's been given many treasures and has a whole year to count them. I don't know when I'll return to France: maybe at Christmas, maybe at Easter. All my treasures, all the paintings, and all the cities so similar to the cities in the paintings, don't stop me missing even last year, when I was bored but saw you sometimes, don't stop me missing the tiny characters in the Pension Souris, where you appeared one day. Mr Pentecôte gave me some recommendations for a radiesthesist friend of his who lives in Siena. One day I may go and see him, and I'll find out whether the gentle madness of my old foolish companion can be translated into Italian. But I hope he won't try any experiments on me with a stick made of elm.

I don't want you to go back to Saint-Germain-de-Charonne without me. You will have to be patient - I speak for myself - and wait a while before going back to Patrice and Catherine. But if you go for a walk in any part of Paris where we have been together, don't be afraid to think of me a little. Tell me about your life, tell me about Monique and Isabelle, and the others whose number and names I have never known. Also tell me what the Pitoëffs are playing this year, and whether you are still going to the Ursulines. Don't tell me with whom. But if there's a new dance since the charleston two years ago, name it so I can learn it. That way, when we return to rue Boissy-d'Anglas, you won't be ashamed of me.

On the other hand, I'll tell you how I see this new Italy coming into being, of which we in France are made a scarecrow. I'm sure you'd like it, because it remains graceful. Yes, sweetheart, Italian fascism seems to me to remain graceful, these people are having fun. All these people are enjoying themselves, they are laughing, they look so astonishingly relieved that they no longer fear pillage, revolution and death tomorrow. You will read some very serious books in which they will explain to you who is the leader here and what the regime has done for the worker, for the peasant. It's all very accurate. But what I like is to have such an impression of freedom, to talk to a cobbler who lives near the Place de la Seigneurie, to hear his sweet singing language (I'm already beginning to mumble Italian, you know, in a few days, and at least to understand it). He is happy in heaven, happy on earth, and he loves his city, and he loves Italy, and he tells me about new roads, new houses, as if no country in the world built roads or houses. Other people would find him naive and boastful. I find his pride amusing and sometimes touching. I don't know what the bourgeoisie is like in this country, let alone the famous aristocracy that fills pre-war novels. I don't know if they won't transform the regime of today into something less intelligent and more embarrassing. But I know that the people are delightful, but I learn fascist songs with what I hear is a terrible accent, but I like to see the children having fun together and I like to see them being rescued from misery, filth and begging. You'd enjoy that too, sweetheart, you'd find it a joy, you who love to wander through the districts of Paris, and I still think of the other Patrice and the other Catherine. I sometimes meet them, brown or golden, in the streets of Florence, and it is perhaps they who serve as my intercessors.

There you have my long letter, all neat and tidy, and the traveller does not fail to point out the artistic curiosities and customs of the country. He is a conscientious traveller and has written a solid French composition.

Dont forget it.

PATRICE.

Catherine to Patrice

Paris, 15 November 1927.

My dear Patrice,

I received your letter with great pleasure, because it brought me a little of your voice, your way of being and of making fun, and also because it gave me news of this life, so different and so strange, which seems to me to be yours from now on. I've read a lot of those pre-war novels you make fun of, because they were the only ones I could easily find around me, in nineteenth-century collections, and even though I've forgotten most of them (I have no memory, no brain), even though I find them a bit ridiculous, I treated them with too much respect when I was twelve (I was always allowed to read everything) not to have admiration for you. Yes, you are a character from Octave Feuillet, and from Paul Bourget, and from *Le Lys rouge*, and from Pierre de Coulevain, and from Henri de Régnier, and even, my goodness, a little from Marcel Proust too. You're a Florentine now, as you should be when you're your age, and one day you'll have to introduce me to Florence as you introduced me to Paris.

My life has changed a little, as you already know, since the beginning of October. I think I was right to take this job as a secretary at Darnier. Dad did raise his a bit, thinking it was completely absurd not to apply for a job in education, official or free, when you've been made redundant. But I explained to him that I would earn twice as much money, and that I could give him some to publish the Intellectual History of the Merovingians. The truth is that I don't want to leave Mum and Monique just yet. There will always be time later (I'm always reasonable, as you know) to run off and teach Latin to little girls from Bellon or Castelsarras.

Darnier is a very busy place, which in itself amuses me. My role is simply to write letters and file them, and I'm happy to have learnt shorthand typing as well as Greek and Latin.

Darnier is thirty-five years old. He is a man who has been very rich, who has also been ruined, who wants to return to the first condition, and who is, I believe, on the way. He built Robbes' plane, which made the famous raid last year, with borrowed money and perhaps even, he told me, a little stolen money. I've seen Robbes: he's a big blond devil, whereas Darnier is a little black man. But I like them both, they're brave, very cheerful and very strong. Darnier is surrounded by three secretaries and two typists, and I'm not going to explain to you how the big aeroplane factory he's setting up is supposed to work, because I'm not sure I've understood it all yet. Anyway, everyone here adores him and would cut themselves into four pieces for him. He treats me with a lot of kindness and camaraderie, just like he treats everyone else, and he doesn't seem to think I'm too much of a turkey. He says he has a lot of admiration for Dad, who never resented him for being his worst pupil. I'm making the most of the chance that has brought them together again. Only chance, my dear Patrice, guides life.

I haven't been back to see the Pitoëffs yet. I hear they're going to play *Hamlet*, and I'll tell you what Georges' will be like. But I have been to the Ursulines and the Vieux-Colombier. You may not want to know with whom, but I'll tell you. It was with an office mate, who knew nothing about cinema, and from whom I'm trying to learn what you taught me. His name is François Courtet. He belongs to a tennis club, and he'll probably take me there, if you'll allow me. I used to play tennis, a long time ago. Apart from that, Courtet is a rather serious boy, a bit heavy perhaps, whom Darnier likes, and who is full of sympathy for communism. You'll have to send me some fascist badges. I'll wear them to enrage him, and I'll tell him great stories about Mussolini's social work and the protection of children. I'm not joking, Patrice, and you make me want to come over there and make the little black-clad *balillas* sing and run around. But I don't think that Courtet would displease you. Our great common dream is to succeed in seeing the Battleship Potemkin, and I'm capable of joining a Soviet organisation for that, even if I have to receive your curse by return of post. There is no new dance, and I prophesy that neither the *upa-upa* nor the *black-bottom* will last long.

This is my life, these are my companions. But there's also the one who isn't here, yet who is very close to me. I won't tell you his name, dear Patrice. You'll find him on your own.

Your

CATHERINE.

III

Patrice to Catherine

9 February 1928.

It's been a month, my dearest, since I received anything from you. A month is a long time. And it's a lot longer since I've seen you, since I didn't come for Christmas. I almost hoped to see you a fortnight ago, when Robbes and Darnier were received in Florence: that was naturally rather stupid. But I went to look at them from a distance, since you know them both, as if I could have caught some reflection of your presence in the tall blond and the short black one. All I found was a slightly more vivid sense of your absence.

I would be hypocritical, Catherine, if I said that it prevents me from enjoying this city, but it doubles my every moment. I'm afraid you don't know what absence is, I can't read it in your letters, I can't breathe it in your writing. For those around me, I give lessons to the children in my care, I show a real interest in the Fascist state, I often go to museums and churches, I ride the tram in Fiesole, and on Sundays I even take the train to go to Pisa, which is a solemn and sad city, to Siena, or to San Gimignano. But all that is what I do, not what I am:
I Catherine's absentee.

I can't even say - let's face it, it's been a long time since I received any - that I'm very happy to receive your letters. Because you describe your life to me with such kindness and precision that I don't have much trouble imagining it. And what can I say: this is a life where I am not. By force of circumstance, Catherine, I know that, by force of circumstance! And you say sweet things to me, and you like me, and maybe you just like me, but I'm not with you. You won't be going to see *Potemkin* with me one day (I'll never forgive you if you do), you won't be playing tennis with me. Don't think I blame you for your friends, your parents, that little Courtet, or anyone else. I'm not that absurd, since it's not all me: and it's completely pointless to admonish me, pointless to preach to me a reason that I know as well as anyone else, but which it's impossible for me to practise. We are far away, and it's absence.

I'd like to try and talk to you about something else, my little girl. The other day I went to Siena, and I'm sending you all the pictures I could find. But all of a sudden, in the middle of that beautiful Palio square, which is as hollow as a shell, when the pigeons flew down around me, it was your little image that flew down with them, and I saw you, all straight and serious, beside me. You never left my side when I went into the town hall to look at the Good Government frescoes. I left you all the more because the Lorenzetti painted you, a little faded I admit, but recognisable all the same, in one of their rounds. But it's not about you that I'd like to talk to you, it's about Siena. I arrived there one evening, looking for an inn, as night falls quickly. And after dinner, I went out to discover the city in the moonlight. I got lost, and then, all of a sudden, I found myself in a deserted square, with an extraordinary cathedral lined with flowers and a great unfinished nave, pierced, enormous, like a ruin. At that very moment, a troop of twenty hooded penitents hurried past at a slow trot. Where had they come from? Where were they going? I don't know. They were no longer in the church I entered. They had vanished like witches. But the night, the marble, a little green, a little blue, the desert, the moon, the extraordinary silence, and that stifling city all around, I swear I wanted to leave straight away so as not to spoil that image with others.

And then I went back to my room and found you again. I'm not sad that you're not here, I know it's not possible, I'm not even sad that I'm not in Paris. It's just that I feel as if I'm bumping into you, you see: bumping into you is the very word absence. With my poor forehead, my shoulders, I suddenly hit a wall of glass: it's simply that you're not there, that everything you can do or say, I don't know, and that I can't keep you with me by the little means that are mine. They are forbidden to me, simply because I'm not there, and it then seems to me that I'm escaping from you, that you're letting it slip away like sand, without me ever being able to do anything about it.

As you can see, the poor fellow is sometimes in a very bad way. You mustn't blame him, and you mustn't blame him for rambling either. When I think about it, he didn't have such an attractive childhood or youth. He put up with it because he puts up with everything, and is capable of building a fine puppet theatre with the puppets from the Souris boarding house. But the reality was no less there: we'll just say, O best loved, that it wasn't always funny. And all of a sudden he had this chance, this unique, un hoped-for chance, which doesn't happen to so many men, to meet something marvellous and enormous, which filled his heart and his mind. One month, fate allows him to consider this thing inside him, to caress it, to accept it and make it his own. Then fate pulls the poor fellow elsewhere. Oh, knows its job, it does things well. It him money, books, paintings, it him Italy, my good lady. In short, it

makes him much happier, much richer and much more enviable than ever before. But it also takes away the wonderful thing, the immense thing, the only thing. Let the poor guy wax a bit lyrical, since he's far away. It's no consequence.

I'll tell you everything this evening, since you seem to me to be more absent than ever. I can't even tell you that I'm forgetting some of your features, it's hard to admit, but it's true. You're disappearing, despite the little photo you gave me, what do you want? I can't help it. We knew each other young, and not for very long. You can't expect even the most marvellous things to stick without time. What the hell! Maybe I don't have much of a memory. I may not know what you're like after a while. But if I only meet you by chance in life, oh my beloved...

So you're almost an imaginary character to me now, as silent as a fictional creature. I'm at my window, and I see the lights of Ponte Vecchio, and I hear the Arno lapping, and I smell its silty odour. I'm talking to you the way we sometimes talk to an image of a woman who doesn't exist, and to whom we want to say everything, because we still feel a bit alone, and that we're missing out on life. These are the consolations of absence, oh bittersweet! I'm giving you the most beautiful names I've been able to copy for you from books, as you can see, I'm not even capable of inventing them for you. What's the point, since you don't exist?

I see much more clearly what surrounds you, the walls of my Paris, the theatres, your house, your brothers, your sisters, and also those I don't know. In your office, where you work like a small yellow bee, I can hear you buzzing along with the others, but I see the others and I don't see you. It's because they've stolen you from me so much that they've filled themselves up with your life and your substance, that they've eaten you. Too bad, my bee. Go on making your noise with them. Tell me too, if you like, how your hive is made. If you didn't tell me, I'd be even more miserable than if you did.

I'll send you your fascist badges, those of the girls who work in social services, those of the children, those of the party, and even a little black hat. When I came here, as you know, my opinions were not very firm. I feel closer to these people every day, my faith. Other countries bore me. Does the French conservative democracy turn you on? Or the glorious German social democracy? But I know that Courtet must tell you about the Russians, and Darnier must be one of those people who love industrial reconstruction and make a nice little mishmash of America, the Soviets and Italy. It's all the rage, wherever you think, in this holy year of 1928. My dream, dear heart, is that you will come with me one day among these graceful little people who want to become strong. You will have a swarm of children gathered around you like pigeons, and you will bow your heads and sing. I distract myself as best I can by imagining you like this, in tune with everything around me, young, proud and delicious.

Don't believe a word I say, bitter-sweet, about the advantages of absence. No, I don't want to see you remain imaginary. Write to the absent Catherine. He needs to.

PATRICE.

Catherine to Patrice

12 February 1928.

My dear Patrice,

I've received the poor man's letter, and I'm starting to answer him straight away. You mustn't get any ideas about Catherine, but remember that she's not much in the habit of writing. It's simply that, and nothing else, that has kept her silent since January. But this long letter now seems hard to understand, hard to deserve too. It seems to me that, far from me, Patrice is exalting herself, and giving me names that are too good, and I'm a bit ashamed not to be able to adorn myself with them as I should.

Yet we had sworn to write to each other only light and easy things, to talk less about ourselves than about what we were doing. I think that was reasonable, my dear Patrice, rather than throwing so many things on the fire to make it go higher. I would very much like to write you a wise letter, full of details, in which I would tell you that Darnier has returned from Florence and Rome, and that I too have looked for a reflection of you on him; that he has an important order from the French and Italian governments; that one of the typists is getting married; that I had the opportunity to go and see *Potemkin* with poor Courtet, but that I thought of you, and that at the last moment I told him I had a migraine. He was furious and went on his own. I'm told it's so beautiful, and I'm all the more sorry didn't go without you. But he's not as stupid as you think. I tried to enrage him with Italy. Alas he knows it much better than I do, who am a fool, and fascism doesn't displease him at all. That's what I should tell you, and give you news of my sisters, and tell you that yesterday I spoke to Miss Agathe whom I met in the Rue Saint-Jacques and who asked me to remember her to you.

I would add, to make you really angry, that François Courtet is a very nice man. We went for a walk together the other evening near the Canal Saint-Martin. He told me a bit about his life. He's an orphan, he studied like everyone else, he travelled abroad. If I am to believe his friends, he also had a good time, as they say. I like to think of him as being attached to life and all its pleasures, but he sees these pleasures in a simple way. He plays football and tennis, he goes to political meetings, he likes to look around him. Basically, you'd get on very well together.

I should be telling you that, and nothing else. But your long letter makes me want to talk about you, unfortunately, and I'm going to do my best to tell you what I like and don't like about Patrice.

Am I going to be completely frank, my dear Patrice? You should be, since that's the only point of being absent. I can see you very well, with your nose, your hair and your long walk. But I also see you, since you are far away, as you are deep inside yourself, and your letters help me to understand you better. I'm looking for a phrase to tell me what's so disconcerting about YOU, and I think I've found just one: you don't reassure me.

It's not an unkind phrase, on the contrary, and I've lived too long in an uncertain and delightful world to be insensitive to the charm of insecurity. But it seems to me that every action you take is an uncertain action. It's a very curious feeling. May I have your permission to compare you to others, even though you are quite different? You may give it to me, but I'll take it. Others may have no money, no situation, or a very temporary situation, and be unstable, nervous, changeable: yet they could, it seems to me, give me the impression of knowing how to lean on life. You don't rely on life, my dear Patrice. I'm a little frightened when you give me beautiful names, and when I see you almost taking pleasure in feeling that I'm imaginary. Then everything you do and say, in spite of myself, takes on a meaning that confirms my impression: that you are happy in Italy proves that you are uncertain, and that you love painters, and that you suffer from absence, and that you love it, and that your life in Paris has this insurmountable seduction for you, and that I myself mean so much to you. I sound mean saying it, but you mustn't think I'm mean. You know that I'm just a reasonable little person, who has learnt to like to see clearly in her heart and around her. My old life, my childhood and family life, God knows I love it! But it has taught me, in mysterious ways, to look carefully at how destiny should be turned.

Your affection, Patrice, your ardour, your letters, all this I carry within me and around me all day long, believe it or not, like something wonderful and immense. But if I know its light and its sweetness, I also know its weight. I stop and weigh everything we bring to each other, and I'm sometimes tempted to think that we need to be careful: what if we were to find it too heavy? That's why I didn't want anything but lightness in our letters: you're the one who broke the pact. I am sometimes frightened, Patrice, to think that I am twenty years old and you are twenty-two, and that that is a very small number of years to support and sustain such strong exaltation. Is it natural that I, who have no brains,

without culture, without knowledge of the world and of things, without any price other than a little desire to know myself, is it natural that you have been able to construct so many musings around me? And am I supposed to believe these fantasies?

I'm getting to know Florence a little, my dear Patrice, I've read the books, I've looked at the beautiful pictures, to get a better idea of where you lived, and also an old blue guidebook that was used by my parents, and in which the traveller is warned to pay ten sous for a candle in the hotels. I can follow you along the Arno, in the streets that lead to the Signoria, and in the cloisters sheltered thick, beautiful trees. But I see you there so little attached to the earth, so intent on enjoying the treasures that fate brings you as toys and not as necessities... I see you enjoying this year, and tomorrow enjoying another, and building yourself a sumptuous, luxurious memory with the moments of Paris, enjoying both your pleasure and your pain... Let me worry about that a little, let me wonder at certain times if it wouldn't be more reassuring for me, yes, really more reassuring, to see you, from time to time, forget about me a little. It would be so much more natural.

It hurts me more than you can believe, my dear Patrice, to say these things to you, because I know very well that I am saying them in a clumsy way, and that they will make me judge you falsely. You will think that I don't care about you, that I scare easily, that I'm a petty bourgeois. I may be a petty bourgeois, Patrice, but I do care about you. If that's what I have to tell you, it's done. But I would just like us to be more natural, and I already don't have any more than you do.

CATHERINE.

18 February

1928.

I'm not quite sure I fully understood your letter, Catherine, but I certainly understood the gist of it, and perhaps better than you did. I don't think you were wrong to write it to me. I believe it all the more because to this letter from Catherine to Patrice explaining Patrice to her, I feel like replying with a letter from Patrice to Catherine explaining Catherine to her.

There are a lot of things I could say to her, but first of all I'd like to say that I'm afraid she's light. I like lightness in things, in actions, in life. I don't like lightness in people. I don't like it when everything a little above the level seems to offend and hurt Catherine. Are you light, my little girl? In all those words you said to me, which you yourself realised could hurt you and me, did you understand that this lightness was the most dangerous thing? I'm not trying to take much credit in this world or the next, Bittersweet. It may be that I make middle-class families feel insecure, that you are more reasonable than I am, that I have no position, no future, no strong taste for anything, that may be. But I'm very attached to a singular virtue, which can't be that widespread: I pay attention. I pay attention to myself, to life, to others, and especially to a little person who, I'm afraid, doesn't know how to pay attention, and doesn't like the attention he gets.

Deep down you reproach me for believing in you too much, for giving you too much space, and you fear being caught in a net of passion and care that no longer lets you be yourself, that no longer lets you be free, dear feminist. But what can I do, if you came into my life as a boy at a time when I wasn't expecting you, when I could have done without you, bittersweet? Or I could have waited a few more years, enjoyed life, enjoyed the innocent beauty of the gardens and the day, and the games, and even the women, I can tell you. But I wasn't of age, and she arrived very early, like a thief. The Gospel says that you have to keep your lamp ready: I'm very young, and I don't even know if I had a bit of light. But never mind, you came along when I was still in the shadows, and now we have to make do. I too could have been free and carefree. Too bad for me, too bad for you.

I wonder then if there aren't memories of a bourgeois family deep inside you, much more strongly than you think. I know your family, they were poets in their own lives, that is to say, in the disorder, pleasure and intoxication of the imagination. But in the slightest of your words, reasonable bittersweet, I suddenly find a whole lot of old aunts in flanged bonnets, revered uncles, fat cousins, who form one hell of a provincial council and point the finger at me as a boy who isn't very serious. Could it be true? I'm afraid so. I accept myself: this imperious gift from heaven, which I have received, you can say that I put a lot of mannerism and a lot of literature into receiving it. I put more simplicity into it than you, who wonder what heaven wants with this heavy, cumbersome boy, with his arms and legs, his heart, his speech and everything else! I accept my little girl, she's a burden to me too, of course, and I wasn't expecting her. But she's here and I can't send her away. I'm getting used to her presence, her absence, whatever you want to call the fact that she's come into my life, and I do believe that absence is still the most cunning, the most devious, the most pernicious and the most burdensome way to enter a life.

You may well say some very sweet words to me, which are dear to me, and which sometimes come back to my mind to console me. However, I can see that you are light, as light as a little girl jumping rope. You tell me that I don't weigh much on earth: I won't argue with you on that point; I find myself very heavy in front of you, so light, very insistent, very ungracious, and I'm not far from understanding you when you are frightened, so young, and I so young, of so many things that come up between us. But then again, that's the lot of old aunts talking behind you: the lot who have forgotten their youth, the gladness with which we have to accept insistence, bad grace, clumsiness, weight. It's not so much I who am weighed down by everything that brings us together in spite of you: and in the face of this miraculous weight, I am full of respect, whereas you have no respect for yourself, only a very irreverent lightness.

I'm telling you all this in no particular order, and you can understand that I don't have the heart to compose my sentences properly, or to number the logical order of my feelings. If I had wanted to play the game of lightness, I should simply have described to you, every fortnight, my life here, the Tuscan countryside, the small towns, the church of Prato which, under a stone shell, shelters the balcony to speak to the crowd in the square, and the cemetery of San Miniato, and the calm cypress trees in the cloister of Fiesole. I swear I love this fresh Italy that surrounds me, and I love talking to the craftsmen in the suburbs, who have polite, smiling faces, and also to the little black *balillas*, who are not happy about France. All this, one day, will perhaps become less certain. But now, when I write to you, I'm stripping away this charming Italy, I'm thinking only of a dusty, ridiculous world, the one that was mine, where one day that reasonable woman with the big fuse appears, who today, faced with the past, the present and the future, what does she know? is terrified.

And I'm quite sure I'm going to scare you again, with everything I'm telling you and what I'm not telling you, which you can guess. I have a habit of putting my cards on the table and not hiding my game. I know you to be reasonable enough to know that you also lay your cards on the table: I only wish I could match them together.

Let's not talk about it any more, Catherine. We've just said a lot of things to each other. Perhaps that's enough for now. I'll try to become more reasonable myself, and only talk to you about Italy and the Cajuolo children; you can only talk to me about Paris and Courtet. I remember hearing about him a thousand years ago, before I met you, at the Sorbonne. He had friends there. I must even have met him, I repeat, a thousand years ago. It doesn't really matter. After all, I don't care about those around you: I know they must be reasonable, like you are. Like you were the first time I met you, at our school-leaving exam, and you pointed out the easiest essay, which I wouldn't have guessed myself at first.

I need to finish my letter, it's already long enough. Next time, I'll tell you some stories about fascism, which you can tell to your comrades. We talk about everything here, with great freedom. Perhaps they won't understand, because the little people are mocking, and it's easy to deceive foreigners. But I don't want to amuse you today. Just think a little about

PATRICE.

10 March 1928.

I let a little time pass, my dear Patrice, before replying to you, but all these days I haven't stopped thinking about you and your letter. On the face of it, I too continued to lead my own life, but I really don't think I was there. You upset me at first, but I think you were right to write to me frankly, and today it even seems to me that you were right altogether.

I imagine that it has always been a great insult for people of our age to accuse each other of having a bourgeois mind. So you think I didn't find your reproaches pleasant, even though I was the first to say the word, and I even read in it a great injustice. But then I got used to it, and now I'm wondering whether there isn't something in this decried term that corresponds quite perfectly to what I am and what I want.

You know a little about my life, and you know that in the eyes of serious people, my family is considered to be the very antithesis of the bourgeois spirit. My whole childhood was spent in a sort of exquisite bohemian milieu, but bohemian nonetheless. My father, whom I adore, has never done anything but follow his fantasies, and as much as he loves us, I wonder if he really prefers us to his dreams, to his baroque civilisation of jewels and massacres. My mother has always spent her time acting as an ambassador between the bohemian world and the world at large, and I think she has accepted a very difficult life with a lot of smiles. Neither my father, nor I, nor any of the others suffered from it, and that was precisely one of the forms of her particular genius. I think that deep down my mother is in a great deal of pain, that she has perhaps, that she has surely suffered, without telling us, from the lack of money, the lack of security, and even from ailments so simple that we never talk about them (the cold, hunger). All this under a light, courageous and smiling exterior, because there were children, his particular notion of dignity, and that unbearable and wonderful man, my father. However, what appears charming, picturesque and whimsical from the outside, runs the risk of appearing a little heavy from the inside: fantasy, my dear Patrice, is surely the most densely populated material in the universe.

So, yes, really, in the face of your speeches, in the face of your exaltation, in the face of your desire to take from life only the delicious moments, in the face of your refusal to look for anything other than these moments and to worry about more practical necessities, I wonder if a petit-bourgeoise has not arisen in me. I say have arisen, because only last year I would have been indignant at such an accusation. But I spent my whole childhood supporting the charms and the weight of a fantasy, of a submission to the delights of the imagination, of a cult of prize moments, and faced with a different fantasy, I might well realise that all this would only half correspond to myself. That's what you call the lot of old aunts. It's not impossible that I'll suddenly wake up their authentic niece.

I'm not very proud of myself for telling you this, but if it's true, isn't it better for both of us to know? I greatly admire my mother and what she has managed to do with her life and ours, this often threatened masterpiece. But I wonder if I could do it myself.

Don't think of this, my dear Patrice, as anything other than my desire to explain myself to you. I am still your

CATHERINE.

VII

Patrice to Catherine

15 March 1928.

What complicated things you're telling me, Catherine! To read you, you'd think I was some sort of brainless bohemian, hated by bourgeois families, a barfly with no future, no position, not even - horror! the slightest diploma, in short, the monster that young girls to be married are terrified of. When I, too, want to become lucid and reasonable, I ask myself what I have done to deserve this, and I don't find out. That's not how I would describe myself, Catherine, if I had to paint my portrait for the matrimonial ads in *Candide*, and I assure you, my dear petite-bourgeoise, that I am a 'fine young man in every respect'.

But why look for excuses? The more you explain yourself and the more you distance yourself, the more shapeless, transparent and small you become. Our letters, if anyone else read them, would seem to be written in a strange fog, where it's less and less clear what I am and what we do. But every now and then we have to pull ourselves together and see things more clearly. Why not put things more simply? I'm boring you, you've had enough of me.

I'm the one who's not angry with you.

PATRICE.

VIII

Catherine to Patrice

20 March 1928.

What do you want me to tell you? What do you want me to know myself? We only know one thing for sure: we met by chance, two years ago at the beginning of the summer, and we spent about a month together in the streets of Paris that I can never forget, and that you, who are trying to hurt me and diminish me, don't even know what it was like for me. After that month, we disappeared from each other's lives. You were twenty and I was eighteen. I wonder, Patrice, if this marvellous island could have been something other than an island, if we really were not a little too young, and if above all we could have known each other. We don't know each other. Patrice, we don't know each other, that's what we have to keep telling ourselves, and it's only natural that we should bump into each other now that we're strangers, a bit like travelling acquaintances who meet up again and no longer know anything about each other.

I don't want to believe it's for ever. There has to be time between us, that's all. Time comes by itself, you just have to wait for it.

Let me not write at length. Easter is near. Are you going to come to Paris? I think it would be useful to us in many ways.

Your

CATHERINE.

IX

Patrice to Catherine

25 March 1928.

I won't be coming to Paris. Contrary to what you may think, I don't think it's useful now - quite the contrary.

PATRICE.

Catherine to Patrice

This great silence, my dear Patrice, must be broken. Two years ago today, on the stairs of room Z, we met and we were preparing to go for our first walk in the woods together. A lot has happened since then, including your cold, harsh words at Easter, when I think it was you who stumbled and didn't quite understand. What was there to understand? Probably not much, and I don't want to go back over the past.

On the contrary, I'd like to talk to you about the future. My dear Patrice, I'm getting married. I'm going to marry François Courtet, probably in October. I won't tell you that if I had seen you again at Easter things would have been different. It's quite possible, I don't know myself. But now that I've made my decision, it seems to me that it's the right one for me.

Now that I've written these words, which seemed so difficult, I don't think I can add anything else, or that it would be very useful. François Courtet is twenty-six, I'm twenty, we're both not very old, but he gives me a sense of security that I probably needed. It would be pointless, I think, to give you any more details about my future life. I'm not sure you'd like it.

I would be ashamed to write the sentences that come to mind, because you might not believe them to be sincere. I must tell you, however, that I have experienced more joy and even pride in being your bittersweet than I probably will in the rest of my life. I won't add that I never want to forget it. Perhaps I won't forget it, but I'm going to try as hard as I can not to remember it. That seems wiser and more honest to me.

It would be quite extraordinary if we never met again. On the contrary, I believe that it will happen one day: it should then be with calm, with pleasure, my dear Patrice. We are too young to know what the future will bring, and even the ceremonies, the gestures and the behaviour we should adopt in its presence. We shall see. I haven't lost faith in you or in myself.

And I sign, once again, Patrice, *your*

CATHERINE.

(Draft not sent.)

The words that recur in your letter: wise, reasonable. I was right to think you were a petit-bourgeois. Security.

And then, what a curious thing: youth. I love my youth, I think it's a miraculous gift, that we should enjoy it, breathe it in, drink its fragrance and hurt ourselves on its thorns. But you are afraid of youth. At twenty, to be afraid of your youth, I can't imagine a more terrible fault. To be there like a little girl beaten and scolded, with all the old relatives who are afraid of youth, and to find that they are right. It's extraordinary. I'd never imagined that you could experience a feeling like that.

Basically, that's the whole secret. You may like Courtet, I don't know. But above all, he doesn't seem *as young* to you as I am. As if being young were a danger you had to guard against, as if I had rabies or the mange, as if youth were a contagious disease. Vaccinate yourself against youth. My surprise is perhaps even greater than my grief.

Absence. We don't know ourselves, we see ourselves through a haze, and letters are such imperfect mirrors that we have only a fragmentary idea of ourselves. To know people through their letters, what an idea! We were absent, and you were afraid of youth, that's all. You'll have to teach Courtet, who, however full of security he may be, may be ignorant of these basic truths.

Too bad, bitter, too bad. I don't think you'll tell him two things that are ours for ever, ours and that youth of which you are so afraid. We too had our wedding, one summer evening, so strong and so powerful that we celebrated it at the very gates of death and annihilation. We too had our middle-class Sunday with our children, in a beautiful working-class church in Paris. These are our two possessions, my two possessions, the ones that I will come to show you in a dream, until your dying days, if I wish, and that you will be obliged to recognise.

But no, I don't have to tell you that. I have to tell you that I hope he gives you such lovely presents, and then so be it! Never mind, Catherine!

I would have liked us to be happy.

III - JOURNAL

*Out of curiosity, I wanted to get to know them:
They are thought to be sorcerers master is hell.
CORNEILLE Polyeucte (Act IV, Scene VI).*

18th October 1935. - Seven years ago. It was exactly seven years ago today that my life underwent a fairly major transformation, which others might find romantic, but which seems to me to be banal. And yet, in this little shop in Erlangen where they speak French, I've just bought two black notebooks with a golden eagle on the cover. They're similar to the ones carried by the legionnaire Siegfried Kast, and that's probably why I'm starting to write in them. But already, in this German peace, in this inn where I am waiting for Lisbeth, it seems to me that the legionnaire Kast, and the Legion, and five years between Erfoud and Marrakech, are even further away from me than what preceded the Legion. Which is saying a lot.

Seven years. I came back from Italy very distraught, more distraught than I'll ever be, I can tell myself now that it's over. In the years that followed, I would never have had the idea of writing down anything about myself: a card every six months to my uncle, for the three years he was still alive, and that was my only link with the world. Today I need black notebooks marked with a golden eagle, and a German family who spoke French. It also took this date of 18 October to see me again in a small office in the rue Saint-Dominique, where I was waiting with two dozen men for a major's decision. I had spent my summer in Italy, near Naples, and in Venice, without wanting to return to France. I had a bit of money left, and no doubt many possibilities. And then I was twenty-two. Did the army appeal to me? Not at all. I could have got in quite easily, back in the second lieutenant's uniform from my year of service. How romantic! Twenty-two years old, what they call 'heartbreak' in the evening papers, and immediately the big game, sacrifice, the Legion... What can I do, if it's mine, this romanticism? Eight years ago today, I regret nothing.

There wasn't much talking in that office before the medical. I remember two or three sickly men, so sad, so discouraged and so weak that you wondered how they could ever have hoped to be soldiers. They were holding their papers in their hands, or what served as papers. Almost all of them were French, although there were two Germans and a Russian. Their worries were brief:

- Will I be picked up? Will I be eating tonight?

I had no reason to have the same fear (I'm talking about the second one). Yet I was just as anxious as they were. I was taken in, nothing was asked of me, I didn't try to disguise myself, my romanticism didn't go that far. I'll always remember that on the way out one of the sad, lanky men who'd been turned away came up to me and stammered. I gave him what I had on me, two or three francs, which he took with immense astonishment. But what did I need money for? He had been to war, and ten years later he wanted to go back to the slaughter of his youth, not for pleasure, but because he had to live. Today he may be dead.

The depot in Marseille, the journey, everything is blurred in my memory. All that remains is the image of that little green-paper room on rue Saint-Dominique, those men tired beforehand, and then suddenly the arrival of a column of 4th Foreigners, led by fifes, drums and horns, on the Djemaa El-Fna square in Marrakech, under a November sun that seemed harsh to me.

19 October. - My African visions have been fairly quiet for the last three years. I don't know why the black notebook with golden eagle brings them back to me with such force. Romanticism hasn't been with me as long as I'd hoped, perhaps, in the five years I've been involved. And yet I never felt blue. But strict, hard work and enormous physical fatigue left me little room for lyrical tenderness. No blues, no boredom, no regrets, no enthusiasm either. A life that left little room for thought and feeling, and, after all, I couldn't wish for anything better. On that point, I haven't changed. If I were a convict, I think I'd be interested in the landscapes of Guyana. The roads we built are as dear to me as the most immortal work of art. But if the tourists who use them ignore the effort that went into building them, I'm still capable of seeing something other than the effort. One day I will return to the four capitals, white Rabat, grey Fez, green Meknes, red Marrakech. This is my country, the one I helped build more than any other on the planet.

When I arrived, the tunnel on the road from Midelt to Erfoud had just been completed. It bears the seven-flame grenade and an inscription: "*The energy of their muscles and a fierce will were their means*".

20 October. - It was on the Place Djemaa El-Fna that I really got to know Siegfried Kast. I was walking alone, in the early days. Against the grey Franconian sky, I only had to close my eyes to see the square again at six o'clock in the evening, with its snake charmers, its storytellers, its barbers, its goat or canvas tents, and to breathe in the scent of the "Moussa", the "Moussa", the "Moussa", the "Moussa", the "Moussa", the "Moussa" and the "Moussa".

cumin and grilled sausages. A little Arab matchmaker had just approached me, offering me women, and when I refused, boys:

- These are Chleuhs from the mountains. More beautiful than women. Americans give up to a thousand francs for one night. For you it will be five hundred.

I laughed, a little surprised, not yet used to Moroccan prostitution, with its frightening and naive venality. Soon there were ten of them around me, chirping away. A tall blond legionnaire would look at me, approach me and playfully chat with them. Finally, the little Chleuhs from the mountains, we would have had them for forty cents apiece, if we had been so inclined. But we preferred to go and drink glasses of tea in an infamous bouchon, at the entrance to the souks, and eat pieces of grilled goat and mutton strung on a wire. Siegfried spoke in a rather slow voice, in excellent French. He had been a legionnaire for a year already. I knew him for three years, and he was a good comrade. It's because of him that I'm here, and yet I haven't seen him very often since I came to Germany.

I still remember the evening long ago, in 1932, six months before his release, when he told me what little he had to say about his commitment to the Legion and the future of his country. It had been stiflingly hot and grey on the road where we were working, and the night, as often happens in Morocco, was almost freezing. I was exhausted, but I listened to him speak, in his thick Germanic voice, without seeing his rough, sun-aged face.

In 1927, when I joined your Legion, I'm not sure I didn't doubt my country. You don't know what it's like. Yes, you will tell me that we had already begun a very patient, very slow, very sure task. I'm not a historian, I don't know how to weigh up the merits of the dead. As far as I was concerned, my country was defeated, all attempts at recovery were petty and maudlin, the Socialists were the masters of the nation, the Jews were everywhere. You didn't know Berlin, the petitions to authorise marriages between men, the women in boots and riding crops on the Kurfurstendamm, the morphine dispensed almost openly, a dreadful mixture vice and ridicule. And all the rot philosophy, literature, music and cinema. Perhaps you enjoyed it from afar. You could have, you were far away. But up close! And not a hope. My best friends imprisoned when Rathenau was murdered. Only distance and chance prevented me from taking part. There was hope on the horizon. There was a lot of talk about your Legion in my country - inaccurately, in fact. But I understood what it was, I wondered if I wouldn't find there a school that I needed, a more breathable air. So I left.

It was undoubtedly the first time I had come across this applied, serious way of looking at life that the Germans have. Siegfried Kast didn't tell me, but I was quite sure that he had left, alone, abandoned, an unsupported volunteer, to *study* the Legion, to learn all he could from it that would be useful to his country, like others would do a thesis on a difficult subject. He told me this half-heartedly, under the cold sky, which would soon be burning, after a day of exhausting work in which he had been nothing but a conscientious legionnaire like the others. But he added

- In a few months, I'll be returning to my country. Like so many others, I haven't abandoned my friends and relatives from the old days. They send me books, newspapers and letters. I can tell you that the years of purgatory, as you Catholics say are going to be over. The year will not end without great events. You French only want to believe in things when they happen, and even then.

At that time, I stubbornly refused to read newspapers or know anything about the world. However, it was in the luggage of the legionnaire Kast that I saw books and newspapers that have since caused a stir. And yet it was he who first told me the name of his boss. The year 1932 will not pass... he told me. He wasn't far wrong.

26th October. - It's hard to avoid literature when talking about the Legion, and it either amuses or irritates legionnaires. However, literature is as much a part of the Legion as anywhere else, and that's where I immediately learnt the most classic stories, the ones that run through journalists' investigations and books. Yes, they still talk about this cousin of William II, whose body was recovered from a German warship towards the end of the last century. Yes, they're talking about a Scandinavian prince, a former convent superior, and there's no shortage of legionnaires to fill the skulls and 'tie up' the slightest passer-by in need of romance and heroism. Over a 'godet, in a square in Casa or Guéliz, I have heard or told myself a hundred crazy adventures, with the utmost seriousness. And some of them were true. The secret of the Legion is to give an exact and strong basis to words and ideas that have been wasted elsewhere.

The military lyricism itself is not the invention of a chronicler. It is a fact. And they are facts too, the desires and dreams that have brought so many men from all over the world to the Algerian or Moroccan south, from so many equivocal little bars. I've never met a Russian prince, or a cousin of the Kaiser, or a defrocked bishop, or even a murderer. The Legion is not that romantic. But the fact that all that is possible there gives it its power of exaltation, the power I was looking for at the age of twenty-two, when discipline and the hardest submission to reality were going to be just as necessary supports for me.

I remember a legionnaire from Béarn, Laboueyre, who had joined up after the armistice and who had fought against Abd el-Krim a few years before. He used to say some pretty terrible things to me, which he knew I only half believed. He had known Klems, the German non-commissioned officer who fled one fine day in 1922 to take command of the Rifans, and who was known as El Hadji Aliman. He was not alone, moreover, and some legionnaires, inflamed by the example of this intelligent brute, who had become chief of artillery and master of a sort of harem, had joined him in the Rif. Laboueyre told me that he had met two of them.

- We killed them and buried them, without saying so. They mustn't be seen. One of them was married. I wrote to his wife. She wrote back.

Laboueyre scandalously told me that Klems' companion was still wearing the white-sleeved kepi. He knocked them out with an iron bar. There was a lot of killing in Laboueyre's stories, always for honourable reasons, and generally out of modesty.

28th October. - I never gave much thought to Germany before I met Kast, and even, I might add, before I came to live there. But if you think about it, Germany has been part of everyday life for almost all French people for many weeks now. Before the war, during the war, since the war, are there many men or women in my country, happy or unhappy, who have not stumbled, at least from time to time, over the name of Germany? I myself, who thought nothing other than what was thought around me, could not help but feel it present. Today, I find it quite natural to live there, as natural no doubt as it was for Siegfried Kast to be in the Legion, and perhaps with feelings that are not so contrary to his own - to study it. It may come in handy one day soon.

I didn't receive any news from Kast for the whole of the year that I was without him, the legionnaire Blanchon of the 4th Foreign Service. He had forgotten me, I thought, and however little I knew about political events, it would have been difficult for me to ignore the change of regime in Germany. This event did not surprise me: Siegfried had told me about it and, to tell the truth, many French people my age had been waiting for it since the war. We were fooled a lot, but some of us saw through it right from the start. Then, one day in September 1933, I received a letter from my comrade. I know," he said, "that you are going to be released. I don't think you're going back. Nor do I think you know what to do with your work. If you have nothing else, come to Munich. This is my address. I'll be honest with you. I have nothing to offer you in the new regime, you might not accept, and you know very well that we want Germans in Germany. But there are French chambers of commerce here that are happy to maintain good relations with us. In Munich, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Bavaria and Saxony, I know them all. We'll offer you a position as secretary, and you could become general secretary in a year or two. I repeat that this is a purely French organisation.

Siegfried did not add that *it* was undoubtedly preferred that the presidents or secretaries of the Chambers of Commerce should be neither Jewish nor socialist. Which, all in all, is quite natural. But it's true that I wasn't asked to do anything else. As he had foreseen, after a year in Dresden, I became Secretary General of the French Chamber of Commerce in Nuremberg. Abroad, these are things that have a certain interest. The Germans have always respected, welcomed and treated the French well: to this can be added the fact that I am a comrade of Siegfried Kast. But I only saw him again in Munich when I arrived, and once since. His protection is discreet, if not secret. And I haven't been back to France since I came back from the Legion.

30th October. - I can hear this little German girl playing next door. I call her a little girl, she is indeed nineteen, with two plaits and a round blond face, but with deep black eyes inherited from an Italian ancestor. People here must know what my relationship with Lisbeth is, but we're not causing a scandal, and perhaps they're not unhappy about holding on to me like this, about uniting a passing Frenchman, who is friendly and pure Aryan, to German soil.

She's sweet, I can't find another word for it. Sweet to caress, sweet to hear when she sings, sweet when she brings me flowers and when she laughs. She has a place in my life, a small but secure place. I have to admit that I don't often think about her when she's not there, but that's also because she's often there. She doesn't live with me, she lives old Nuremberg with her aunt who took her in; she's studying to be a teacher, she tells me, but I'm not sure. She comes to see me, we have dinner together, and then we leave by car for the countryside or the small towns nearby. Last year we spent Christmas in Bamberg, and it was the first time I'd spent several days with her. I discovered that what I liked about her was precisely her tranquillity, her transparency. She doesn't get in my way, she breathes next to me, she enjoys herself. She's a child.

Sometimes I impose another image on the world around me, another girl, a brunette this time, another lithe body, resurrected from the distant past. But I dismiss the image. The most recent one is enough for me. She's my German wife. Her part is small, but it's her part.

16th November. - I saw Siegfried again. He came here with Julius Streicher. We spent two days together drank a lot of dry Franconian wine, which leaves the head free and cuts the legs. I sent my German girl away. Siegfried and I still speak French, just as we did in the Legion. He has put on a little weight, but his face has lost the tiredness of yesteryear, and he is now a young blond giant, younger than he looked in Erfoud. In action, he seems to have simplified himself, in a way that others would no doubt find regrettable. But it's the subtleties, the refinements, that don't really matter.

did not suit Siegfried. It was to escape them that he had joined the Legion, and to escape them and make them escape that he recognised his party and his country from the outset. Today, he repeats Goering's words to me:

- When I hear talk of culture, I reach for my gun...

When you see what so many others have done with this culture... But sometimes I think with a little fear of my country, which did not see this strength grow up alongside it, and which even today ignores it and disfigures it. Siegfried was a Kast legionnaire, and he speaks of France with sudden enlightenment. Of course, he would fight her if his party ordered him to; but he has got to know her. I'm here for a few years in a kind of German Legion, less harsh than the other. I too am getting to know Germany, which will perhaps not be in vain in the future, when its eternal nature will pit us against each other.

17th November. - After the first night when he had spoken to me about his country, Siegfried had mentioned Germany to me several times. I got into the habit, which I've kept, of calling him by his first name, which is obviously not customary in the Legion, but simply because his was beautiful. Siegfried is several years older than me, and many of his friends are even older.

- They told me about those mysterious years after the war. Imagine a day when we learn that we're fighting in Silesia, against the Poles. Hermann jumps on the train and runs. And there he meets other young people, strangers, who are also going to Silesia. And at the same time, whole trains of young people from all over Germany set off for Silesia. Without reason, without purpose. Just as spring calls the beehive, as autumn calls the storks and swallows to the south. I was too young then. Otherwise, I would have left too. Can you see the beautiful migration of German birds towards war and the resurrection of the homeland?

- What happened to Hermann?

- Killed by Marxists in Berlin in 26.

All this stood out for me against the backdrop of the canvas tent, against a sky of fire, and I saw the shiny asphalt, the fog of Hamburg, the sad, troubled years of post-war Germany, as so many films had shown it to me when I went to the cinema. Today, by way of compensation, it's the fiery landscape of Morocco, where I fought dissidents, where I made roads with a German legionnaire, that is inscribed for me on the humid Bavarian sky, and on the romantic little towns, with their moats, their turrets, their Gothic sculptures and their red swastika flags.

18th November. - Sometimes, though I want to forget everything, I think of our conversations in 1926, when I was trying to share my confusion with a young girl. How long ago that year was! I have to make an effort to remember the price of books, the price of the metro, dances and fashions. It's true that I don't know if everything has changed so much in my country. But we were running, greedy, towards the pleasures and troubles of the spirit and the world didn't have the same smell, the same colour. Across the planet, human beings were not governed by the same myths, and I admire the fate that led me through the amiable anarchy of those years, then sent me to be educated in the first-born of the new nations. I tried, timidly, to explain it to myself and to the young girl, the land of black shirts, songs and exaltation. My eyes are still there today. *A little Cajuolo died in Ethiopia.* Already a soldier, how time flies! I see his thirteen-year-old smile again, in his big brown cheeks, and I see Florence again, red and green. The evil of the century, fascism, has taken on a different colour here. But I no longer have anyone to explain it to.

Would his images appeal to the young girl from Saint-Germain-de-Charonne? Could she give them to the two children in the cemetery, to the bronze philosopher who was, like another, but less illustrious, "a house painter"? The thick-set boy she married is no doubt now going to anti-fascist meetings, and she follows him, speechless, she follows him, amazed, just as she used to follow everything I said to her. It's true that at least I brought her Florence and Siena, an accessible world. Today's world is more closed and remote. What would she make of it?

on year, all these things have become more important, it seems to me. But maybe I'm wrong.

19 November. - There's a lot more fun to be had in Germany than the anti-fascists in my country think. They even make fun of the regime, without believing the mockery, as they should. The other day, in a cabaret, the songs were interrupted by the sound of dishes being washed backstage, and each time the singer said:

- It's Goering again who must be kicking himself with his decorations.

There is a lot of humour about the overwhelming plebiscites.

- Another one where the government got 99 and a half percent. It's strange, though, all the people I meet are in the half per cent range.

Icy silence. Perhaps the audience is waiting for a schuppo to stop the impertinent man. But he advances on stage, and with a dry smile, he announces:

- Joke authorised by the government.

Germany is thought to be bowing under the yoke of fear.

I find it curious to discover a sometimes delicious irony, which worries me more than passivity.

22 November. - They don't want war: it doesn't matter what the people want, that's what I always tell them. They'll do it to us if they have to, and we'll do it just as well.

The key is to look at ourselves as future combatants. But they don't understand at all that the French have a certain reticence in the face of the Germans. They naturally saluted with their swords, but they could not understand why the French felt that the situation was not quite equal. Two Verdun combatants agreed, and even polite each other on the respective value of their weapons: "No, your shells were more to be feared. - No, no, they were yours. Everyone is convinced deep down that there are only two soldiers in the world, the French soldier and the German soldier. However, when I hear a Frenchman and a German from Verdun talking about "their" war, I know that deep down the Frenchman is saying to himself: after all, Verdun was my home, and that this reserve prevents him from giving himself entirely to the pleasure of chivalry and reconciliation after the battle; and, quite naively, the German does not understand this reserve.

I don't believe that people can ever understand each other. I do not believe in rapprochement, either by the elites or by the masses. I believe in prudence and I believe in necessity. It's a question of grasping both.

23rd November. - It seems to me that Siegfried has a real friendship for me, but is he my German friend? I don't think so. He is my legionnaire comrade. Not that I'm not passionately interested in his metamorphosis from French legionnaire to young Nazi, district chief, speaker at anti-Semitic meetings. He does everything he does, as always, with a kind of conscience, honesty and rigidity all at once. I'm not even bothered by any narrowness that he obviously intended, because he's well-educated, lightly ironic (without the slightest heaviness), and he's experienced post-war European Germany. But that's not what links us. I could find that in someone else, and indeed I do. What binds us together is the sound of a vanished fife, it's a filthy café where people drink mint tea on mats, it's a squalid tent where people make love to yelping, motionless women on the way back from long tours, it's a road under the yellow sun, and the dull sound of a bullet that just crashed into a palm tree. Then the Nazi of the Third Reich suddenly falls silent, and we understand each other.

14 June 1936. - I watch events in my country from a distance. Some French people passing through have come to tell me that, since yesterday, they have been refused French money in hotels. "We don't know what it will be worth tomorrow", they are told. The Germans speak with discretion. I asked one of them: "But why would you want a strong France? You can't be sincere". He thought about it, and I don't know if it was with irony that he replied: "We prefer a strong France. A weak France is too great a temptation.

In any case, the temptation is taking shape. I can't really take this Popular Front seriously. However, factories occupied and nationalised. I think of what I've read about the pre-fascist years in Italy, when the workers kidnapped the technicians in the streets in order to run the factories they had taken over and where they had established Soviet-style discipline. And these photographs of metalworkers playing the accordion in the courtyards look rather like those Russian films that were all the rage at the time when I wanted to see Potemkin.

10 August. - The game is winning everywhere. The generals have just revolted in Spain, and this war for which so many people around me are bursting into flames, at first I thought it was just an ordinary *pronunciamento*. But no, it's still a revolution. To think that there was a time when I sincerely thought that our era was flat and that we were too late!

5th September. - It's been a long time since I took up the black notebook with the golden eagle. But who am I going to talk to this evening about my meeting and the most buried past, the past I fled to Morocco and Germany? When I went to the station earlier to receive this delegation of French businessmen, I didn't think I would meet Mr Seneca. Did I even know that he was a businessman? But his whims have pushed him towards a kind of small bosses' unionism, and he is a well-known figure, he told me, in the watchmaking industry. So much for the character! I know from experience that it's not difficult to become something when your only role is to chat. Mr Seneca was sent, along with a few others, to the Nuremberg Congress which opens today, and which I myself am seeing for the first time. This is the work of the commercial rapprochement organisations, and we have inherited five or six olivarius from Paris, as many from Lyon, and a few weavers from the North. But what would compromise Mr Seneca?

He recognised me even before I got out of the car, which was a pleasure after all. He shouted with enthusiasm and jumped on my neck. I immediately went back to the Pension Souris, my twentieth year, the lake in the Bois in the morning, and the small, dilapidated churches of Paris. He doesn't know that I wanted to get away from it all, he doesn't know that, and luckily he doesn't have much of a memory, and he's basically only interested in himself. He has given me news, however, of all the past - or almost all of it. Paris changes even less than mortal hearts and the provinces. The Pension Souris is unchanging, the dwarf Theodore still serves there. But he no longer takes his meals there. It seems that Mr Pentecost has found his former wife, that they have both fallen out with Mr Seneca. All this doesn't seem very clear to me, and the old man's explanations are rather confused. But it's enough for me to look, suffer a little, to feel everything that unites us and that he doesn't even suspect. A little bouncy character, the colour of a rat...

Around him, moreover, some picturesque characters, who would amuse me more if he wasn't there. The lady with the big hat, an admirer of the Soviets, Hitler, fascism and whatever else you like, low-blue, low-red and low-brown all at the same time; and the little Frenchmen with their big bellies, some ready to denigrate everything, others ready to admire everything, as exasperating in one role as in the other; and the chatterboxes and the naïve and also two or three attentive and serious figures who make me feel a bit better about the chore of walking them around and showing them the splendours of the Nazi congress.

And then, when I'm looking them, all of a sudden the man in the big hat takes me back in time.

7 September. - One hundred hours," Pierre Raynaud, a French journalist with whom I enjoy talking, told me. One hundred hours with Hitler... That's about how long I'm going to spend in Germany, and in these few days, what can I do but let myself be overwhelmed by vivid, varied, even contradictory impressions, without presuming to judge a country on the basis of such a brief experience? But if you look at the pictures, these Bavarian villages that the train and car pass through, they are set in the middle of charming green landscapes like childlike objects and scenery. The pointed or round roofs, the brown crossbeams of the visible beams, the flowers in all the windows, it is the Germany so dear to the Romantics that greets us first. Perfectly clean, as graceful as a toy from Nuremberg, medieval and feudal, it provides a delightful backdrop for its enormous festivals, in a contrast that may come as a surprise. In the narrow cobbled streets of Nuremberg and Bamberg, along the rivers and canals, beside the cathedrals and the admirable stone statues, it is the old Germany of the Holy Roman Empire that marries with the Third Reich. But I'm not shocked by the millions of flags decorating the facades. No posters here, as in Italy. Just flags, some huge, five storeys high, others smaller, but always at least three per window. Can you imagine this flowering elsewhere? The flag becomes an ornament, so cheerful under this grey sky, which combines with the touching baroque sculptures on the old houses and the flowers on the balconies. We know that these people love flowers, and in the garages, the workers devoutly decorate the bouquet holders on the cars every morning. In fact, this has always attracted the believers of the past, the lovers of 'good Germany, the great Mme de Staël. Flowers do not prevent other, more threatening realities.

It's a fact that there's not a village that isn't decked out in flags on the triumphal roads leading to Nuremberg, during the week when the National Socialist Party holds its meetings in the old Franconian town, the holy week of the *Reichsparteitag*.

These villages decked out for the big party are not a bad introduction to Germany. All that remains now is to enter the magical enclosure and watch the Hitler service unfold.

9 September. - It's a service all right. The parades through the city are not the main part. One evening, from the grand hotel in Nuremberg, we watched tirelessly as groups of SA men in brown uniforms passed under the windows, lit only by the glow of torches. We were candidly asked to go up to Goering's room for this purpose. Can you imagine an orderly service lending M. Chautemps his room to watch the 14 July parade? The Germans found this quite natural and only showed some concern when some jokers expressed their intention of jackknifing the General's bed.

But is elsewhere that the congress reaches its dark and sparkling power.

At Zeppelinfeld, outside the city, an immense stadium has been built, in the almost Mycenaean architecture so beloved of the Third Reich, and to which it was able to give so much grandeur. The stands can hold a hundred thousand people, the arena two or three hundred thousand. The swastika banners flapped and shone in the bright sunshine. And here come the labour battalions. The men of the *Arbeitskorps*, in ranks of eighteen, music and flags at the head, shovels on their shoulders. They leave the stadium, they enter it, the heads of the labour service follow them, bare-chested, then the young girls. The shovels are presented and the labour mass begins.

- Are you ready to fertilise German soil?
- We're ready to go.

They sing, the drum rolls, the dead are remembered, the soul of the party and that of the nation are merged, and finally the master completes his work of stirring this enormous crowd into a single being, and he speaks. When the stadium slowly empties of its officiants and spectators, we have begun to understand what the new Germany is all about.

We must understand him even better, however, the next day, at that unheard-of ceremony that goes by the banal name of calling the political leaders (*Politischen Leiter*). It was night. The huge stadium was barely lit by a few spotlights, revealing the massive, motionless battalions of brown-clad SA men. There are spaces between their ranks. One of them, wider than the others, formed a sort of avenue, leading from the stadium entrance to the grandstand where the Führer would pass. It was exactly eight o'clock when the Führer entered the stadium, followed by his staff, and took his place to the cheers of the crowd. The Austrians were the loudest. We'll see them on every parade, with their rhythmic call:

- Austria salutes its Führer!

The Bavarians smile, look at the diplomatic stands and applaud. One of our companions, just back from Austria, tells me about the Nazis' progress.

- In front of twenty people who didn't protest, I heard a man call his dog. Do you know what he called it? Dolfuss.

But when Hitler entered, the crowd was hardly thinking about it, and was no doubt thinking only of getting drunk on so much pagan splendour. At the very moment he entered the stadium, a thousand spotlights all around the enclosure were switched on, shining vertically into the sky. A thousand blue pillars now surround the stadium like a mysterious cage. They will be seen shining throughout the night of the campaign; they designate the sacred place of the national mystery, and the organisers have given this astonishing enchantment the name of *Lichtdom*, the cathedral of light.

Here is the man now standing on his platform. The flags fly. Not a song, not a drum roll. The most extraordinary silence reigns when, at the edge of the stadium, in front of each of the spaces separating the brown groups, the first rows of standard-bearers appear. The only light was that of the unreal blue cathedral, beyond which butterflies could be seen swirling, perhaps aircraft or mere dust. But there is a spotlight on the flaghighlighting their red mass and following them as they move forward. Are they actually moving forward? One might rather say that they are flowing, flowing like a flow of crimson lava, irresistibly, in an enormous, slow slide, to fill the gaps made in the brown granite. Their majestic advance lasts almost twenty minutes, and it's only when they're close to us that we hear the muffled sound of footsteps. Only silence has reigned until this minute, when they come to a halt at the feet of the standing chancellor. An unearthly, mineral silence, like that of a show for astronomers on another planet. Beneath the vaulted ceiling, striped blue down to the clouds, the broad red streams have now subsided. I don't think I've ever seen a more prodigious spectacle in my life.

Finally, before and after Hitler's speech, which caused a stir in the mute crowd with outstretched arms and shouts, the *Deutschland über alles* was sung, the *Horst Wessel Lied*, in which the spirit of comrades killed by the Red Front and by reaction hovers, and the song of the soldiers of the war:

*I had a mate;
The best I'll have...*

Then there are other songs, created for the Congress, which easily fit in with the cool night, the seriousness of the hour, these beautiful dark voices, and all the musical enchantment without which Germany cannot conceive of anything, neither religion, nor homeland, nor war, nor politics, nor sacrifice.

During the hours I spend in this surprising country, which is perhaps further away from us than the farthest East, I have enough opportunity to be annoyed and shocked not to remember these minutes of spectacle. For all this is not empty, but meaningful. It is all based on a doctrine, an intelligence, a sensitivity, and these grandiose spectacles are linked to a representation of the world, to the hardest ideas about the value of life and death. For those of us who attend as spectators, as infidels who are allowed to share in the beauty but not in the sacrifice, we first need to get our heads around the idea that appearance is not everything and that we need to go beyond that. It is because these ceremonies and these songs mean something that we must pay attention to them and think about what they mean.

10 September. - First and foremost, they mean something to the country's young people. It is to them that everything is addressed here, and one is almost astonished to discover, in the SA that fill the streets, debonair Bavarians, small, pacific, who turn these uniforms into the clothes of a quiet national guard. In truth, we had forgotten that there were Germans over the age of twenty-five - and that it was they who had created National Socialism. But they may have created it, from now on the movement is no longer for them, it is for young people.

We wanted to see these young Germans too. Through the Bavarian countryside, its small villages, its woods (the tree is the German divinity par excellence), we talk to those who are driving us.

Here we are on a small sunken road, arriving at a village of plank houses, and that's the end of our historical controversies. We're looking at a labour camp, like thousands of others in Germany. Only fifteen delegates took part in the parade of shovels. The rest are there, eighty or a hundred nineteen-year-old boys. We cross the fence, the empty courtyard surrounded by huts and flowerbeds. They are, we are told, behind the camp.

They are there, in fact, under the tall birch trees, sitting in the sand, their spades in the distance, - and they are singing. These young people dressed in brown, under the trees, so naturally composed a picture eternal Germany, at the hour of rest, that we stopped, a little taken aback. They explain:

- This is the singing lesson.

Over there, this word certainly doesn't evoke any sweetness, but gravity, virility, calm and powerful love of country, total devotion, all expressed in this mother tongue of the German. In just one of these songs, without which it could be said that the party would not exist (Germany only follows the one who sings), we find all the others, in which the different romanticisms mingle, that of forget-me-nots and that of the new times, that of sentiment and that of war. Lisbeth taught me some of them, which date from the beginning of the movement, and which are hardly ever sung any more

*In Munich, many fell. In Munich,
there were many. It was in front
of the Feldherrenhalle that the
bullets hit them.*

or :

*O brown maiden, why do you
weep so?
- A young officer in Hitler's battalion
stole my heart.
An Oberland regiment marches
A regiment on horseback, a regiment on foot...*

In front of us, we interviewed some of these young people. Almost all of them are from Saxony or Franconia. In a moment, they will tell us their daily routine: get up at five, go to bed at ten, it's a very military and fairly strict schedule. However, in the relationship between these boys (they belong to all social classes), as in the relationship between leaders and subordinates, there is a kind of unity, a rough camaraderie. This was the undeniable novelty of the Third Reich, and Germany's most formidable strength. The *Hitlerjugend*, the SS slept on straw in their bivouacs. Here, there are beds and rooms of rigorous cleanliness, decorated with a large cross (yes: a cross, not a swastika). And of course, all over the place, these boys destined for a harsh life have drawn flowerbeds.

I left the camp under the trees while an orchestra played dance tunes for us, and it was an orchestra again the next day that I would meet up with, this time in the mist and on ground soaked by the night's rain, at the big tent camp of the *Hitlerjugend*. From the top of a plank tower, I could see stretching out into the distance, over the wooded plain, the light shelters where Hitler's teenage years were spent. Apart from the sheer numbers - several thousand children are housed here - there is nothing profoundly different from a Cub Scout camp. They simply rushed to the orchestra and ran to sing, with a kind of hungry ardour that would be unknown to French youth. Only on a wooden stele are inscribed the names of the hundreds of party children who fell to Marxist bullets. A flame burns, a child keeps vigil. We silently salute the young dead. Here again, what strikes me is the nature of the discipline. The militarisation of childhood in Germany is not at all what we thought. Those who come to talk to us approach us cheerfully, fearlessly and of their own accord. I confess that I find this much more serious than caporalism.

But night has already fallen, and we have to go to the SS bivouac at the gates of Nuremberg for dinner. We will be received by Mr Himmler, head of the SS and head of the Gestapo, and Mr Goebbels himself will preside over the dinner. To be honest, the picturesqueness of the camp, of the tents reserved for the Führer's personal guard, only appears so to the naive. The atmosphere of major manoeuvres is the same in every country in the world, as is that of official banquets, even if they consist of sauerkraut, Bavarian sausages and dry Franconian wine. All this would have been of little interest had we not been led, on our way out, to the camp flag. It was the hour when the colours are brought out, a little later than on warships. A bugler played a nostalgic tune, and slowly the red flag with the swastika came down. Such a spectacle is beautiful in any country, no doubt, but here it was part of a whole. After the festival, as after the fire, after the banality of everyday life, it is now customary for the German who lives in a group to be suddenly reminded of the most serious thoughts that govern his nation and his race. Just as the Hitler Youth have their monument, so after this official banquet, which may have been pleasant and vulgar, we are reminded that there is also something else, symbolised by the honours paid to the very symbol of the Empire.

11 September. - The old man is more discreet and perceptive than I thought. If he didn't tell me about Catherine at first, wasn't that he'd forgotten her. It was that he didn't want to say anything. It was I who first asked him:

- You give me news of almost everyone, Mr Seneca. But not of that young girl who came to see me at boarding school last year. Perhaps you've forgotten her?
- No, no, I haven't forgotten her. Not at all, Monsieur Blanchon, not at .
- Her name was Catherine Berger. I loved her very much. I even thought we might get married. But she got married while I was in Italy, to a man called François Courtet. I've had no news of her since.
- I know, I know, Monsieur Blanchon. Do you think I can talk to you about it?

I burst out laughing, and made no effort to do so. My God, it's so long ago, little Catherine, and the dances of 1926, and our pleasures and dreams of those days! He told me that Catherine had taken a bit of a fancy to him, and that she had once told him she was going to marry him. It even seems that she was so upset and worried about me. How women torment themselves over little things, really!

- What's next?
- She is married. I meet her from time to time in Luxembourg, where I go for a walk. She no children. She's happy, I think.
- So much the better, Mr Seneca, so much

the better. He also told me about Courtet.

- I know him, think. He's my client, like Madame Courtet. We chat too, I like to chat, you know.
- he still a communist?
- Communist? Not at all. I don't know if he ever was. In any case, now he's more on the other side. He was even injured on 6 February, in 1934. You know there was a riot on 6 February?
- I may not read the papers, but I knew anyway.

I suddenly think, apart from myself, of little Patrice from Saint-Germain-de-Charonne. Where was he on the 6th or the 9th? Did he fall, at the Concorde, or at Clichy?

- Mr Courtet," continued the old man, "is in a news agency, where he works in the foreign service. It's a nice position, I'm told. I can't remember the name of the agency. Oh, she's not quite into it, I think, but you have to do something for a living.
- I thought he was working for an aircraft ? But in fact, we don't talk about Darnier any more?
- Darnier... Darnier... wait a minute. Wasn't he associated with a British or Australian aviator?
- Robbes, yes.
- Robbes must have killed himself, naturally, many years ago.
- I didn't read the newspapers.
- And Darnier, he disappeared. Ruined, or in South America, I don't know. His employees had to find something else to do. You know, in France now, you can't stay in the same situation for long.
- So it seems.
- So Courtet was very well versed. He knew several languages English, German and even Russian. It served him well at the agency. He even went to Russia once, he told me, just before he got married. That's what put him off communism.
- Before he got married? I don't he'd ever been there.
- Yes, yes, but maybe two or three months, and just before getting married. He must have spent the summer there, sent by Darnier to study aeroplane engines. I heard it was awful the way they treated people there. And I think things have got rather worse, Monsieur Blanchon?
- So they say. I don't know Russia.

Naturally, I won't know much about this chatty old man. Why should I be interested in Courtet? I'm hardly surprised by his political developments. I think with amusement that I was jealous of him, without knowing him, because he wanted to take Catherine to see *the Battleship Potemkin*.

12 September. - By acting like a guide, I end up becoming as naive as the people I'm taking around, as if I hadn't been living in Germany for three years. I have to explain the country to them, and I understand it better by explaining it to them, and I'm surprised by what I tell them.

How could a Frenchman fail to be surprised by the militarisation of women, for example! From five o'clock in the morning, in Bamberg, the headquarters of German girls, rhythmic singing could be heard through the streets, and long female processions could be seen going by, seemingly preparing for a parade that would never come. It's not a pretty sight: those skirts

These greenish, short brown jackets are not always pleasant to look at. And then, do I have to tell the truth? Not to mention the grace that ninety-nine out of a hundred of these Bavarian women lack, I'm not even sure that this regime of forced marches suits them perfectly. They're robust, of course but I've also seen a lot of tired, drawn faces among them. It seems to me that there is a great deal of excess here, - whereas young men are magnificent, almost everywhere, for their health and youthful strength. But women should not be treated in the same way as men at any longitude, and this truth of La Palice's must be untranslatable into German.

13 September. - I wondered what my impression would be of the man who carries on his shoulders not only this Empire, but also this new religion.

I remembered sometimes listening to Hitler on the radio or at the cinema his election campaign in 1932.

This campaign was something unforgettable: the bells, the drums, the choirs, a whole musical magic enveloped him at every moment, in a fever that the expectation of power made even higher. The future chancellor, the Führer of the party destined for victory, began to speak in an almost simple, almost unified tone. Then his voice would swell, become hoarse, fill the whole space with something magical and terrible, and the word "Deutschland" would come back, passionately, every twenty seconds, like a sacred incantation.

Today, Hitler speaks much more calmly. Admittedly, the Germans still get excited when they hear him, and applaud with drunken stoicism when he promises them privations and poverty. Admittedly, his voice seems to move when, as the other day at the *Politischen Leiter* parade, he proclaimed that he was sacrificing everything for Germany, that he would give his life if necessary. But the whole thing gives us the impression of greater moderation. He stopped gesturing, spoke with his hands folded almost non-stop, and the loudspeakers echoed the end of his sentences like a duck's cackle.

I had just seen him two hours earlier, and much more closely. Eighty or a hundred foreign guests had been invited to a tea party at which the Chancellor was to appear. Then we were led to another room, where we discovered, in a sort of disorderly mob, a small man who is the master of seventy million men. He was surrounded unceremoniously, as one would surround a street pedlar or a cravat merchant, and two Englishwomen commented loudly on him.

A small man. Smaller than he looked on screen, sad, with his yellowish jacket, black trousers, wisp of hair and tired face. Older, too, than we thought. It's only up close that you can see his smile, an almost childlike smile, the kind that leaders of men so often have. "He's so nice", his colleagues say in surprise. We introduce him to a few people, he shakes hands with an absent gaze, says a few words. And we just stand there, stunned, not understanding.

But you have to look at her eyes. In this insignificant face, they are the only thing that counts. They are eyes from another world, strange eyes, deep blue and black where you can barely make out the pupil. How can you tell what's going on inside them? What else is there than a prodigious dream, a boundless love for *Deutschland*, the German land, the real one and the one yet to be built? What do we have in common with these eyes? And above all, the first and most extraordinary impression remains: those eyes are sad. An almost insurmountable anguish, an unheard-of anxiety remains in them. We can make out in a flash the present difficulties, the possibility of war, the economic crisis, the religious crisis, all the worries of the leader in charge. We feel strongly, physically, what a terrible adventure it is to lead a nation, and to lead Germany towards its devouring destiny. Especially when that leader has to transform it in such a way that a "new man", as he says at every moment, can be born and live there.

We don't want to be romantic. And yet, in front of this sad vegetarian civil servant, who is a god for his country, how can we not think that in a June dawn, he descended from heaven, like the archangel of death, to kill some of his oldest and dearest companions? I am thinking of them today. This man sacrificed what he considered to be his mission, and his personal peace, and friendship, and he would sacrifice everything, human happiness, his own and that of his people above all else, if the mysterious duty he obeys commanded him to do so. I am not, of course, talking about the happiness of other peoples. Germany has taught us that it has never counted for much. Hitler is not judged as an ordinary head of state. But he is also a reformer, he is called to a mission that he believes to be divine, and his eyes tell us that he bears the terrible weight of it. This is what can call everything into question at any moment.

14 September. - On Sunday morning, the most unusual ceremony of the Third Reich took place: the consecration of the flags. The "blood flag", the one carried by the demonstrators killed during the failed *putsch* of 1923, was brought before the Führer in front of Munich's Feldherrenhalle.

In Munich, there were several of them, when the bullets hit them...

With one hand, the Chancellor grasped the flag of blood, and with the other, the new banners he was to consecrate. Through him, an unknown fluid must pass, and the blessing of the martyrs must henceforth extend to the new symbols of the Church.

German homeland. A purely symbolic ceremony? I don't think so. In Hitler's mind, as in that of the Germans, there is a real idea of a sort of mystical blood transfusion, similar to the priest's blessing of the water, if not to the Eucharist. Anyone who does not see in the consecration of flags the analogue of the consecration of bread, a sort of German sacrament, runs the risk of understanding nothing about Hitlerism.

I don't know what Germany used to be like. Today it's a big, strange country, further away from us than India or China. The flag itself accentuates this astonishing oriental impression, and you have to make an effort to realise that some of the virtues that are given pride of place - work, sacrifice, love of country - are part of the common heritage of all peoples, so overwhelmed are we by the impressions of disorientation and exoticism. I don't know whether the Thirty Years' War, as I was told, cut Germany off from European civilisation, but I am quite sure that Hitler is in the process of building a civilisation which, in certain aspects of its particularism, is even further removed from this community.

You can't help thinking about it all the time. I understand Italian fascism, I understand what immortality may remain of it, even after the fall of the regime. But when faced with this construction of a new man, one wonders: is it permissible? Is this not an effort that goes beyond the bounds of the nation? Will Hitlerism tomorrow be no more than a gigantic historical curiosity? Will we stare in amazement at these oriental flags, these daggers, will we listen to these songs with only our memory? Isn't it all *too much*? Will it all last? I've never asked myself that question before. I ask myself, and I'm struck by the unusual, perhaps ephemeral, nature of everything I see, which is so new. Yes, when you try to remember those days that were so full, when you recall the night-time ceremonies lit from the side by the glow of torches and spotlights, the German children playing like wolves around their memories of civil war and sacrifice, the leader lifting the subjugated crowd in wide swells with plaintive cries, you say to yourself that this country is first and foremost, in the full sense of the word, and prodigiously, and profoundly, and eternally, a strange country.

15 September. - All these French people I'm taking around will be staying for a while after the congress. They will be shown the social organisations of the new Germany, the corporate organisations. I will have the pleasure of having this burlesque little character with me for some time to come. I don't know why Lisbeth looks at him suspiciously. She has heard nothing of what was said between us, and what was said is of no importance. But she certainly doesn't like him, and it's as if she's afraid of him.

16 September. - I have a pretty good picture of this Courtet. I don't think I'd dislike him. I must have been told that once. No doubt the life he leads is not one of action, but the man must be active, energetic, perhaps a little naive. He went over to communism, and now to a kind of pre-fascism. He may have joined some league. He must wander a bit, but sympathetically. And yet I can well imagine that he could give a woman the impression of security that Catherine used to tell me about. He makes mistakes, but he makes them out of love for life, out of a desire to be in . It seems that's not how I make mistakes, and it's not how I'm right either. I myself now feel quite detached from the Patrice I once was. The Legion separated me from him. But in these adventures of my time I'm looking for nothing more, perhaps, than adventures for myself. Catherine was right to guess that. I imagine that Courtet in the Legion, Courtet in Germany, would do a little less for himself. Women don't like it when you live for yourself. I'm detached enough today to give Catherine my absolution.

I think of Mr Seneca's return, after an absence of eight years, and in truly unforeseeable circumstances. The fact that Nuremberg and the Third Reich brought us together could hardly have been predicted at the Pension Souris, not even by Auguste Pentecôte's pendulum. But I have always thought, obscurely, that there was a law here, and that beings who had become involved in the lives of other beings were so deeply entangled in it that they could no longer extricate themselves from it. The trick is to know their periodicity, because there is one, like the periodicity of the stars. The watchmaker and his ghosts have returned to my life: will he precede other ghosts by a few months? Deep down, I never really believed that Catherine would disappear from my horizon forever, and I always expected to bump into her again.

17 September. - In the Legion, you hardly ever ask yourself why you chose this profession, and I didn't have to talk to anyone about it. Did the shadows from which I had come to flee assail me so often? At first, no doubt. But so much physical fatigue soon chased them away. I think that for the last two years at least, I have tasted true peace there. To say that I was happy would be going too far, because I am not romantic enough to find happiness in a difficult life. But in the end, Siegfried's friendship, the rough pleasures, and also a certain sentimental exaltation that it's impossible not to experience, were more than enough for me. I remember two or three evenings of brawling - I can't remember more than half a dozen, despite the legends in the bars - when the mere cry of "A moi la Légion!" ("To me, the Legion!") from some brawler in trouble with riflemen or infantrymen was enough to plunge me into an exhilaration bordering on joy.

Here, the peace is different. Lisbeth comes to dinner with me, makes me horrible chops with mustard, horrible gelatine sauces, horrible creams with powdered eggs, and I have enough fun telling her all my French thoughts to find some happiness in it. Sometimes she sings too, or brings me blackberries picked with friends on the road. Or she tells me about her Führer, whom she once saw at a Force for Joy party. And she brings the same childlike, greedy gaiety to all this. I'm afraid I'm a little more important in her life than she is in mine. Perhaps I should leave her before

I thought about it. But what harm would I do to her, greater than the little good that would be possible! We are quick to accuse those who don't love: they don't have such a convenient role and their selfishness doesn't always know how to act. They should love, that's all there is to it: but they don't love, what can they do? So I stay with Lisbeth, who doesn't bore me, whom I forget when she's gone out the door, who often amuses or moves me, whom I caress and speak to. I try not to think too much about the fact that she might be asking for something else. And then I tell myself that she's too blonde, too pink, to be serious about her Frenchman. In two years' time, she'll probably be a chubby young girl. I don't even think I'm stopping her from finding a solid Bavarian in a brown shirt who will make her lots of children, and to whom she will cook bland sauerkraut and pork in mustard. If she knew the plans I had for her, she'd slap me in the face with her braids. I can't believe she'd put much more than childish grief into it.

It's probably all this, my selfishness, my tranquillity, my concern to enjoy life in peace, and this year, and the torments of the world, and the torments of others, and my own, that Catherine called my insecurity. I want to believe that. It's hard to be bad, it's hard to be good. I'm content to act mediocrously. There are so many things in life that seem to me more serious and more exciting than these thin sentimentalities. They didn't bother me in the five years I escaped them, and I don't see why they should bother me now. If she brings me her bilberries, her blue flowers, her gorse, her songs of love or war, I'll enjoy it. It's already a big part, bigger than she thinks.

19 September. - I would like to write as calmly and briefly as possible about that day. I never imagined, as I began it, that it would bring me such strange and strong proof of my blindness. I was talking to Mr Seneca at home, and I must have left the door unlocked, since Lisbeth has no key. The old man told me about Paris, his daily life, Mr Pentecost and their common wife. On many other occasions he had told me similar things, and even more important ones, which could legitimately have given rise to more suspicions. Did we even talk about Catherine? You'd think so. But he must only have said her name, or me, and I am now trying to reconstruct that day, that hour that was so important. I know that he spoke to me with a frankness that, in another person, would easily pass for indiscretion. This is undoubtedly where all the trouble came from.

- You won't be coming to Paris one day, you?

- Probably so," I replied.

- You haven't been back for a long time.

- For nearly eight years, dear Mr Seneca. I didn't go back when I returned to France. I might not recognise myself in the streets. I imagine there must be new ones. And there must be new traffic regulations.

- In short, you're from the Paris before pedestrian traffic lights?

- That's right. You know how to see things as they . So there are nails? I'm from Paris before the nails.

We laughed a little. It was an innocent conversation. But I remember well now that it was he who told me about Catherine.

- You'll have to see Mrs Courtet again," he said suddenly. I said

nothing.

- We'll have to see her again. I remember very well the day she told me she was getting married. It wasn't a love marriage. I know all about love marriages, Monsieur Blanchon. And I told her so. She started crying, protesting that she loved Mr Courtet very much. I like Mr Courtet too, he's very brave, very intelligent, and very likeable. And she gave me a long, very confused speech, talking about you and about him. A woman is not confused when she talks about herself and her heart, unless there is something to hide. Mrs Courtet and I have been very good friends ever since. You understand that it's not natural for us to be friends, I realise that very well. She's young and pretty, I'm an old fool. If she comes to see me, it's because she has some reason she doesn't want to say. Haven't I told you yet, Monsieur Blanchon, that she knows you're in Germany?

- She knows...

- She knows it. I don't know how. And I can swear to you that not once since her marriage have we spoken of you. Not . When I told her I was coming to Nuremberg for the Congress, she didn't say anything at the time. She had come to bring me a watch to repair for her husband. An ugly watch at that. It doesn't make sense to go out and buy junk like that. You might as well buy it at Uni-Prix. So when she was about to leave, she said to me: "So you're going to Nuremberg, Mr Seneca? - Yes, madame. - Do you remember Patrice Blanchon? - Of course, Madam. - I hear he lives there now. And she left without saying anything more. That's why I recognised you so quickly on the station platform. I hadn't been told that you were the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. I only knew the name of the president. I was surprised, of course, when I saw you, but I knew you were there. I knew from Mrs Courtet. You'll have to see her again when you come to Paris. And you'll have to come back to Paris.

I remember very clearly now. I was more surprised than I can say by those words. Were you happy? I don't know. But surprised, in any case. And I repeated Mr Seneca's last sentence, not as an affirmation, not as an acquiescence, I swear, but simply to put it before my eyes. It seemed so extraordinary to me, who had almost sworn never to return to Paris. And I repeated it, in a voice without timbre, in a voice without meaning, I affirmed it:

- We'll have to come back to Paris.

Then we fell silent. There was, I remember very clearly, a fairly long silence. Mr Seneca was smoking his pipe and I was looking out of the window, banging on my glass. Eventually he got up. I imagine that since my arrival in Nuremberg, it was this sentence that he wanted to say to me, that he had perhaps been asked to say to me. In the Hitler Youth camp, in the Black Guard bivouac, in front of Bamberg and its canals, it was this phrase that shone in him, and that he didn't yet dare to reveal to me. He ended up bringing it to my house, like a good liaison officer, and giving it to me without witnesses. Without witnesses? One can never be too wary.

I showed him to the door and came back to my office. He could well have been gone for three quarters of an hour, maybe an hour. I heard moaning in my room. I went in. It didn't take me long to work it out. There was a box of Gardenia tablets on my bedside table. I sometimes take them to sleep, because I haven't been sleeping well since I left Africa and my body is exhausted. Lisbeth had swallowed all that was left of the almost new box.

"We must return to Paris". That was the first thing she said to me when she regained consciousness.

She didn't know that when you want to kill yourself, you have to proceed with caution. No sooner had I entered the room than she started to vomit. A few less pills and she fell asleep peacefully, never to wake up again. She's at home now, and medical care will take care of the rest.

But for a long time to come I'm sure I'll hear his white voice, much whiter than mine was, saying this sentence:

- We must return to Paris... We must return to Paris...

14 October. - Lisbeth is gradually recovering, even faster than I expected. Not that I was very worried about her physical state after the first two days. But it was impossible for me to forget the reason for his act, and that reason had not disappeared. I couldn't, no, I couldn't swear to him that I would never go to Paris again, because the little grey ghost of my youth, the one who had left me in peace for years, the one who had barely accompanied me on the hard roads of the desert, had come back to this city of toys, brought by an old fool with an imperial goatee. A little grey ghost, against whom I would fight in vain, and who from time to time resurrects for me, with even more force than it took him to appear on the corner of a Parisian street ten years ago. I can't swear to Lisbeth that he doesn't exist.

Nor can I forget that gesture behind my door, that sweet, fat, blond child's face suddenly drawn, as if by a pitiful greed, to those deathly treats on my table, to death itself, sweet, sly, drowsy. I don't feel worthy. If I look for a word, that's the only one I can find: I don't feel worthy. Now that the physical anxiety has passed, because everything passes so quickly, this solitary and enormous act in the life of this child with her ingenuous tresses, in our life of quiet lovers who have pooled only voluptuousness and pleasure, this act, I don't understand it any more than I did on the first day and I find it hard to bear the weight of it, I don't think it would be monstrous to confess, to admit to myself that it affects me only by morality, by a sense of responsibility, and not by any deep inner conviction. It's because of me that she wanted to kill herself, I can repeat this sentence to myself, but it doesn't manage to arouse in me any new feelings for this charming little girl whom I have chosen as my German companion. Remorse, certainly, shame, certainly, a little contempt for me too, - but for her? As far as she was concerned, a gesture couldn't change anything, didn't change anything.

It's in her that I'm surprised he hasn't made more of a metamorphosis. She too has remained my young German wife, and in a few days she too will bring me flowers and leg of lamb with jam, songs and cold sausages. We haven't talked about this gesture. I don't know what she told her aunt. There she is, a little paler and that's all. It's as if every extraordinary act falls into existence like an aerolite, producing nothing on earth but a bit of dust. She wanted to kill herself for me, that sentence changed nothing in my heart; nor, it seems to me, did it change anything in hers.

Or rather, if she threw herself into death with the appetite of a child, I have to believe that she was driven by weeks of inner passion that finally exploded one day. I have to believe that this serious little girl, so serious about life, death and love, with all the seriousness and conscience of her race, as I found these two virtues in the legionnaire Siegfried Kast, I have to believe that the other evening she couldn't resist what she took to be a decision. But then, she really did die in those seconds of annihilation when the poison no longer even tormented her body. It was someone else who woke up, innocent, graceful - and also oblivious. This gesture, out of all proportion to myself, cured her of all her enormous exaltation. She's down to my level now.

I don't even know if she isn't as *embarrassed* to mention it as I am. It's a strange word. It's the only one I can think of: as if risk and heroism were some kind of incongruity, a bit shocking. I've experienced that sometimes in the dangers of war. Why, when an unusual act breaks through the banality of everyday life, shouldn't we be as embarrassed by it as we are by the madman who suddenly declares himself? We both stand there in front of this madness of love, without the one for whom it has been unleashed understanding any more than the one who has been subjected to it.

And yet, out of some human respect, we stand before this incomprehensible act, bored like tourists in front of the Parthenon. We are obliged to admire her for sacrificing herself, and me for sacrificing myself. It would be more natural for both of us, who are neither heroes nor legendary figures, to forget all that, to say that we understand nothing about the Parthenon. But there are centuries behind us, centuries of classical education, morality and literature. We dare not admit it to ourselves. We don't dare settle down to our mediocrity, to our little love, to go for walks in the towns of Bavaria, in the Franconian countryside, to amuse ourselves by clashing or tuning our national myths, and to enjoy caresses and conversations. It would be easy to go back. We dare not.

We don't dare, and I'm the last one who can. Because the thought keeps coming back that it was she who wanted to die, not me, that it is she to whom I owe a debt, she alone who can free me from it. I don't care what I think of her attitude today, yesterday she made me her debtor and her slave. I cannot move.

25th October. - We went for a drive in the forest. I've had a very nice red Mercedes for a few days now, probably a bit of a folly, as they say. Lisbeth is amused and flattered by it. You can flatter anyone with these big toys. She had wanted to have lunch outside and had prepared a whole meal of preserves, bottled sauces and powdered desserts for me this Sunday. We made an omelette over an fire. Young people on bicycles by and waved cheerfully: "Heil!" It was one of those October days that still makes you think it's summer, but in the evening the dampness penetrates your clothes and hair.

All the same, I wanted to tell him, without being entirely sure that I wasn't telling a lie, the sentence I should have said three weeks ago:

- There's no reason for me to go to Paris, Lisbeth.

She laughed happily, as if I were promising her a Christmas present, and threw herself around my neck. Then she put her head on my shoulder, her heavy blonde head, and whispered little-girl words to me.

- I was crazy the other day... I thought you were going to leave... You mustn't remember what I did... I know I can't stop you leaving. Besides, you'd come back here, wouldn't you? You mustn't think I want to lock you up...

I swore to her that I believed her, that I wouldn't leave. That if I ever wanted or needed to see my country again, it could only be for very simple and very honest reasons. We ate our German lunch, we picked some tall leaves, we went to say hello to some of Lisbeth's comrades who were doing their labour service in a camp not far from here. Everything is so simple now, so natural, that I can't help feeling a little disappointed.

17th November. - Lisbeth and I went back to the way things used to be, and now I'm sure she won't do it again, which is something you rarely do for the same person twice.

29 November. - This afternoon I accepted the assignment I was asked to take on the day before yesterday. I hesitated for a long time. It seems incomprehensible to our Council that I should refuse to go to France, where everyone knows I have not been since I settled in Germany. They even made two or three indulgent allusions to the reasons that might keep me in Nuremberg. Poor Lisbeth! That's what it's all about...

Last night I revisited the years I spent in the south of Morocco, I recognised on the wall of my dream the Marrakech palm grove, just as it appeared to us when we returned in column. All that was my life for so many hard weeks, simply because I didn't want to go back to France, because a little grey ghost had chased me away. Because a little grey ghost had made it his kingdom and forbidden me to enter. Today, he's still living in his domain, and I, who didn't even want to approach him, am going back there, and the old fool who reminded me might be happy, and I'm giving in, giving in at last.

It won't be very long, no doubt, and I'll probably come back to Nuremberg. My German wife can wait for me without fear, I will return to her. If I didn't come back to her, I am sure now that she would soon be crying for the happiness to which she is entitled and which I am quite incapable of giving her. But I will come back, she can rest assured.

There are moments, no doubt, when nothing matters after the years when you have created a strong enough framework. On this trip to Paris, I find myself as helpless as the twenty-two-year-old boy who arrived one day at the depot for the isolated in Marseille

to win a hard, precise and absurd adventure. As helpless as if I hadn't suffered from heat, fatigue, thirst and cold; as if I hadn't watched behind the cactus or the palm tree for the slender shadow of a rifle barrel; as if I hadn't known how to talk to pleasure girls and men of war ; if I hadn't been able to talk to men from my own country, finer than Greeks, and men from a new and willing country whose language I had to learn; if I hadn't been a friend of the legionnaire Kast, if I hadn't been able, in a difficult world, to achieve tranquillity, strength, money and pleasure; if I hadn't accepted, deep down, with perfect selfishness, Lisbeth's act and her despair. There's no point in what you've painstakingly built up, and in the virtues of action, when you find yourself with a little grey ghost, and you realise that he alone has counted in your life. I leave, swearing never to try to see him again, but full of a wild joy at the idea that he may be brought to me by luck and chance.

IV - REFLECTIONS

A delicious source of fertile misery...
CORNEILLE *Polyeucte* (Act IV, Scene II).

1

VILLON begins his *Testament* with the very admission that matters most to us:

In the thirtieth year of my life...

The thirtieth year, give take a few months, a little before, a little after, is always the age of the Testament.

2

For a long time, for women, this age was the age of the first anxious look in the mirror; this new number of tens the last admitted number, after which could only come the anguish of ageing, the end of all security in love, all power. Can it be wiped from the sky, the evil star that has made those who discover it tremble? When its light has reached you, is it mad to imitate Villon?

3

Because it was Balzac who wrote *La Femme de trente ans*, we are relegating to the distant past the time when this age retained some importance. Neither the woman nor the man of thirty today seem to be any different from those who are younger. They have the same clothes, the same physical appearance. They often play the same sports, and they share same familiar or amorous camaraderie with each other and their younger siblings. Yet you only have to know them to realise that this mysterious age remains the most enigmatic axis of human life, the most important after the fourteenth year. Childhood dies at fourteen, and youth a little before thirty, as the ancient ages and ancient writers had clearly seen, and our time brings man nothing but artificial extensions.

4

An administrative rule: in most government jobs, you cannot take up a post after the age of thirty; you must have taken part in the competitive examination at least once before that age.

Medical advice: it's best for a woman to have had her first child before the age of thirty.

5

For many years, we have lived in the eminent dignity of the temporary. Many of us, at this age, are settled, married and have children. From now on, you have to make up your mind about your future, whatever it may be. You have to choose. Even if, fortunately, many uncertainties can still be foreseen, at least a whole part of life is fixed: the part that depends solely on ourselves. We think we know who we are.

We are doing it with a health, a lucidity, an energy, that have their pleasures. We are beginning a new life, as they say at the end of novels. This is often true. And we begin it with all our strength, sometimes with more strength than in the past, with all our chances, sometimes with more chances. But on pain of being retarded adolescents, which lacks dignity, we limit these chances. We are at the age where we have to play for sure.

6

For every age has its beauty, and that beauty must always be freedom. Only the freedom and beauty of the thirties, escaped from adolescence and threatened by the future, are combined with lucidity for the first time.

The first time... Basically, the thirtieth year is the age when, for the first time, the feelings, living conditions and thoughts of maturity appear, and appear in a young body. Hence the contrast, the pleasure, sometimes the pain.

7

What we leave behind is not always worth regretting. Sometimes it's misery, or at least embarrassment, awkwardness in the face of life, a crushing and useless job, the pain of love such that you won't find it again until old age (and perhaps never), uncertainty about the future, problems with physical development, shyness in front of women and grown-ups. You give all that up for greater self-confidence and, if you're lucky, for some of the best years of human life, the flowering of power for men and the flowering of seduction for women. The truth is, what you leave behind is not always worth regretting.

But you leave behind is your youth.

8

We are also at the age when we are so rigorously forced to change that prolonging the forms of our youth begins to become ridiculous. It's not so much a question of physical appearance in this day and age, although we have to start taking care: I've seen men and women at parties who weren't much over thirty, and who, by dancing and playing, were already becoming imperceptibly like the old dance-hall ladies who act the little fools. At seventeen, I would have looked at them with a little contempt. But I think above all of life, of the heart, of the spirit. What used to be grace and ardour so quickly becomes a grimace! Nothing is sadder than an old student, and it takes a kind of genius, all too rare, to maintain the pleasure and beauty of bohemia for long. "At your age, acting like a kid...", murmur bourgeois families. They're not always wrong. It's up to us to feel our hearts stop, silently, when we can guess this phrase on silent lips or in glances. But then we have to stop giving lips and eyes the opportunity to form these words.

9

Thirty, the first time it can become a tragedy to chase after the enchantments, joys and sorrows of youth.

10

There is only one youth in life, and you spend the rest of your life regretting it, and nothing in the world is more wonderful or more moving. Sometimes men deny regret, deny wonder and emotion. And perhaps they are even sincere, they have finally forgotten. They won't stop the wonder from having been, from having contained all the most exhilarating things a human body can bear without breaking. They will not prevent any satisfaction of pleasure, ambition, success, love or truth from ever being worth a few fragile and naive moments in our memory. If we were honest with ourselves, how often we would let ourselves go, bite our palm or our wrist, our eyes closed on a summer evening by the brown sea, on a couple dancing in front of the hills, on a fortified town in the mountains, on a school playground, a roof, a sudden and surging street, magical minutes buried. If the thirtieth year is the age of sometimes serious mistakes, it's because we imagine that we can still extend those minutes, it's because we believe that we haven't changed yet, it's we hold them in our hands like sand, like water, it's because physical appearance, circumstances, the too close proximity of youth fool us, and we believe that there is still time. But other joys may be ours, but no longer these.

11

If I had to give a beautiful image, painted or sculpted, of voluptuousness, I would not choose young lovers. An hour of love is not beautiful at . At thirty, men and women find in pleasure its perfection: its ardour, its ardour, its power, but also its knowledge, its slowness. These young bodies, still rejuvenated by nudity, are attentive to each other, concerned, friendly. On the edge of pleasure, they wait for each other like two swimmers, and they may wait for each other, and they may not wait for each other for long. Something golden and fruity is already rising from her, and yet she has the gesture of a little girl who turns her head in the pleasure that women will have until they die. And yet she is as hard and fine as the girl who ran along the pebbles by the sea yesterday, and he finds in her the camaraderie, the youthful vigour, the sporting fraternity, at the same time as the tenderness, the ample caress, the burning melancholy. And from him she expects more than quick embrace, the soft fall of the runner quenched after such a short leap, she expects patience, a long, hard, deep shaking, so much slowness and so much warmth, and the unbreakable tension of body and spirit, and that movement of the immense, heavy, regular wave of love. She waits for him in youth, in fatigue-free triumph, in the exactitude of this body that towers over her perfectly. This is the miracle of these years, as fragile as the miracle of adolescence itself, and perhaps the only real compensation that time can provide.

And yet we are allowed to regret the hasty, irrepressible pleasure, the burning that the mere contact of a body gives the body, the pleasure that is wasted and wasted, started over, taken up again, clumsy, sometimes ended in tears, and which leaves the lovers irritated, ill-satisfied, dissatisfied with each other, hot with quarrel, regret and youth.

12

Being thirty is not being old. It is simply the age at which the simplest records are forbidden to the most vigorous, the age at which the greatest swimming champion, the greatest running champion, never reaches, the age at which you can no longer learn to play tennis. For twenty-year-old boys as a whole, the achievements of champions are also forbidden. But everyone can still hope for them. At thirty, even the hope of illusion does not exist.

13

I don't know what indicates age on a face or a body. I mean, you can clearly see some people drying out, others, for example, getting fatter, you can clearly see the nail marks of time on the cheeks and eyelids. But there are children of sixteen who are wrinkled, there are men and women of thirty whose skin is smooth, and no one is mistaken about their age. The popular expression is that a face is fading. I don't know of a better word. An imperceptible movement has begun which, in ten years' time, in twenty years' time, in thirty years' time, will have definitively taken the life out of some already doomed area of flesh. Everything is alive, animated by the blood in a young face. Look at the moment when you will see dead areas appear, so thin, so insignificant, - where nothing in appearance is transformed, but where it seems that the rivers of blood have become more subterranean, more distant, - where the soft inflection of the neck, under the chin, the soft inflection of the neck, under the ear, the delicate swelling of the cheek after the hollow of the eyelid, have not changed, but have mysteriously lost their mother-of-pearl, their light, have become as anonymous, as impersonal as the most anonymous and impersonal parts of the body, - when that immaterial mist that floated around young faces has disappeared, when the fog has lifted for greater clarity, greater certainty, - then it is indeed the moment when youth is over.

13

For some time, we have seen our own youth as a block, from the sixteenth to the twenty-third to the twenty-fifth year. Already this block is crumbling. Already the sixteenth year does not seem so different from childhood, and the sixteen-year-olds we meet are really children. There will come a time when we will call soldiers children. But they are young people, not us.

14

One of the first great surprises of growing up is getting to know young men and women who are no longer children, who you can talk to as if they were your own, and yet who are so young that, for example, they were born after the war.

15

One day I was talking about cinema with a boy who didn't seem so young. And suddenly he said to me, with a hint of respect:

- It's true that you knew silent cinema.

It took me a long time to realise that cinema has been talking for ten years now, that I still haven't got used to it, and that for a boy who didn't go to shows as a child (it happens), I had to evoke quite accurately the ancestor who attended the first performances of the Théâtre libre or a ball at the Tuileries.

16

This new age has its benefits. Not to mention the material advantages that it almost always brings with it, which should only be signs of happiness, or else they are of no importance. Talking about a book in which old childhood friends get bored together and risk making each other unhappy, someone once said to me: "Don't you think things would have been better if they'd had a bit more money?" I failed to find this comment vulgar, but it was true. For many, if not all, money is what replaces youth. You stop being young when you start needing money to build your life.

But we can conceive of other benefits of the thirtieth year, knowing that we are more lucid, more accustomed to life, to men, that disillusion is rarer, enthusiasms just as real but more thoughtful, and that, even physically (true youth is physical), we can find honourable compensations, since we are more skilful at pleasure. Does this compensate for disorder, cravings, excess, clumsiness and waste? I'm not sure it does.

17

A man and a woman in their thirties are therefore more at ease with life. Very often, they have their families, their responsibilities, they have a more difficult life, but they have given themselves the opportunity to these difficulties. If, in addition, they have reached

They then understood the full extent of their changes when they realised that they now needed a certain appearance of luxury to enjoy pleasure, that they found bad restaurants abhorrent, and that they chose good seats at the .

18

So the danger that threatens many people at this age is ageing. It's the *taste* for comfort, the *taste for* money. You stay young as long as you accept money as the backdrop to your life, but as long as you know that tomorrow you'll be able to do without it. It's only later, in fact, that we see it take over our hearts completely. At thirty, he is fortunately only a comrade who can be sent away.

19

Those two or three years around the age of thirty, look around you. A crisis, I mean, where something unravels. Relationships and households fall apart. Single men marry. Single women are frightened to discover the life of an old maid. It's the first time that people tire of the past, that habits become burdensome. And it's also the first time that you can only free yourself from them with a great deal of effort, far from the ease of yesteryear.

20

Let's look at our thirty-year-old friends, since it's hard for us to see ourselves. Let us contemplate ourselves in these foreign mirrors. We no longer recognise them if we happen to remember their youth. What is this fever that has seized them? Why do those who were sedentary run the roads? Why do the wanderers stop? Why have those who were bohemian become bourgeois? Why are they embittered, sunk in dubious compromises? Why have their fantasies become creaky and suspicious? And those amusingly dressed women, they're covered in rags, and those exotic birds, they're just shrill parrots. They chase after their youth, they imagine they can prolong it, when they should be charming and dignified men and women of thirty, vigorous, light, laughing, faithful, accustomed to the laws of their new state. Sometimes we don't even know how to see them as they are, but observe the looks of their younger siblings.

21

There's no age when you want to change your life. Before the age of thirty, however, these desires are fleeting. Later, they become more violent, and sometimes you give in to them. I think it's quite rare to give in to them at thirty, when the life you lead has not almost always been settled for so many years or so many months. But not giving in to them can leave quite incurable wounds, a quite astonishing weariness, poorly disguised under the joys of action and apparent success. The evil may never erupt, or it may erupt in fifteen years' time: the origin of the crack is often there.

22

When you're thirty, you can still find excellent friends - but no more friends. True friends are those of adolescence, more rarely those of childhood.

At thirty, you can still discover real and great admirations - but you don't get carried away by an unknown and sometimes mediocre poet.

Neither friends nor poets, it is on this first solitude that the happiness of the thirtieth year must be built.

23

Physical appearance has changed so little that we certainly have every excuse. However, the dignity (and happiness) of this age, which can be admirable, lies entirely on the borderline between these two states: realising or not realising.

24

They put into their suffering the ardour of intact bodies, hearts that beat powerfully, they confront each other with vigour. We are sometimes surprised to discover their struggle. Or they become pensive, and their gaze is fixed on a small, faded image, where they had thick hair, easy despair, even easier joy, and we know that to find that image they would savagely give up their whole life. But they won't.

25

I don't think love is achieved at that age. It's simply the first time I've been able to meet a woman and not a little girl in short skirts - a real woman who is, for example, eight, ten, twelve years younger than I am. It's simply the first time that you can say about a 'young' couple: he's ten years older than she is.

26

The thirtieth year, moreover, has its own particular colour in our time, crushed as it is between war and the future. It may come as a surprise later on that it has been able to lose a fairly traditional balance, and that it has become similar to the eighteenth in its restlessness. Circumstances wanted and forced it to do so. The war was such a violent hegira for the modern world that those who lived, however briefly, before it are likely to remain shaken by it. Those born afterwards are more confident. But the generations born between 1900 and 1910 are the last to have been able, if only through their families, to have some clarity about an old world, and to participate, even unconsciously, in the myths of the nineteenth century.

27

"We will build the future," say the leaders of totalitarian countries, "with children who are now ten, fifteen at the most. They have never known anything else. Just like more mature men, the generation of thirty-somethings is not sure, and perhaps they are doomed. At least that's what we think, sometimes wrongly.

28

When a leader, whether friend or foe, addresses his comrades in the Empire and across the seas, when we see the harsh flowering of nationalist youth on the silver screens, we have to take it on board: it is not only the men confined within dictatorial borders who feel a blow to the heart, but everywhere, across the vast universe of race and history, who, sometimes moved, sometimes enraged, think of the past and present of their country and say to themselves: "Why not us? If we try to ignore these sometimes confused feelings, this mingled hope and bitterness, we run the risk of going into serious trouble.

But it's not just teenagers who are listening. Or rather, teenagers listen with an immense sense of hope. Their elders mix hope with regret, "Why not us with "It could have been, and deep down they are not quite sure, even though they have just reached the age of achievement, that it is not already too late.

And then, suddenly, they look around them and believe they are promised the joys of creation in the present.

29

I am well aware that the young men of 1914 lived in anticipation of war; but it has to be said that many of them brought to it a vitality, and even a hope, that is impossible today. Later on, we may not fully understand the state of mind of those who missed the war in their childhood, who grew up in a Europe full of illusions (even if they did not believe in these illusions, they formed the atmosphere of their adolescence) and who, suddenly, for several years, expected the war to come in the spring or autumn. I'm not just talking about the great crises when you open the newspaper one morning and see the battle approaching. But I am thinking of that insinuating combination of fate that does everything to persuade us, day by day, hour by hour, that war is inevitable, that it will come from democratic stupidity, or from totalitarian appetite, but that it will come. So, from time to time, men in their thirties lose a little not courage but confidence, but moral health, and they struggle with their nerves, so continuously that they cannot help but feel a little tired. For perhaps deep down they believe only in miracles, which is not a particularly comforting form of hope. They know that reasonable doctrines don't stand a chance. And they may put a brave face on destiny, but they experience a fairly quiet form of *hopelessness*.

30

Thanks to the adventures of millions of men in a few countries, in power or on the way to power, thanks to the lines of fortune divined by old and young book-writers, we have been able to see, over the last twenty years, the birth of a new human type, as different and as surprising as the Cartesian hero, as the sensitive and encyclopaedic soul of the eighteenth century, as the Jacobin 'patriot', we have seen the birth of the fascist man.

This is what we need to know before attempting to analyse the social, political, moral and aesthetic doctrines that are being developed and embodied just about everywhere. A human exemplar has been born, and just as science distinguishes between *homo faber* and *homo sapiens*, perhaps we should offer classifiers and lovers of small labels this *uomo fascista*, born in Italy no doubt, but which can also claim the universal designation of Latin entomology. Even those who do not accept his domination would undoubtedly do well to get to know him, even if it means fighting him. For there is no doubt that he stands before them, as did

in other times the Christian knight, leaning on the cross of the sword, or the pale revolutionary conspirator in his clandestine printing works and smoky cafés - one of the most certain incarnations of his time.

In a few years' time, perhaps he will be different, and even better named. In Germany, it is only in ten years, I think, that we will see the true man of the Third Reich, stripped of all Saxon or Bavarian particularism, mixed in the camps with all the other Germans of the whole Empire. But more generally, it is when they are grown up, these Germanic *Pimpfen*, these Italian *balillas*, that we will know what it is like to be a man who has never lived anywhere else but in the fascist atmosphere. And the result may not be very encouraging. I think I will remain more curious about those of today, who have experienced the end of the liberal era, and who are gradually emerging from it, like a swimmer emerging from the sea.

They are here, in any case, and by necessity, they are young. Some of them have suffered from the war as children, others from the revolutions in their country, all from the crisis. They know what their nation is, its past, and they want to believe in its future. They see the imperial glitter constantly shining before them. They want a pure nation, a pure history, a pure race. They often like to live together, in these immense gatherings of men where the rhythmic movements of armies and crowds seem like the pulsations of a vast heart. They do not believe in the promises of liberalism, in the equality of men, in the will of the people. But they do believe that from the independent researcher to the industrialist, the poet, the scientist or the labourer, a nation is *one*, just as a sports team is *one*. They don't believe in the justice that comes from words, but they do believe in the justice that comes from strength. And they know that out of that strength can come joy.

For the extravagance of the opponents of fascism lies above all in this total ignorance of fascist joy. Joy that can be criticised, joy that can even be declared abominable and hellish, if you like, but joy. The young fascist, supported by his race and his nation, proud of his vigorous body, of his lucid mind, contemptuous of the thick goods of this world, the young fascist in his camp, in the midst of comrades of peace who may be comrades of war, the young fascist who sings, who marches, who works, who dreams, he is first of all a joyful being. Can the radical comitard, the thin Judeo-Socialist conspirator, the consumer of aperitifs, motions and compromises, understand this joy? I don't know whether, as Mussolini said, "the twentieth century will be the century of fascism", but I do know that nothing will prevent fascist joy from having been, and from having stretched people's spirits through feeling and reason.

31

The only word that can sum up this age, its only *raison d'être*, in love as in politics, is lucidity. If it doesn't know who it is, if it doesn't know what it wants, the thirties have no *raison d'être*. For others, the enthusiasm of illusion, the certainty that has never doubted itself. For us, our only merit, in all areas, is to have accepted ourselves and to have chosen.

32

There is also the one we don't talk about, the one for whom there is no age, and there is also God. Before God, each person retains his own temperament, his own reaction, and thirty-year-old unbelievers are not united by a mysterious resemblance. Can it be said, however, that in many cases, one way or the other, the time is less for passions than for security, less for anxiety than for a certain tranquillity of soul? Can we say that, for some, it is the hour of a secret, faithful, unavowed and sure feeling, the feeling of God's friendship? The hour when everything becomes both more mysterious and simpler? And for many others, between two anxieties, it's the time of the absence of God's silence. You don't think about it any more, you don't think about it yet, you have your work on earth, and that's it. The two species are not so far apart: they have made peace with themselves, they accept themselves, they are secure in their hearts.

33

And thirty is also the age our parents were when we were children, yesterday, when we looked at them, with that childlike look that goes from bottom to top, like men and women, not like teenagers. Sometimes they had already completed a period of their lives, and sincerely believed that their youth was over, especially in an age as harsh as ours. And we, who remember ourselves and what they were like, are now their age, in a flash. We take their place, we continue them, we are themselves, and all childhood is abandoned. It all happens so quickly, for them and for us.

34

Those who die shortly after their thirties are not consolidators, but founders. They bring to the world the sparkling example of their vitality, their mysteries, their conquests. They hastily point the way, in the glow of their ever-present youth. They dazzle, they interpret, they marvel. God chose, in his earthly appearance, to be like these beings, to die at age Alexander. All around you, men and women alike, you have experienced these apparitions a little like the ones of Alexander.

exhilarating, slightly mysterious. They burn their own lives, and sometimes those of others, but they provide the flame, the future. It's hard to imagine Alexander pitting the West against the East. After that, you're on your own! Like those people who disappear before their defects, before their equilibrium, before their own success. They did not come to bring peace to the world, but the sword.

V - DIALOGUE

I don't know what spell still draws me to you.
CORNEILLE, *Polyeucte* (Act II, Scene II).

FIRST SCENE

(It's evening at François and Catherine's house. They are silent. They are reading. And François lowers his newspaper and breaks the silence).

FRANÇOIS - When the curtain rises and we discover this three-walled room where the characters live, what is first sentence we hear?

CATHERINE - There are several methods. The most common is to get the servants to talk to each other. It's amazing what you learn in the theatre from the servants. You'd think that the real poetic art of playwrights was the private police report.

FRANÇOIS - There's also the lady who was a childhood friend of the heroine. She arrives, knows nothing, gets herself into the sitting room, and it's not difficult for her to get the essential information from the chambermaid. Ah, I knew Catherine well. She's been married so long!

CATHERINE - I've only been here four months. But I can tell Madame that she has been married for several weeks.

FRANÇOIS - And they get on well? I haven't yet had the pleasure of getting to know her husband. What sort of background does he come from?

CATHERINE - Oh, revolting! How rude! My poor François, you would make a very bad policeman, and an even worse playwright. You need to be gentler, more skilful. The chambermaid will be appalled and tell Madame straight away that a disguised spy is asking for her, or a former mistress of her husband, with a bottle of vitriol hidden in her handbag. Let's start again.

FRANÇOIS - It's the character of Catherine's friend that doesn't suit me. I immediately feel like a fake fur collar around my neck, a brimmed hat, cotton stockings, the soul of a college professor fallen on hard times, with something puritanical and even Ibsenian in the way I cross my buckled shoes and nervously shake my handbag. And then, you offer me a small role, a breakdown, I'm better than that.

CATHERINE - It's never the main characters, as you yourself have recognised, who are the first to step forward under the spotlights and in front of the footlights. The spectators are not yet seated, the seats are creaking, and you mustn't let the turmoil of the stable and the refectory that is a curtain call spoil the treasures of poetry and emotion that the writer has lavished on his heroes.

FRANÇOIS - I once heard a play in which the author had solved the problem in an ingenious way. He had two servants say the word *Cambronne* four times. This established contact with his audience, set the tone, and he could move on without wasting time to the highly spiritual conflicts that were the usual subject of his masterpieces.

CATHERINE - What did the public think?

FRANÇOIS - I think the calculation was wrong, the play fell very quickly. The word in question is far too important to be wasted so needlessly, and in such profusion, from the very first scene. The critics and the audience felt that the drama was losing interest and that the author was not living up to the promises made by such a brilliant start.

CATHERINE - Dear François! When I met you for the first time, you had your eye fixed, for some reason, on the round hole of a square. At the time, I was ignorant, and I imagined that the hole of a square was a precision instrument similar to a microscope or a telescope. It took me a long time to realise that it was only used to suspend the square. I now realise that it wasn't a bad symbol of your character: people think you're serious because you play with mathematical instruments, but they soon realise that you're just playing.

FRANÇOIS - Not at . I wasn't playing.

CATHERINE - You're not going to tell me that you were carrying out a vitally important measurement, without which the fuselage of the planes wouldn't have had the exact dimensions, and we'd have missed out on the World Cup!

FRANÇOIS - First of all, you don't talk about gauge when you're talking about a fuselage. It doesn't surprise me that the construction factory went bankrupt, if the engineers had a scientific background as haphazard as that of the secretaries. But I was in fact doing a more important measurement, through this little circle drilled in the thin wood. I was simply looking at you, and to better isolate you from the world, to consider you in all your frankness, I chose the only instrument that chance had placed within my reach.

CATHERINE - And what measurement did your square give you?

FRANÇOIS - She gave me the measure of the only being I've ever known on earth whose gestures fit naturally into the perfection of the circle. Never angular, never piercing, the little person I followed from the corner of my office, under the window, moved as if inside a bubble, and I couldn't believe it was completely real. She seemed to be caressing the wall of air around her with her palm curved backwards, like a concave, round, transparent wall, and she was rolling forward in front of this bubble of air, like certain acrobats enclosed in enormous glittering steel balloons. Superficial minds know the square only as a right angle or acute angle. They ignore the fact that its main *raison d'être* is undoubtedly the medallion with which it can set, at office hours, the important events of life.

CATHERINE - And that's how, thanks to a square, you end up with a well-regulated life, where you live more at night than during the day, and listen to the world from Paris, without ever knowing anything about it other than the broken line of the Morse alphabet and the streamers of telegrams, left behind, like the morning of a carnival, by the historic hours.

FRANÇOIS - You shouldn't speak ill of streamers, and as for the Morse alphabet, it's an outdated method that modern press agencies no longer use. I recognise here the ignorance of the little airy person of my square, fed with eighth-grade history lessons and recomposing the universe with the dreams of the old teachers who created secular and feminine education. No, my darling, there's hardly any Morse alphabet any more, no Auer mouthpiece, no velocipede, but I do like you to carry around with you those pictures of the *Tour de France by two children*, which were already old when we were young, and which teachers and professors so ingenuously keep in stock like the merchants of *objets de piété* of the Third Republic.

CATHERINE - A man of many sciences, you can laugh at me, you who see the universe in terms of the circle of squares. I married you because I thought I had discovered a solid, serious person, after a childhood whose only reality was Redskins playing in the corridor, and a father who devoted his days to researching the great intellectual currents under the Merovingians. The world thinks I have nothing to complain about, and middle-class families envy me my marriage and my dining room. But it is undoubtedly difficult to escape the ravages of fantasy. My husband doesn't take me seriously, and I'm only attractive to him because he assumes that I think Paris is lit by gas, and that I can enumerate the advantages of the candle over the candle.

FRANÇOIS - What I like about you, Catherine, ever since I saw you walking in the very centre of the square, is that you are so quick to adopt a reasonable attitude. I imagine you in a black apron, a pupil at the communale with your homework written in the monthly book, with your braids neatly pulled and your good points. You're a wise little Frenchwoman who writes poetry using the rule of three and the stère and who could use, alone in the world, those forgotten measures of the metric system, the myriameter, the decime, the decagram. People think that there is a reason behind all this, and the peoples of the world speak sometimes with envy, sometimes with contempt, of French logic: they should meet you to know that this logic is only one of the forms of the spirit of creation, of unreality and dreams, the escape plan for escaping from the world.

CATHERINE - They should meet you to start spelling with one finger, and translating the most mysterious lexicon of this language so clear, to know that when you make fun, you are serious; that you are light because you really believe in a lot of things; and that you almost never say anything important when you are thinking about serious things.

FRANÇOIS - Perhaps we'll go and show them soon, this lexicon, and this so reasonable unreality. The lamppost, the velocipede and the Morse telegraph will no longer be a mystery to those who ignore the poetry of the rule of three and the words of the *Little Ship*.

CATHERINE - What have you brought me?

FRANÇOIS - I'm not bringing you streamers, those streamers that every night tell us the number of Chinese drowned in the floods of the Yellow River, the preaching of that American whose teeth are gilded with wisdom, the claims of the pearl fishermen and the alleged Jewish ancestry of the leaders of the Third Reich. But it's because of them that I'm bringing you something, just as at the ball you must first remove the long paper ribbons from the hanap of ruolz won at the lottery and the sweets offered by the great chocolatier invited to the party. But how careless! The gift I'm bringing must be handled with care, and the sound of a clock is already making the social police sit up and take notice.

CATHERINE - What explosive are you going to give me?

FRANÇOIS - Not much, perhaps, my dear. Just a trip, a huge country, red and black with parties and blueberries, spotlights, aeroplanes and blue flowers in pots on all the windows. Cutting telegram streamers in the Parisian night, or seeing to it that they are cut, no longer suits my genius, it seems. I'm asked to go elsewhere, to stand at the other end of these telegraph wires where they wind and run at the speed of a spiral of light. The world is hungry for news, true and false. We have to throw all this printed paper at it with pitchforks, as machines like black nickel-plated ruminants graze in printing works. I am being asked to establish vast pastures, to farm them, to make them green and ripe, I am being asked to send the German straw, the German hay, the German buckwheat, the German willow that they need to the machines in Paris.

CATHERINE - Would you run the German agency?

FRANÇOIS - I would create it, because it hardly . I'm told it's a very important task. CATHERINE - I don't

want to go to Germany.

FRANÇOIS - Don't you want to? I remember that you yourself once told me that it was madness to deprive oneself, more or less voluntarily, of the few shows that fate has made available, with special tickets, to the poor spectators that we are. You said that we wouldn't understand anything about our time if we hadn't attended the premiere of *Phi-Phi*, a parade on Red Square in Moscow, the Exhibition of Decorative Arts and a congress in Nuremberg. It's too late for *Phi-Phi*, but we can hope to go to Moscow, and on 6 February in Paris we saw the old ladies who always move about curiously on the night of a riot and take to their heels with such singular speed when the police charge. Why shouldn't we, who missed the march on Warsaw, the march on Rome, the entry into the Rhineland, at least go and see the celebrations in Germany? In twenty years' time, none of this may exist any more. You have to have seen the world, dear Catherine, and of that world, I think you have to have seen Germany.

CATHERINE - I don't want to go to Germany.

FRANÇOIS - You don't want to go there for a while, you don't want to take a trip, or you don't want to live there?

CATHERINE - I don't want to travel there, I don't want to live there. I don't want to go to Germany. Don't try to lure me there by talking about the music, I don't know anything about music; or by describing the shows, I don't like crowds; or by telling me about the painters, the cathedrals, I don't like museums, I don't know anything about sculpture; or by telling me that they pick flowers there, I'm not interested in German flowers. I don't want to go to Germany.

FRANÇOIS - I've never known you so full of negations, so heavy with advice and stubborn resolutions, stuck in the ground like a sign of contradiction and certainty. I thought I was bringing you pleasure, a change, something harmless and light. But I see you stumbling over the word Germany, with your little nose at ground level, and pawing backwards like a dog at a standstill. You know it's hard for me to refuse. What I'm being offered isn't so terrible or so long. I won't be staying in Germany all my life. And it's an offer that must flatter me.

CATHERINE - Don't go to Germany, François. It's not the country for us. You won't find there the enchantment of the rule of three and the decagram, only the intoxication of the forest and the gorge. We will be lost there, as in the legend of the Rhine, we will have no one to understand us, or we will cease to understand ourselves. All those who have gone to Germany have lost their way, for themselves or for others.

FRANÇOIS - What nonsense! All the people I know who went to Germany came back more French than ever, anchored on the contrary in their French feeling, exasperating by dint of having pitted the radical teacher against the Nazi group leader, and the rule of three against the Black Forest. Who did you know who got lost in Germany?

CATHERINE - But nobody! Who says I knew anyone? I don't know anyone.

FRANÇOIS - Was she all alone, in her circle and in her bubble, the young girl who came up to me ten years ago, in a world of green cardboard and enchantment? Was she all alone, the square dancer, whom I chose at first sight because I could isolate her so easily from the others, in my magic circle? Wasn't I making a mistake when I cut her out of the air, like a sacrilegious person who cuts out the face of a saint or angel, after the sacristan has left, in a dark church panel?

CATHERINE - I don't understand what you mean. I don't want to go to Germany because I don't like Germany, that's all.

FRANÇOIS - You don't want to get lost in Germany like you do in the land of the gnomes, Rhine gold and fairy ring, do you? But we won't go looking for such miraculous conquests. We'll be simpler. You were hoping for the Rhine gold and the ring?

CATHERINE - I'm not stopping you from getting them after all. Go to Germany. But leave me here. I don't understand anything about Bavarian lakes or cathedrals of spotlights.

FRANÇOIS - I should be leaving for a year, two years. CATHERINE -

Stay, François. Don't leave me for Germany.

FRANÇOIS - I can feel you all tense and taut, my little girl, in this unknown Germany, like a jungle or a planet. Why worry? We will only be separated from Paris by one night, even less.

CATHERINE - But that's not it.

FRANÇOIS - Let me do it, let me soothe this anguish around you. Let me search. CATHERINE -

Don't look.

FRANÇOIS - Why are you struggling, and is it really necessary to say what would be better accommodated in silence? No, you were not alone when I arbitrarily cut you out of the air in the past; and you yourself told me that someone else had promised you the Rhine gold and the ring. Weren't eight years enough to make you forget? Is he in Germany, the man who was to bring you the gifts of the water girls and the songs of the Lorelei?

CATHERINE - Nobody has ever promised me anything, François. But I don't want to go to Germany to meet someone I knew when I wasn't even the young girl in the square. I told you that at the time.

FRANÇOIS - You didn't tell me he was in Germany. CATHERINE -

He came.

FRANÇOIS - I won't ask you how you know, I don't care. I just think that ten years haven't erased its shadow enough, since you still know which fields and streets it casts its shadow over. So it's not possible you to travel through a country where we speak the same language, where we celebrate the same festivals as the country where this stranger perhaps lives? Germany is big, Catherine. Why should we meet him? Why does the mere thought of meeting him, at the corner of some wooden house with a carved gable, at the corner of some new autostrada in the Silesian sands or the Bavarian forest, stop you, upset you? Are you really that insecure, Catherine?

CATHERINE - I't know, François, whether I'm sure myself or not. I know not to tempt fate.

FRANÇOIS - Tempt him, Catherine? Never between us has there been any question of temptation, It is a word that had not been translated into our vocabulary. Do you know where he is, Catherine? Have you written to him, Catherine? Did he write to you, Catherine? Do you ever stop thinking about him, Catherine?

CATHERINE - You're crazy. I've never thought of him as anything other than a lost moment, as lost, as far away from me as my childhood balloons, the eyes of my brothers and sisters, and the long corridor where we dragged ourselves along on a carpet at the age of eight. It was by chance that I found out he was in Germany. And it was you who made me think that I shouldn't go to that country. It's all very simple, you see, much simpler than you might think. We were happy just now, having fun laughing at ourselves and our lives. Don't forget that, François. Don't talk to me about Germany again.

FRANÇOIS - You speak as if Germany, huge and swollen, appeared before us like an obstacle and a revocation. It is not Germany that is forbidding our past happiness, and the hour of which you speak. It is you yourself who, under the heading of country, discover something more threatening than the geography of its rivers, its flints and its marshes. There were so many things for you?

CATHERINE - It wasn't a country, François, it wasn't a fairytale or a journey. It was a mirage, if you like, and I was already suspicious of mirages. We played together in the theatre and went for walks in Paris because I was eighteen and he twenty. It lasted a month, and you knew that when I met you. Today, after eight years, I have to tell you again that he didn't give me anything I wanted from life: he didn't give me security, strength, balance, what you call the magic of the rule of three, and which I need so badly. I was reasonable when I realised that everything was pulling us apart. What crime would I be committing if I were still reasonable and refused to chance bringing us closer together?

FRANÇOIS - No crime, Catherine. But I think that this appetite for certainty is insecure, which at the mere mention of the name of a country, makes you pale, and red, and frightens you.

CATHERINE - And I think that your reason, in which I had believed, is very insecure, which is not content with the advice of silence, and seeks to blur the image of peace.

FRANÇOIS - I never said I was reasonable. I'm not being reasonable, I want to see clearly, and no doubt it's not the same thing.

CATHERINE - Enough clarity. I've had enough of clarity. We've never done more harm than by shining these spotlights of clarity wherever we'd found blissful darkness. I thought you would bring me solidity, certainty. Did you only bring me clarity? All my childhood, just as others were afraid of the night, I was afraid of light, afraid when the tea was brought in, afraid when the day dawned, and I knew that the sick die at dawn, and I was never so happy as when I was lost in the dark of an attic, with all the friendly noises around me. I hate brightness.

FRANÇOIS - We are not going to Germany, Catherine. We will remain in the French shadow, in the French mystery, the shadow and mystery of the people who have loved closed shutters and closed windows the most, who hide to count their pennies and to live, and where the servants stop eating when we enter the kitchens. Let your mirage fade away, let's not give it the chance to take shape in a stadium or on a lake.

CATHERINE - I've already told you that I don't like mirages.

FRANÇOIS - It's quite an enchantment that they provide, and no journey is more purely remembered than the journey through the sands they cover. I don't mind not raising them on the horizon. But those who have once known mirages...

CATHERINE - Leave me alone.

(He leaves.)

SECOND SCENE

(A few days later. Catherine is standing alone. Patrice is let in.)

PATRICE - Here I am again, Catherine.

CATHERINE - I see you.

PATRICE - You knew I was coming back? You weren't unaware that I had been waiting for so many days for this moment that would bring us face to face again? Were you waiting for this moment too?

CATHERINE - I didn't say anything.

PATRICE - You haven't said anything, but I can hear you. I can hear your heart beating, and its beat fills the room like that day in the past when it beat so hard it almost broke, and mine at the same time.

CATHERINE - I didn't say anything, Patrice. I've been happy since I lost you. I've got a house, I've got a husband, I'm happy.

PATRICE - I can't believe you're happy. You were asleep, that's all. People sometimes think that sleeping is letting go. But you sleep just as well in action. I slept too, for ten years. Slept while working under the sun, while not sleeping, while toiling as no man in the world has ever willingly toiled. And people think I'm energetic and active, but I was asleep. Only you know, seeing me again, how poor I am and how deprived of everything, and that I have only just woken up.

CATHERINE - That's not what I see, that's not what's terrible. I see you, Patrice, as I saw you in that spring a long time ago: you are uncertain, you are cruel, and it is this uncertainty and this cruelty that for me, for a time, took the very place of happiness. You are the mask that happiness wore for a while, and I found it hard to lift it and understand. Cruel, cruel, so cruel, why do you come back? You're not the same, though, and you've aged, it has to be said, aged a lot, and your face has moved like a bad photograph, and you've already got grey hair on your temples, and maybe even less hair. But you are so cruel that I see you again with your old body, and that slightly acute face, those thin lips, everything that was for me the mask of happiness.

PATRICE - It wasn't the mask, it was happiness itself. We have slept, Catherine, longer and more deeply than on the night of our real wedding, when we were thought to be dead next to each other. Isn't it time we woke up? I can't stand it any longer, I've been lurking around for days, and I already knew the colour of your lamp before I came in, because I saw it shining a little through the window on Avenue Mozart, between the trees. Do you still love Paris so much, Catherine? I taught you to know it, and for so many years I've been away from it that I haven't seen it change since the days when I walked there with you. I don't know what to say any more, and I don't care, and suddenly I find you again, you who have not aged, you whose features I had forgotten, because I forget everything in my sleep, and you are only dressed in a different dress, and I have to go back with you through the streets of grey cobblestones and cracked walls, towards Charonne and the Faubourg gardens. There we met two children. They were ours.

CATHERINE - I'll have my own children one day, Patrice, I hope so, I don't need our fictitious children. The ones met and played with are now skinny, nasty, dirty teenagers who hate us, and they're not wrong. Leave me to my real life, Patrice, I don't need any more illusions.

PATRICE - How stiff and tormented I feel you, and how strong you are in my

arms! CATHERINE - I'm not in your arms.

PATRICE - There you are, no one can see us in each other's arms, not even you, not even me, but here we are. Our vocation until now has been to be in each other's arms, invisible, to love each other invisibly, to marry each other invisibly. Don't you want a little more clarity, Catherine?

CATHERINE - Another one who wants clarity. All these men who need clarity. Such pride! I'm a woman. I'm modest and reasonable, you've told me enough, too reasonable. I always have been. I want to believe that young girls, in their pillows, deliver the country, invent the printing press or gunpowder, enlighten the world without flame, and make truth reign around the holy sepulchres. I must have been a very bad and very simple child: I never liberated cities, I never won battles, I never wanted to leave. And I'm very happy in my town, and in this town, in my home. The only thing I want is to be in my place, in the middle of the room in the middle of the house, with my children's room on the right and my room on the left. What strange dreams have you formed for me, Patrice? I'm not a heroine. I can't ride with men, run, take cities and hold a sword. I faint when I see blood. I'm afraid of long corridors. If angels appeared to me, I think I'd fall to my death in terror. But I'm sure they'll never appear to me.

PATRICE - And that hurts you, you saying so.

CATHERINE - I'd so much like to be happy, Patrice. I'm simpler than you think. When I was little, I was always being scolded for being greedy, curious, coquettish, for wanting to touch everything, to touch things with my hands. But I still like things that are great to touch, to see, to taste and to eat. I love deep cuisine, gardens, houses, beautiful children who are as fresh on the cheek as a bunch of flowers. I want my share of happiness. Don't you think that everyone has a share, a piece of happiness, and that some achieve it and others don't? But it exists, I don't know where, marked with our name from all eternity, like a gift hanging on the tree for every child.

PATRICE - I know my Christmas present, I know the name on it.

CATHERINE - Me too, Patrice. That's why you mustn't disturb me. I live here with my friend who is my husband, in the house that is also my friend.

PATRICE - Is that still enough for you?

CATHERINE - I miss having children, Patrice. But apart from them, that will always be enough for me. I've hesitated until now. But they will come. Always, with this friendly life around me, until the day when the one who appears, I can also call my friend, my friend Death! May it come as late as possible, of course! Let him take me only when I'm old, withered, light in my dress, as old women are when the carpenter takes them to the coffin. But if she comes late, I'll be happy, and so will she. Everything has to end, doesn't it? And dying is like going to bed. It's like going home after a walk.

PATRICE - I hope it's going to be a long walk. CATHERINE - I

hope so too. That's why you have to leave me.

PATRICE - Dear little girl. How I love to see you like this, so rebellious against yourself deep down, underneath your calm exterior, all tense and taut, cruel and hard, like a beast full of jolts!

CATHERINE - I'm not joking, Patrice.

PATRICE - Don't be silly.

CATHERINE - I told the truth, Patrice. I don't want you.

PATRICE - It's true, we've never been on first-name terms. Let me do it though. You have a right to be on first-name terms with your dreams, after so many years of sleep.

CATHERINE - Don't you understand that you have to leave me! That you have to go? You have to go away with your caresses, your cajolery, your slyness, everything I've always hated about you, your smile, the way you make fun of yourself, and all the weakness that is mine as soon as you appear, because you laugh like a child, and I feel small and weak next to you, and in need of protection! I don't want you any more, I don't want you any more, I don't want you any more.

PATRICE - I'm going to leave you now, Catherine. I'll come back another day. CATHERINE - Go away. Don't come back.

PATRICE - Goodbye, Catherine.

CATHERINE - Patrice!

PATRICE - What do you want?

CATHERINE - Come. Let me touch you. Let me touch your face with my hand, your body that I will never know as a wife knows her husband's body. Let me touch your hands that won't take me, your eyes, your tough skin, stretched tight over your bones, your mouth, Patrice.

PATRICE - My darling child.

CATHERINE, - Let me touch you again, before you leave me and leave me all alone, I would have liked, Patrice, to belong to you. I can tell you now. My hands will tell you even better than I can, clinging to your neck, clinging to your clothes and not wanting to let you go without retaining a little of your warmth, and your smell, my hands, my poor hands. Just a moment longer. Don't speak. Let me put my hands on your shoulders, hold you like this, close to me and yet far away, at arm's length, already gone. Let me hold you a second longer.

PATRICE - You see it's impossible, Catherine, and you won't let me go. Why this madness?

CATHERINE - Ah, I don't know. Why have you come back? Why have you brought our twentieth year bodies back to my house, along with sour youth and everything that cannot be? I can't take it any more.

PATRICE - I can't go on, Catherine, I can't go on. I've been waiting for you. I've been waiting for you for so long and here you are in front of me, and we mustn't fight any more, we must give in, and the rest doesn't matter.

CATHERINE - Give me your hand. Let me touch your hands. And your face. And your eyes. And everything that must now be mine, like myself, my very body, and my life. Let me touch you, so that today I know and recognise perfectly this wonderful contact with a human being who has always been marked by me. You won't going away again, Patrice? You'll stay close to me, warm and strong, like this forehead that I touch with my hands?

PATRICE - Dear madwoman. Dear passionate.

CATHERINE - Isn't it true, Patrice, that we can be happy?

PATRICE - I don't know. What does happiness matter to us? In the desert, in Germany, was it happiness that I was thinking about, when your small brown form suddenly appeared from the charred stones of Erfoud or the crowds in Nuremberg? We don't know if we will be happy, we only know that we must walk close to each other, and that it was impossible to fight for so long. Waiting for so many years, bittersweet, and suddenly discovering that life had no meaning because that small brown shape had disappeared from the horizon, and that there was no need to look for anything else, and that those dreams of the eighteenth year, of the twentieth year, are reality itself, and that they don't need disappearing backdrops, a peaceful and pacifist Europe, the grey and mute ghosts of the screen, but that they can just as easily reappear for bodies of thirty years old, thicker, less

light, in a world transformed, all glittering with possible wars. What does it matter, best loved one, what does it matter what is not this truth, at this hour that recognises us, visible at last in each other's arms?

CATHERINE - But what about the future,

Patrice? PATRICE - What is the future?

CATHERINE - But I'm not alone, Patrice, but I have a husband, Patrice. And you popped into my life like a thunderstorm, and now what do you want me to do?

PATRICE - I don't know, I don't know anything, I don't know what the future is, or the truth about others. I know that it's impossible for you not to be mine, that I've waited too long, that I want to take you with me, better loved, bitter-sweet, and that we have these years to start again, these years that I didn't live and during which we slept.

CATHERINE - Has my whole life been a sleep since then? PATRICE - A

sleep, Catherine.

CATHERINE - Let me wake up slowly. I've never liked waking up early, or all . Let me see the world around me, and the window, and the bed, and the wardrobe.

PATRICE - You want to think, Catherine. Haven't we done enough thinking over the last ten years?

CATHERINE - I don't know.

PATRICE - Your house that surrounds you is a set, a paper house, and we will break through the walls as we leave our home in a dream. You don't live here, you live with me. You're not married, I'm your husband. Where are your children, Catherine? These children you are waiting for, you say, but have not yet had, and who will only come when they are ours? This is the proof that you are not married. We'll be able to give them our names, like those two little ones we met one evening a long time ago, near a low, grey church. You've told me enough, that your life is now a safe and real life, and yet I see nothing around you, no mechanical horse without a mane, no doll without eyes, no pierced ball, no lost lottery, nothing, none of those glittering symbols that indicate the reality and security of life. Everything around you is fake, Catherine, your love is fake, your marriage is fake, your home is fake, and I'm coming and you're alone, and you're still the young girl I rowed past one June morning on the round lake in the Bois. Now it's up to me to offer you reality, an adventurous and secure life, you regret, desire and didn't have. You open your mouth and remain silent and open your mouth like a fish drowning in air. I offer you the water, the race, the pleasure, the happiness. What do you need to think about?

CATHERINE - No, I don't want to think. I'm tired of thinking and being reasonable. But let me wait.

PATRICE - I leave you. A little more time, and I will come back, no longer like a storm, but like your dream itself, the dream you had in your sleep. Lie down. Be alone. It's getting dark already. I told you it was sleep. You won't even see me leave. I'll be back.

CATHERINE - You'll be back?

PATRICE - Bittersweet, I'll be back.

(He goes out. Night falls. She is left alone. Time passes. François enters the room after an hour or two).

FRANÇOIS - Were you sleeping, Catherine?

CATHERINE - I was dreaming.

THIRD SCENE

(A few days have passed and 's time for the first scene).

FRANÇOIS - Do you remember, Catherine? The other week, I was asking you how two main characters, brought together in a play, attack their scene, when nobody has seen them yet, and we don't even know their first names.

CATHERINE - Yes.

FRANÇOIS - I'm thinking about something today. Perhaps you could give me some information.

CATHERINE - Perhaps.

FRANÇOIS - What does a character who has noticed something new do? Seen it because he has guessed it, not because he has seen it. And who doesn't have the patient skill of those heroes dear to the playwrights of the boulevard, who doesn't know how to ask those insidious questions from which the truth gradually emerges. Who doesn't know all about this dramatic progression in which we see the masterpiece of fidelity to life, and who doesn't need to.

CATHERINE - I don't understand.

FRANÇOIS - Perhaps I'm wrong to speak in parables. But I think it's pretty clear what I'm saying. The person is sure, he doesn't need any confirmation, and suddenly, out of pure loyalty, he wants to tell the other person that he's sure. Right in the middle of life, all of a sudden, without any link or connection to what has gone before. What came before was lunch or dinner, the simplest story, spring, winter, rain or shine. There is no comparison between what he has to say and the day-to-day events of their day. He simply wants to say that he is sure. Without getting angry, without being dramatic, and above all without trying to be clever, without wanting to conduct an investigation. He has no aptitude for detective stories. He is simply sure.

CATHERINE - But sure of what?

FRANÇOIS - You must have seen Patrice Blanchon again, Catherine. Don't answer me. I don't have to tell you how I know, because I don't know myself. The other day, when I talked to you going to Germany, I think you hadn't seen him yet. At least, I suppose so, but I could be wrong. It doesn't really matter. If he wasn't with you in body, he was there in spirit. He had already returned. Again, I don't want to be wrong, but it seems to me that he wasn't with you very often during those eight years. I'm not being too presumptuous, am I? Now he's back, you've seen him again. You've recognised him. You recognised him as he was, and you recognised yourself as you were ten years ago. There's nothing any of us can do about it. What are we going to do about it now?

CATHERINE - He came back, it's true, he came in through that door, he stood in front of me like someone standing in a dream. He left again. It was a dream. I told you straight away when you came in. I was dreaming.

FRANÇOIS - I don't like you dreaming. I knew you as a sensible little girl, surrounded by school things and household tools, so you didn't need to dream.

CATHERINE - You can dream as much as you like. I see you're not used to it. A dream is such a small thing. It slides over sleep like a drop of water on a window pane, over the thick reality of sleep. Sleep is more important than a dream.

FRANÇOIS - Was it sleep, those ten years, Catherine? Did he tell you it was sleep?

CATHERINE - Don't look for it, don't chase after that light, that false brightness of which you all speak! It came, of course, it surprised me like a nightmare and like a storm. The storm has passed now. This is where I live, not in the house of dreams.

FRANÇOIS - You're not made for this house. You were made for the solid stone house, for the little fire of logs in the fireplace, for the wide, low bed, for the table and for the lamp. Repeat for me that you are real and strong, and that you are not a figure of smoke, a dancer of shadows and ashes.

CATHERINE - I don't need to repeat it. My future, François, is to move forward patiently with a real and resistant man in this real and resistant life, as you say. It is to consolidate the stone house around me, not to retrace my steps, to rediscover the inconsistent young girl, the acrobats' roulette, and the aerial dreams in which you walk at twenty, eyes closed, a reed pendulum in your hand, as if on a rope above the river. If all that has come back around me, I can't help it. But let me close the doors on the invasion. You're the one trying to open them. It wasn't me who wanted to go to Germany.

FRANÇOIS - How false and easy everything becomes when you talk! The curious Germany I proposed to you is long gone, and it fled from me the moment I knew what it was hiding behind its monumental banners and stadiums. But I prefer to hear you say that you like the compact and secure life, even if you seem to me to be too quick to worry about a dream. I've always been afraid of dreams, Catherine, and perhaps that's why I seemed capable of giving you solidity and peace. I don't know if I'm really capable of that, but I do know that I've made an alliance with the house and with life, and that this stranger has only made an alliance with the dream.

I refuse to believe, Catherine, that so many shadows and so many clouds can really prevail over this armchair, over this painted wall, over this fireplace, over this nailed-down carpet, over all these very real objects that surround us. There are so many other things for us to conquer, things that are not just shadows and clouds, but fraternal with this armchair and this wall! This is our life, your life, life, Catherine, this conquest over reality is as patient as God's conquest over chaos on the morning of creation, as the Dutchman's conquest over the sea. It's not a question of letting yourself be submerged by the dreams of youth, with their great powdery foam! We must move forward, patiently, dike by dike, through our future polders. We have so much to do, so much to conquer! The children haven't come yet, Catherine, and we were wrong, but they will come. And they will come, like field after field, farm after farm, all our real possessions, all our estates, and our pleasures, and our pains, and our white hairs, and all that is true, all that is ours, whereas those dreams you had as a young girl, and which suddenly enter through the door or the window, belong to no one.

CATHERINE - Talk to me. Keep me in this chair and in this room. Weave your ties and nets around me. Tell me what I was made for, you who know all this better than I do. It's not dreams that can weigh me down enough, with their useless ballast: I need all that you promise me, heavy and fair, and so calm.

FRANÇOIS - But I'm not calm, my little girl. I'm trying to show you our treasures and our toys, but you can see, can't you, how my hands tremble. It's hard, you know, to feel everything that was life itself slipping away, pulled away by your dreamy head, by your incongruous thoughts. And why, I ask you? For very old forgotten musings, for student walks through Paris, for a ghost. I'm not in the habit of fighting ghosts. I've never had one around me, whether from God or the devil. My battle is with material worries, mechanical constructions, reports, treatments, the increase in buses, pleasure we gain and touch. I may be clumsy in telling you these things, I don't know how to speak.

CATHERINE - You're not clumsy.

FRANÇOIS - But then, I don't have a halo, I don't walk the streets with that little neon circle around my head that Father Christmases in Christmas shop windows and travellers resurrected in the dreams of sentimental young women have. Too bad! I'll give you what I've got, Catherine, my patient, thick-skinned way of seeing things clearly, my pocket money, my work and my pleasure, and above all my certainty, my certainty that ten years ago we signed together the pact that best suited our desires and who we are.

CATHERINE - Go on. Wrap me up. Wrap me in your words, overload me with the heaviest anchors. Don't leave me. Press down on me as a man presses down on a woman in love, and she can't move, and she's caught, and caged between her limbs, and nailed.

FRANÇOIS - Is it true that you are nailed and caged in my arms, my little girl? Is it true, at least? Because I can't hold on any longer, if you make me wait any longer, I'll give in, collapse and let you go. I can't hold on any longer, Catherine. Hurry up and join me.

CATHERINE - I'm here. Don't let go. Hold me still. Let the dreams fade around me. Let them unravel in the darkest corners of the room. Hold me.

FRANÇOIS - I've you. Don't move. I am here.

CATHERINE - We are here.

FOURTH SCENE

(Patrice has come back to see

Catherine.) PATRICE - I'm back,

Catherine. CATHERINE - I can see

that.

PATRICE - And already it seems to me that everything around has changed. Today is the day you have to answer me. Today is the day you are finally awake, and we are both awake, and we are going to leave, am I right?

CATHERINE - You made a mistake. I made a mistake. There's no point in talking any longer, Patrice. As soon as you this room where you've come, you have to know. I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving, not today, not tomorrow. I'm never leaving.

PATRICE - Aren't you tired of fighting, Catherine? Every time I come over, will I have to hear you say no, see you shake your head gently? So I will have to patiently resist and throw myself into this game, into this

gallantry? As if we didn't have anything else to do? As if we hadn't wasted ten years saying no that meant yes?

CATHERINE - They don't mean anything other than no. I want to stay.

PATRICE - You're not lying? You're not mistaken?

CATHERINE - I want to stay.

PATRICE - Have you spoken to your husband? Did you tell him I was back?

CATHERINE - He knows. All that matters less than you think. I want to stay. I want to stay.

PATRICE - I know why you want to stay here. All it took was for him to speak to you, with his straightforward reason, for you to immediately rediscover what had seduced you eight years ago. His way of feeling life in a simple way, of being solid in a simple way, of suffering in a simple way, of fighting in a simple way, and even of changing his mind in a simple way. You forgot that for ten years you had slept, slept in me, and that your life with me might be restless, but it would be your life. He tempted you again with security.

CATHERINE - I don't know what that means any more, Patrice. Is poor François as sure as you say? He's a man, that's all, and he fights with his reason, but also with that inner trembling that he hides, with so much courage. Is that the security I'll find with him, now that you've come back? Ah, I would be safer and more secure with you, Patrice, because I would have nothing to regret, and I know that I would forget everything else. With him, I will resume what you call my sleep, which will be a sleep with my eyes singularly open. I will look at this door through which you once entered, and I will hope, and I will fear, to see you appear again and again. We will have only one certainty, Patrice, that of being unhappy, of no longer being able to be happy. Is that what you call our security? Ah, you are lighter than I once thought.

PATRICE - And with me, Catherine? Let me at least hear, if you won't give it to me, what you would be like with me, what you would find with me.

CATHERINE - I would find everything I dream of, everything I need. I wouldn't look at any door, any window, I don't know what life would be, if not a game, if not the very continuation of childhood. Breakfast in the morning, with its butter and hot milk, would be a semblance of breakfast, a breakfast for laughs. Everything would be, as the children say, something to laugh about, your presence, mine, our work, love. It wouldn't even be happiness, but something faker and more magical than happiness, the image we have of it, happiness reconstructed in the toy room. As you can see, that's not possible. We're past the age of the toy room.

PATRICE - Speak again. Tell me, tell me what would take the place of happiness, and what I value much more than happiness itself.

CATHERINE - Don't expect me to get caught up in the words I'm going to say myself, like the bee engulfed in its honey. I don't have to describe this illusory life that we won't know: leave me the future consolation of saying it only to myself, mouth closed, for so many weeks, so many years to come, when it will be part of my dreams. I can tell you this without any crime, dear Patrice. We will have our dreams. Don't ask for more than your share.

PATRICE - How strange misunderstandings are! To hear you describe each other, your husband and me, what does it sound like? One would think you were a dreamer, an incompetent, a cloud-breaker who has never experienced the pains and hardships of life, and a courageous man, a fighter. The cloud-breaker is me, and yet it is I who know what hunger is, and heat, and cold, and the pain of the body, and who have spoken to men in their language and made myself obeyed and understood. And the intrepid one is the French petit bourgeois, waiting under the lamp, near a window overlooking trees, on a Parisian street well guarded by the police and the government.

CATHERINE - Well, looks aren't everything, Patrice. And I could also tell you what you've told me a hundred times, that I'm a petit-bourgeoise. And to tell you that you've brought nothing back from your hard, real life except a few unusual, shiny objects that you drag behind you in my dreams. Let me tell you again, it's your share.

PATRICE - I'm not protesting, I'm explaining. All the absurdity of this opposition between these people with you, I'm not saying that it's inaccurate at the same time. And I'm past the age of surprises. You must be right, Catherine, just as you were right ten years ago. I'm going back to Germany on my own.

CATHERINE - We were both right.

PATRICE - I know, let's not talk about it any more. I brought my beautiful red car for you today, you could see it by leaning out of the window, like a child showing off his toys. I wanted to take you with me, in my beautiful red car, and run, and cross Paris, stopping at the Charonne church where we were so happy ten years ago, and cross green and grey France, misty Germany. It was a game for children, you're right, it's not for us any more.

CATHERINE - My poor Patrice!

PATRICE - He's not really to be pitied, he's seen the little girl he used to know.

CATHERINE - But he remains alone and naive with the beautiful red car. Were you counting on her to soften me up, Patrice, to kidnap me and take me to dinner in the Bois?

PATRICE - Don't make fun.

CATHERINE - I'm not making fun of you. You are the Patrice I love, with your toys and your desire to show Paris and the world as I met it, a long time ago. It was Charonne in the old days that you brought to me on the hill, it's Germany today. You love magnificent and cumbersome gifts. We've also passed the age of Christmas presents.

PATRICE - Farewell, reason.

CATHERINE - Farewell, dream.

PATRICE - Who knew?

CATHERINE - Who'd have thought it?

PATRICE - That we think we've found happiness for a moment and turn our heads away?

CATHERINE - That we would understand that it is not happiness, but the most seductive image of bewitchment and pain?

PATRICE - That we would cross paths with our real bodies, as inconsistent and yet as light as our thoughts across distances and water?

CATHERINE - And that we, all sensible, we, mature and certain, we, assured in life, would agree with the raging children that we were, and who, at twenty, understood that they shouldn't live together?

PATRICE - Farewell, certainty.

CATHERINE - Farewell,

temptation.

PATRICE - Now accompany me to the door as you would accompany a visitor. That's all I was.

CATHERINE - I'll come with you, dear distinguished visitor. I'll go even further. I'll come down with you, I'll get into the beautiful red car, and you'll leave me a little further on, at the edge of the Bois, for example, like the day we met. Or even less, at the bend in the road. I want to sit next to you, in the biggest and most sumptuous of Patrice's toys.

PATRICE - Little girl..

CATHERINE - Let me be a little girl. It's for my dreams.

PATRICE - Come and prepare your dreams, dear prudent, dear egoist. I'll gladly give you the red car and the beautiful farewell under the Parisian chestnut trees. That may well be, albeit a little harshly, Patrice's last gift.

CATHERINE - I am not cruel to you, Patrice. PATRICE - I'm not saying anything.

CATHERINE - Come on, Patrice.

PATRICE - Don't you think, Catherine, that we could have been happy? CATHERINE - I

don't know.

(They leave. Then, a moment later, François enters and goes straight to the window).

FRANÇOIS - So I wasn't mistaken. So she left, without even a hat, without any luggage, in that beautiful red carriage waiting at the corner of the avenue. You would have stayed, Catherine, I would have fought. But left? So you're gone, she's gone, the transparent square dancer who entered my life so perfectly, but too lightly no doubt, like a bubble. And here I am, a fool, helpless, new in face of ignorance and grief, not even having recognised her when I passed her on the pavement opposite, only suspicious because I didn't hear her behind the door and overwhelmed by certainty as I watched a red car flee out of the window. Alone again, as alone as I was at the beginning of life, before I met her, and bumping up against the elusive wall on all sides. And yet I could have held on to her with the armchair and the lamp, as I did the other night, and weighed her down with an extraordinary amount of ballast. But I wasn't there, and she left. She opened her door and recognised her dancing youth, which took her away like a breath. And I, thick, I, heavy, not thick enough, not heavy enough, I remain standing against the misty window where the lamps tremble between the leaves. Ten years in one fell swoop, and I'm all alone among the plaster and rubble, holding some big crumbling block, some stone where a torn piece of paper or a spider's thread trembles... How could I even think of rebuilding the wall, joining the floorboards and ceiling battens? The magic house has collapsed around me! It's broken and folded like a paper house, in a great white dust! Who would be left standing alone when their home was gone, and before it was gone it sounded like nothing but emptiness? This small, light person clung to me, so heavy, as a flake clings to a tree, a ball of grass hollowed out by a breath. She's gone now, she was too light for me so heavy, but I realise that I'm not a tree and I'm not so deeply rooted in the earth. Leave me alone! Let me, too, be allowed to be light, to run away, to abandon myself!

(He walks for a moment, then leaves the room. After a quarter of an hour, the door to the flat closes. There is silence again, and Catherine returns to sit in the armchair).

VI - DOCUMENTS

*Take back the favour you lent me And give
me back the death tookme CORNEILLE,
Polyeucte (act II, scene I).*

N.B. - François Courtet had retained from his youth a taste for compiling files. He didn't always go about this task in the same order as before. He would simply cut out anything of interest from newspapers and sometimes books, attach notes taken from the back of an envelope and letters, and pile the whole lot in his wallet, along with photographs. When the bundle became too bulky, he threw it in a drawer, but continued to add to it as the mood took him. In this way, at the whim of events and readings, he had put together for himself a sort of file on the Spanish Civil War, containing documents on what he had known and others on what he had not known. But the whole, no doubt, seemed to him to capture fairly well the colour of a part of his life.

*Facing the sun with the new shirt You
embroidered for me in red yesterday,
Death will find me if it comes,
And I'll never see you again.*

*Next to my companions, who stand
guard under the stars and are at my
side in our efforts, I'll make the
impassive gesture.*

*If they tell you I've fallen, it's
because I've gone away
At the post waiting for me there.*

*The flags will return victorious, With the
cheerful step of peace.
They will have five knotted roses,
The five arrows of my beam.*

*Spring will laugh again
Waiting for the sky, the land and the sea. Rise, legions,
to victory!
A new dawn is breaking over Spain.*

(Song of the Falange.)

Gatherings of soldiers during the first few months of the war remained fairly romantic in character. The Marxist press called for, in the words of Pierre Scize, "the trestles of voluntary enlistment" and evoked memories of the French Revolution. The Madrid government sent Dolores Ibaruri, MP for Oviedo, known as La Pasionaria, to Paris, where she held a meeting at the Vel' d'Hiv, shouting "Blum in action! It was La Pasionaria, whose talent as an orator was undeniable, who would be the main propaganda agent for the Reds throughout the early days of the war, and who would pour out her romantic enthusiasm for them. This Asturian miner's wife was surrounded by a legend of social struggle and civil war, the various episodes of which, depending on the case, were secretly approved or denied; it is said, for example, that she cut a priest's throat with her teeth. True or false, the fact is perhaps not to be disliked. A few hundred, soon to be a few thousand, volunteers managed to get across the border, and they fell into two categories: 1° fighters by doctrine, convinced communists, anti-fascists determined to block the road to reaction; 2° unemployed people from all countries, for whom the battle was just another way of earning a living. It was with regard to the latter that some tactical errors were made. Sometimes minors under the age of eighteen are recruited, as their families ask them to be. Sometimes, promises of high pay were not kept, leading to disillusionment, and escaped militiamen returned to tell of the horrors of the Red Army. Sometimes it was said that the workers' organisations were putting pressure on foreign workers who would have their work permits withdrawn if they did not go to Spain. Lastly, special propaganda was directed at White Russians, former officers who would be allowed to return home with their rank if they first went to Spain to do a training course. Naturally, the biggest recruitment centres were immediately set up in France, organised in the towns by the parties, and mainly by the Communist Party. Belgium also provided considerable contingents. Together, they formed the International Brigades, whose military value was not always obvious.

negligible. But for the first two months, the organisation of these "soldiers of freedom" was not yet perfect: this was the time of what André Malraux called "the Apocalypse of fraternity".

In totalitarian countries, enlistments were carried out in much the same way, and included both categories of men. In Italy, former soldiers from the Ethiopian war were included, and in Germany, Reich citizens already living in Spain. But at first, foreign contingents were relatively few in number in the Nationalist army, and it was not until the autumn that they were organised in a precise manner. It should not be forgotten that several dozen, if not several hundred, Frenchmen crossed the border in the early days, sometimes in terribly romantic and difficult circumstances, to join Franco's troops out of a desire to take risks and out of conviction. During the summer, the whole force was certainly far from matching the numbers of the International Brigades, and the aid given to the Nationalists by Italy and Germany consisted mainly, at first, of supplies.

Finally, on both sides, and in every country in the world, there are also the desperate who have found another Legion, with the same romantic, sentimental and dangerous atmosphere.

(History of the Spanish War, II, 4.)

Before fighting on the various home fronts, the French border at Bidasoa had to be closed to the enemy. On 26 July 1936, a column set off from Pamplona to try and rescue the Falangists besieged in San Sebastian. With the road blocked, they had to take the Irun-San Sebastián road in reverse, passing through Oyarzun. Colonel Beorlegui had already launched an attack on the 23rd with three hundred and fifty Carlists. He was joined by another column, commanded by Colonel Ortiz de Zarate, made up of twelve hundred volunteers and a dismantled 105 mm mountain battery pulled by oxen. Oyarzun, defended by a few militiamen barricaded in their houses, was taken on the morning of 27 July, and Beorlegui, who had taken command of the column, immediately set off for the sea, leaving Irun behind. At that point, with no cavalry and no air force, he knew nothing of his enemy's positions, and did not know which forts were in enemy hands. San Marcos bombarded him quickly, and he realised that three kilometres from Oyarzun, the small town of Renteria, protected by an armoured train, was an insurmountable obstacle. For several days, the front stabilised between Oyarzun and Renteria. A thousand Carlists, machine guns and another mountain battery joined Colonel Beorlegui's forces.

It was during these early days of the war that an episode took place that gives it its chivalric flavour. Commander Garmendia, loyal to the government in Madrid, took the wrong road and stumbled into the Carlist outposts. He was shot at and wounded. In hospital, he recognised Colonel Beorlegui as an old school friend. That evening, he died, and his adversary had the body taken back to Navarre, with a letter to his widow.

(History of the Spanish War, II, 1.)

*Carlos Lesca, alférez de requetes on reconnaissance in Behobia.
To Lieutenant-Colonel D. Pedro Gaxot, Commander Irun Square*

I have the honour of reporting to you that yesterday while on patrol along the Bidasoa, at 11.15 p.m., my attention was drawn to a man swimming across the river from the French border. Shots were fired at him, but they didn't hit. When he got closer, he shouted several : "Arriba España! Viva Franco!" and I ordered my men to stop firing. When he came alongside, we seized him. He said he wanted to join "Nationalist International Brigades" (as he put it), but had not been able to get permission from his government to cross into Spain. During the day, French customs officers prevented him from crossing the international bridge at Hendaye. He has no money on him and speaks no Spanish. He is a Frenchman with identity papers, named Francesco Courtet Herbillot. He was escorted to Irun where he was questioned before being admitted to the Legion. Last week, the two French Basques crossed the border were in fact Marxist spies of Spanish nationality. They were shot.
Behobia, 3 January 1937¹

Today I affirm that fascism, as an idea, as a doctrine and as a realization, is universal: Italian in its particular institutions, it is universal in the spirit that animates it, and it could not be otherwise... It is therefore permissible to foresee a fascist Europe, a Europe inspired by the doctrines and practice of fascism in its institutions, a Europe, in

¹ This piece, like others of its , must have been copied for François Courtet (Herbillot, after his mother) by some fellow staff scribe.

in other words, resolving in a fascist sense the problem of the modern state, the state of the twentieth century, so different from the states that existed before 1789 or that were formed afterwards.

Benito Mussolini.

(*Message for the year IX-1931*).

Just as the young and sensitive democrat, trained by *the Encyclopaedia* and its principles, discovered a new exaltation at the birth of the United States of America, created by Freemasonry, so, in the twentieth century, it was Italy that brought the first political realisation of a nationalist and social doctrine. Oliveira Salazar's Portugal, founded on Christian principles, provided the model for a corporative system inspired by La Tour du Pin, which had only been applied in Italy within the framework of a more rigorously statist administration. When Germany, in its turn, completed its revolution, it obviously brought its own personality to it, which there is no question of transferring elsewhere. But without wishing to go into the details of its racial, religious or imperialist dogmas, it is certain that it gave National Socialism at least its preoccupation with proselytism and at least its festivals. The cult of the fatherland was translated into ceremonies of sovereign beauty, day and night services, Walpurgis nights illuminated by spotlights and torches, enormous music, songs of war and peace sung by millions of men. Finally, in the years that followed, the various nationalist movements, whether victors or candidates for power, whatever their differences, each contributed a particular feature, or reinforced the notion of a universal revolution, similar to the one that burnt the whole of Europe in 1848, for example.

We were interested in Mustapha Kemal's attempts to create a Turkish national feeling. People were watching the fire being lit everywhere, glowing with a low or high flame, seeing the whole old world gradually threatened. It was on the plains and canals of Holland, among the pastures, the tulip fields and the armies on bicycles, Mussert's *National-Socialistische Beweging*; it was in the suburbs of London itself, in the English meadows, the English mines, Oswald's *British Union of Fascisms*. Mosley, it was the movements of French-speaking or German-speaking Switzerland, and the Bulgarians with the *Defence of the Fatherland*, the *National Legions*, the Danes with their National Socialists, the Norwegians with their *National Association*; all the peoples, in turn, from the Balkan gaps to the dry landscapes of Greece, to the icy fjords, from the red plains of Castile to the green and white mountains where a lost bell rings, began a long restless and sleepless night, where they heard singing, each in their own way: "Nation, wake up!" In Romania, Cornéliu Codreanu addressed his legionnaires in speeches full of harsh, colourful poetry, appealing for sacrifice, honour and discipline, calling for that "state of collective enlightenment hitherto encountered in the great religious experiments" which he called state of "national ecumenicity", and creating the original monastic and military movement of the Iron Guard. Finally, in Belgium, a land of traditional liberalism, Rexism, quite apart from its other merits, placed the emphasis, because of its thirty-year-old leader, on the most spectacular and attractive element of the new world: youth. The universe was ablaze, the universe was singing and gathering, the universe was working. Everywhere, eyes were turned towards what some, as early as 1933, crouching before their Wailing Wall, moaningly and indiscriminately called fascism.

And finally, while all the various doctrines were either still waiting for power or had seized it without a long war (even German nationalism), a terrible struggle broke out in one of the noblest lands in Europe, pitting *fascism* and *antifascism* against each other in bloody combat. Spain was thus completing the transformation of the long simmering opposition in the modern world into a spiritual and material struggle, a genuine crusade. Its international brigades, on both sides, sealed alliances in blood. All over the world, men felt that the siege of Toledo, the siege of Oviedo, the battle of Teruel, Guadalajara, Madrid and Valencia were their own war, their own victories and defeats. The Chinese coolie, the labourer from Belleville, the rogue lost in the London fog, the poor and disappointed gold prospector, the master of the Hungarian or Argentine pastures, could flinch with anguish or pleasure at some misspelled name in some unknown newspaper. In the grey smoke of shells, under a sky ablaze with Russian and Italian fighter planes, ideological contradictions were resolved, in this old land of acts of faith and conquerors, through suffering, blood and death. Spain gave its consecration and definitive nobility to the war of ideas.

This is how myths are created. In his *Reflections on Violence*, Georges Sorel, the man to whom Mussolini claimed to owe everything, explained at length the creative value of myths. *It matters very little," he declared, "to know what details myths contain that are destined to appear dryly on the plan of future history; they are not astrological almanacs.... Myths must be seen as a means of influencing the present..."*. The myth of fascism has the advantage, which the myth of the general strike dear to Sorel did not have, of having been incarnated several times, in various forms. But its virtue comes from elsewhere. It comes from its power, which makes it, according to Sorélien's definition, "*an organisation of images capable of instinctively evoking all the feelings that correspond to the various manifestations of the war waged... against modern society*". The flames of the Spanish war gave these images their power of expansion and their religious colouring.

as in democratic countries. In Zaragoza, in particular, we will see several times in the shop windows a large, clearly legible sign: "This shop has been fined for selling at excessive prices... this shop has been fined for concealing goods". These are tough measures, which we can only applaud.

There are others. On the whole, it is certain that the Spanish high bourgeoisie and aristocracy understood their duty admirably. The greatest families - starting with the royal family - have had sons killed in the modern Reconquest. But lesser families sometimes balk at the duty of gold, which for them replaces the duty of blood. The Falange took it upon itself to make them understand the necessities of the moment, and, as the Italian fascists did, to remind them that voluntary contributions are most useful to the State. Rather than being robbed by the Marxists, isn't it better to sacrifice part of your assets? The great liberals of yesteryear were made to understand this with firm discretion. Some of the great lords who were approached thought they were being generous enough to sign a cheque for 6,000 pesetas. One of them had a magnificent beard that was his pride and joy and was famous throughout Spain. He was visited by some young men who seated him in a spacious armchair, courteously placed a beard dish around his neck and shaved the precious fleece. The next day, he He "completed" his offering to the party. French anti-fascists who imagine that Spain's liberation movement is at the service of the most sordid reaction would no doubt be surprised to learn this.

This discipline, moreover, hardly needs to be exercised towards those who have understood, from the outset, where the intelligence of their time and charity should lead them. In the social works of the new regime, the daughters of the aristocracy, those of the upper bourgeoisie, work with their hands alongside the daughters of the working class. They are the women of a great people.

The most important aspect of the *Auxilio Social* is the home-delivered meals, which are collected in small three-tiered containers (in keeping with the Spanish custom of multiple dishes). We have seen these meals distributed: the poor people who came to collect them, no order, no Propaganda could have given them that air, both satisfied and *free*, of someone who comes because it is right. The pretty Castilian women who handed them the crusty bread, the spicy sausages and the chickpeas in oil were happy and fraternal. It was the furthest thing from a *soup kitchen* we had ever experienced! And these people were going to eat this meal at home, on their table, with their family. And the charity that distributed the food to them bore a name that had been desecrated in France, but which took on its full meaning over there; it wasn't called a charitable enterprise or help for the destitute, it was called *hermandad*, meaning fraternity.

We can see how far this fraternal and Christian spirit is from the National Socialist spirit, whose practical achievements we must admire. Spain could, if it wished, astonish the world - even more than Portugal - by establishing a kind of Fascist Catholicism, the originality of which belongs to it alone. It is the feeling of fraternity, of the communion of the faithful in the nation and in love, that serves as the driving philosophy of this rising nation. And what is astonishing is to see how this feeling has so quickly moved from the realm of doctrine to that of action.

When evening descends on Spanish cities, it's the same joyful stroll, the same charming *paseo*, with only a few more soldiers than usual, and a few blond or brown "technicians". But the war was still there, present, the war united with the necessary revolution. At half past eleven in the evening, all the French TV stations, at maximum strength, in the restaurants and cafés, in the public squares, broadcast the communiqué. Beforehand, they gave a fairly long list of names. As we asked what it was, we were told:

- This is news for the families of the red prisoners. The prisoners we take. The Reds almost always simply report them missing, without explanation. We tell the families when they are injured, where they are being treated and what their condition is. They listen to the T.S.F. for news.

After the reading of the press release, the official anthem, the *Chant des grenadiers*, was played, which was the *Marcha Réal*... Everyone leapt to their feet and saluted with outstretched arms.

Pierre RAYNAUD, *La Revue grise*.

In the Toledo town hall, a little old lady clutching an oilcloth shopping bag asks for the señor *alcalde*. She speaks quickly and weeps, opening her oilcloth bag from time to time. Her husband and son have been killed, and she has no potatoes. Who? The Reds? The Whites? We don't know, she mixes everything up in her terror, and taps her canvas bag in despair. She goes from one to the other, weeping as she explains her three interchangeable miseries: her dead son, her dead husband, the lack of potatoes, and all of this is mysteriously linked to her waxed canvas bag, to her despair, to her quiet, demented chatter.

(From a French newspaper).

To Mr Seneca.

You may be surprised, sir, by this letter and my adventures. I would not like to disappear altogether from the world where those I have known live. I no longer have any relatives, and I don't want my friends to know where I am. Nor do I want you to give out my address. But in the end, everything has to be planned for. If one day they need to know where I am, where I died, you'll know that it's in white Spain, and it's not difficult to reach me, no doubt, through the Legion. Why did I choose you? In memory of some conversations, and to be able to inform and remain silent at the same time, to be known and remain hidden.

François COURTET, here legionnaire HERBILLOT.

Although at the end of December the Nationalists had gained some advantages in the Brunete sector, the situation of the forces east of the Manzanarès and the Cité Universitaire remained critical. On the other side, the Reds still held El Escorial and the line from Madrid to Avila. On 3 January, Franco decided to launch a new attack against the Red positions, which were solidly sheltered and defended by the International Brigades. The Red counter-attacks on the 11th and 12th were in vain. Instead of a concave line bending towards Boadilla, the Nationalists had a convex line between Vademorillo and Madrid passing through Las Rozas and the Manzanarès. The situation at the Cité Universitaire improved considerably. But El Escorial was still in Red hands, and the heavy rain that fell on the 13th prevented any large-scale operations.

At the start of the attack on the 3rd, the Reds had attempted a diversion to the south, towards Villaverde and Getafe, but to no avail. On the 19th, a similar attempt on the Cerro and los Angeles, after artillery preparation and with the help of tanks, was more successful and they occupied part of the ground. Moreover, the fine results of the Nationalist attack from 3rd to 10th January had not actually dented the defence of Madrid, although the pressure was now as strong as it had been in November. On 10 January, Miaja ordered that the entire population, with the exception of men aged between twenty and forty-five and any women who so wished, should abandon the capital. Long lines of civilians in cars and carts headed south-east. As in November, the danger brought the enemy brothers closer together, and reconciliation seemed to be taking place among the defenders, although clashes between Spaniards and international brigades were frequent.

(History of the Spanish War, II, 6.)

*Our fathers fought for God, country and
king.*

*For God, for country and for king We'll
fight too.*

*We'll all fight together, all united,
Defending the banner of
Holy Tradition.*

*For God, for country and for king Our
fathers died.*

*For God, for country and for king We
die too.*

(Oriamendi, song of the Carlist petitions).

On leave in Toledo. I'm at the café; a German, clearly recognisable, talks to me, sits down at my table, drinks a *refresco*. Germany interests me more and more, and we talk.

The legionnaire.

The new type of soldier. The professional soldier. He had been a French legionnaire and had come to Spain. It's true that he's a "technician", he doesn't fight, like most Germans here.

And yet there are some in the Legion. I also know an Italian who went Ethiopia. A Frenchman who went to the Chaco and China.

Back to the mercenary. Some may not even be convinced. Red side aviators, with bonuses and insurance. A job like any other. After all, why not?

A relative of the sixteenth century and this third of the twentieth.

I told my German. He speaks perfect French. Naturally, he gives me no explanation of his role in Spain. He must have come here very conscientiously, *studying* the Spanish war, looking at what's going and what isn't, taking notes on the present and the future. He must be an engineer, or something like that. But he does belong to that new type professional soldier that we thought would disappear. The man who runs where there is war. Who hears the call of war. And who joins the side he prefers.

Mercenary during the Wars of Religion.

Were we going to commit ourselves either to the Protestants or to the Catholics? I don't know.

Today, we committed either to universal fascism or universal anti-fascism. A religious war. Unless

you sign up for something else. I didn't tell him why I'd left.

He gave me his name for 'after the war'. His name is Siegfried Kast, he lives in Munich, and they would refer me to him at the Brown House.

(Notes by François Courtet.)

TOLEDO, A DEAD CITY

Just two kilometres from the enemy lines, Toledo was even deader than Barrès saw it. Toledo is a strange city buried by night, with no lights other than flickering blue lamps in the winding Arab streets. The cafés of Zocodover are sheltered by earthen sacks, padded up to the first floor, and closed at midnight. The streets are deserted, the shops poor. You could sense the threat of war and the approach of the front line, even if the marvellous green and yellow square had not been destroyed from top to bottom. The rest of the imperial city has not suffered too much. But Zocodover is in ruins, gone forever from the face of this world: you can imagine restoring a monument, and San Juan de los Reyes, opposite the Alcázar, will soon repair its wounds; you can't imagine restoring a masterpiece of chance, those fifty irregular balconies, those unstylish but exquisite houses, those poor but marvellous facades. Guns and mines have destroyed for ever this unique Spanish achievement.

So close to the front, Toledo has not yet returned to its former life. At the café we meet the *alcalde* who lived through the seventy-two days of the siege of the Alcazar. He tells us about it with a sort of charming elation.

- I didn't like boiled horse at all," he confesses. I didn't like it at . Even if there had been salt... But there wasn't any. So I ate wheat. It wasn't very good, because of the bran. But it was better than boiled horse.

And he laughs out loud at his gastronomic embarrassments.

Outside the Alcazar, there is little or nothing left but monumental ruins. We visited the underground passageways, with their enormous walls, we saw the door on which the only small cannon was pointed, the mill made from a motorbike engine, the telephone from which Colonel Moscardo heard his son's voice, the bakery, the humble souvenirs of the siege, the last bottles of pharmacy, the bread, the wheat that was left. The infirmary had been set up in the chapel covered with a large red carpet. A copy of the Virgin of Alcazar, the original of which is now in the cathedral, was placed there. Here is the room where one of the two children of the siege, Ramon-Alcazar, was born, here is the swimming pool where some twenty of the dead still sleep, and the bathing cubicles where some of them were buried standing up. Here, in the courtyard, stands the statue of Charles V, his armour pierced by a bullet.

There was a Frenchman in the Alcazar, but we hardly knew it. His name was Isidore Clamagiraud. We'll meet him later: he's a pastry chef in the Place Zocodover, has a little rat face, with freckles, and he tells us straight out, with a slightly sardonic smile:

- I'm the famous Frenchman from the Alcazar.

He went out twenty-one nights in a row, at the end of July and the beginning of August, to look for flour in his shop. On the twenty-first night, he was caught. The next morning, they were ready to shoot him. But that day, the French consul in Madrid was touring Toledo to arrange for the repatriation of French nationals. He was told that Isidore was to be executed. He waited for the motorcade on the way to the Transito synagogue, pounced on the condemned man, pushed him into his car and sped off, just like in a film. The confectioner explains this calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

In the streets of Toledo, we see a few legionnaires who come from the Madrid front, sometimes to relax for forty-eight hours. One of them, a Frenchman who fought in the last war and has been fighting in Spain since the beginning, tells us some beautiful and horrible stories.

- The Reds tried to retake Toledo in 1936," he tells us. We sent the Legion against the tanks. Do you know the best way to fight tanks? You throw a bottle of petrol, it breaks, you throw a grenade, and the tank lights up like a match. Only when we got to the tanks, the bottles were full of water! The Reds' little friends had played a nice trick on us. We came back one hundred out of seven hundred.

He shrugs his shoulders. It's the misfortunes of war

We ask him how the French are judged in the Legion.

- In my *bandera*," he told us, "the commander has given an order: any legionnaire who speaks ill of France will get two days in the *platoon*. Do you know what a platoon is? You get up at four o'clock, work non-stop and go to bed at two in the morning. When you have to deal with a bad head, you put the bag on him: a very heavy bag on his back, which he must never leave, even to sleep. So we take it for granted.

Tomorrow, Toledo will no doubt resume its former destiny as a sumptuous city, a city of enchantment. The rebuilt Alcazar will no doubt once again become the Spanish Military Academy. And we must also hope that a wise leadership policy and the social works of the Falange will revive life in these streets and in this desolate countryside. Today, it may only be the museum of Spain at war, but it is the most moving and superb of museums.

It was not unusual for life to have resumed everywhere else, and for Toledo to remain wounded, torn apart, with its mines and its memories. No other city in Spain, however attractive, Burgos, Seville or Segovia, could have claimed a similar fortune. While waiting to become a great living city again, it was foreseeable that, in this war, Toledo would choose to be, for a few months, under its veiled lights, in its abandoned streets, the very city of death.

Pierre RAYNAUD, *La Revue grise*.

*I'm a soldier in the heroic Legion,
A painful ordeal weighs on my soul, and I
seek redemption in the fire.*

*We are all unknown heroes. No one wants
to know who we are. And a thousand and
one tragedies
The cycle of our lives.*

*Everyone is who they are: who cares!
Life as it was doesn't matter.
Together we form a flag that gives
glory to religion.*

*Legionnaire, legionnaire,
You who seek to fight,
You leave your fate to chance,*

*Your very life is chance.
Legionnaire, legionnaire,
Without rival in courage
You'll meet death in war, and your
shroud, Legionnaire, will always be
the national flag.*

(Song of the Legion.)

IN THE TRENCHES OF MADRID

The Cité Universitaire in Madrid is no further from the capital than the Cité Universitaire in Paris is from ours. It is in Madrid itself, at the gates of the city, that Franco's soldiers have long been entrenched, in a sort of "pocket" that is besieged on all sides, constantly mined, and that only communicates with the hinterland via a few very bare undergrowths and a footbridge exposed to machine-gun fire. This is the land they have occupied, organised, where they live, and where they show commendable pride in the astonishing achievements they have begun to undertake and bring to a successful conclusion.

Once we had crossed the famous footbridge, which we had been ironically told about since the border, we found ourselves in an encampment that looked like a holiday camp. The lieutenant-colonel has a little pink house in the trees: it's the "Villa Isabelita", recently built for him, with the strictest of comforts, complete with kitchen and bathroom. As for the soldiers, they've just had a swimming pool dug for them, and it's quite large, I'd say, so they can happily forget about the sun and the scorching heat. Earlier, we visited a *tabor de regolares*, petted cats in the cagnas and played on a piano sheltered by foliage. In truth, we forgot that the enemy lines were not a hundred metres away. We'd almost forget it, during the miles we'd cover under the sun, through the trenches of the Cité Universitaire, if, from time to time, a little whistle or a dull, dry noise didn't teach us novices to distinguish between bullets that pass over us and bullets that don't hit very far.

These trenches are curious, extraordinarily clean and paved in the strangest way. The most varied and sometimes most luxurious materials have been borrowed from the little palaces next door to the Cité Universitaire. Marble, mosaic and vulgar brick alternate with a delightful eclecticism. But the architects seem to have had an obvious predilection for... radiators. The radiators, which lie on the floor, let the water run off, and are a great replacement for the wooden slats that are usually used. In addition, we walk bent under the ground, sometimes twenty-five metres away, through a loophole blocked by a large stone, looking at the lines of the Reds, the tall houses of Madrid so close by, the giant Telefonica building and the churches.

In the Cité Universitaire itself, few buildings (or ruins, rather) belong to the nationalists. The colonel in charge of the sector, who had courteously come to wait for us and who would accompany us everywhere, pointed to it with his cane:

- This is Philosophy... It's red...
- Naturally...
- Medicine, dentistry... red too. But the hospital-clinic is ours. And Architecture too... And the Casa Velasquez.

We visit the ruins of Casa Velasquez, once a French house, and the even more imposing ruins of the enormous hospital-clinic, one of the most beautiful in Europe, now completely ransacked, with dozens of floors collapsed and folded on top of each like paper. The architecture is in better condition. It's here that the officers of the post office will be inviting us to the most sumptuous of lunches, which would suggest that the Cité Universitaire is one of the gastronomic stops for tourism in the new Spain - stops that are, to be honest, a little hard to get to. There, in the shadow of the armoured shutters where a machine gun bursts in from time to time, we visit some of the non-commissioned officers' and soldiers' rooms (with only religious pictures on the walls), and the hospital.

The Cité Universitaire hospital is perhaps the wonder of Spain. In the most sheltered corner of the architecture, sophisticated surgical services have been organised. The wounded were taken there immediately and treated immediately. The enemy was fifty metres away. We were constantly firing and bombing. It's not far from here that we're going to pay our respects to a formidable scree slope where thirty Moroccans were caught one day when a mine exploded. Everywhere else, mines are ready to explode. Trenches were left under the surveillance of a single sentry, almost evacuated, waiting for them to explode. It is in these conditions that a modern hospital has been set up and is operating, saving untransportable wounded every day.

- Here's one," says the surgeon. Wounded, his temperature is 37°5 and he is safe. If we had had to transport him, he would have died. As soon as we can, we'll evacuate him by night, via the gangway.

In a moment, we're going to get lost in the lines, just as the fire starts up again in the late afternoon, and it's some French-speaking Moroccans who will lead us to an officer and put us back on the right path.

Pierre RAYNAUD, *La Revue grise*.

LES CAMELS (*News*)

It was eleven o'clock, and in war-torn Zaragoza, with the restaurants ready to close, people were no longer going to the café as they used to. These are peacetime pleasures. But Spain is still Spain, and when you leave the table this late, can you go to bed? I'd heard about the *Royal*, the only singing café officially open in the whole of Nationalist territory. I asked Pepe to take me there.

- We have to hurry," he says. We close at midnight.

We enter a narrow street, a door ajar, a corridor cluttered with boxes. On the first floor, we were shown to a dressing room. This is the *Royal*. The room is fairly large and poorly lit. Downstairs, wooden benches and tables. Everything was full, almost exclusively of soldiers: legionnaires in green shirts, two or three *requetés* in red berets, a bunch of phalangists. A few Germans too, blond and clearly recognisable. They are silently buying drinks for the women. The spectacle resembles that of any garrison town café-concert. But at the foot of the narrow stage, where a discoloured creature in a wide black skirt, castanets in her fingers, twirls, a dozen soldiers in arms stand guard. They are hilarious, moreover, leaning casually on their rifles, but they have rifles.

- Are there any fights?

- Sometimes," says Pepe. Last week it was the Legion. You know how it is. One guy beats the shit out of another (Pepe knows all the nuances of the French language), a shout: "*A moi la Légion!*" and it's a big dance. Sometimes it's the phalangists. Or foreigners.

- The Germans?

- No. The Italians. They argue with the Spaniards about women. In fact, look at today's attendance: not a single Italian in the room. We've practically banned them.

Some lukewarm *refrescos* have been brought in, and we listen, vaguely numbed, to the singers. They are neither very beautiful, nor very learned, nor very well dressed. But they are women. We understand that in this city of soldiers, the rigour of Fascist Catholicism is somewhat attenuated. And under the dubious lights, this shadow with a slightly crumpled face, whirling around, raising her long arms, her sequined dress, she represents many things. But it's the room I'm looking at above all.

In the box on the right, from which we are separated by a low ledge, two young spectators in green shirts, it seems to me. I look more closely. One of them is a woman, very beautiful, with short black hair and, on her sleeve, two bruises signifying two wounds.

- She's a female legionnaire," Pepe tells me. There are a few like that in the Legion. Didn't you meet Mathilde at the Ciudad Universitaria? We tolerate them. They're loyal to the man they're with. When he's killed, they take another. Until then, everyone respects their comrade.

In this war, all romanticism becomes banal truth. On the left, I lean a little, there seems to be a firm celebration of the latest nationalist victory. Three or four bawlers are applauding wildly for Isabelita, who must be the star of the *Royal*, or the friend dear to their hearts. The nearest one wears a little tricolour ribbon, which I think I recognise, on his epaulette. He hears Pepe speaking French, turns round and looks at me.

- French?

- Yes.

- So am I.

He steps over the edge, comes and sits next to me, almost kisses me, and tells me his name. In this true story, I will only mention his first name: François. François has obviously had a lot to drink and I send for a bottle. He says a few incoherent things to me, while the applause greets Isabelita's last song. Another singer has just arrived, whom my new companion whistles at enthusiastically even before she sings.

- Why are you whistling it?
- She's a bitch.

I'm trying to change the conversation

- How long have you been in Spain?
- Winter. On assignment in Zaragoza. Back from Madrid. I did the Guadarrama. Two injuries.

He shows me his bruises.

- Like the beautiful legionnaire.
- Where? Next door? She's a bitch. All women are bitches.

François must be a misogynist. He continues to whistle with gusto and turns from time to time to the comrades in the dressing room he has just left. One of them looks very young to me, with a round child's face and five broken arms. He is drinking lemonade, laughing very loudly, and mischievously applauding the singer that François is whistling.

- A Frenchman too," my companion informs me briefly.
- He's not very old.
- Eighteen years old.

The teenager hears me and holds out his hand. François smiles, then falls silent, now sombre. A vague murmur runs through the orchestra, supported by the singing of the women, the clash of their pointed heels. Through the smoke, I can make out the soldiers in their caps, the blue shirts of the Falange. The show is drawing to a close. Everything has to close at midnight, by order of the general. The tall woman dressed in black has dropped her light dress and appears half-dressed in a silver jumpsuit. There was much applause, and the guards turned towards the stage. François was silent, shaking his head, when the little Frenchman applauded.

- Eighteen," he says without looking at me. That's a strange age. He doesn't know anything. He'll remember for a long time that he was eighteen. You can remember it for a very long time, you can even do a lot of stupid things just because you're eighteen. I don't know if I was ever that age. It's a bad age, for later on, and for other people. It's better to forget you ever had them.

I report these words exactly. I didn't dare ask for an explanation. François must be in his thirties: who was eighteen with him? Or even remembered being eighteen? Some time before he left for Spain, I suppose...

But the little Frenchman half-heard he was saying:

- Come on! Come on! Still thinking black, you idiot?

He taps her on the shoulder over the railing that separates us. He reaches into his pocket and throws a large, crumpled paper bag across his lap.

- Here, silly, have some sweets.

François starts to laugh, more frankly it seems to me, he pulls a caramel from the bag where they are huddled together and hands it to me in turn. With a loud orchestral roar, the last singer fell silent. The soldiers start to leave and we make our way to the door. I manage to catch François in the rush:

- I would have liked to know the name of the caramel legionnaire. Perhaps I could have some newspapers and books sent to him. Does he have any family in France?

François stops and looks at me:

- Do you remember the mobile guard captain M..., killed three or four years ago in Colombes by the Communists? He had a son, sixteen at the time of the revolution. One fine day, the kid left for school with his books under his arm. Only he had borrowed money from his sister: three days later he was in the Legion. I guess he was interested in fighting those who killed his father. He's eighteen, he's been wounded five times, everyone loves him. He doesn't drink, he doesn't think about women. He plays a lot, for example. We play together at Ciudad Universitaria. When he has a bit of money, he goes down to Toledo and buys himself a kilo of toffees. He's a kid.

Outside, it's the warm, muggy night of Aragon, a little peace in the midst of war. Robert

B... (*Alceste*.)

... So goes Spain, through a thousand leagues of war and peace. There are other landscapes that time has not allowed us to explore. But eternal Spain and the Spain of the moment, taken together, have given us enough to astonish, admire and understand. The beautiful villages of Navarre are empty of men today: because, from the start of the conquest, thousands of red berets sprang up, and fathers left with their fathers and with their sons. And in Valladolid, the blue city, the homeland of Onesimo Redondo, the city so dear to José Antonio, the young men of the phalanges were killed. And above all the vicissitudes and passing quarrels, the dialogue of the phalangist and the *requete* comes together in the greatness of the nation, as Jacinto Miquelarena happily expressed it in his Dialogue of *Unification*.

*How well one goes to war, How well
one goes,
When you don't have a fiancée or a
mother, How well you do...*

sings the eighteen-year-old phalangist who proclaims: "I am José Antonio's youngest comrade". And when he asks the *requete* who to notify in the event of his death, the mountain Chouan replies: "José-Maria Hernandez, sixty-five years old, tercio de Montejurra. He's my father. - And if he isn't? - José-Maria Hernandez, aged fifteen, tercio de Montejurra. He's my son.

The dual ideal of the "holy tradition", as the Carlists sing, and of new "dawn", of the "spring" that comes laughing over Spain, as the Falange sings, is visible at every step we take in this admirable land of exaltation and faith. We find it in the inscriptions on the walls, in the portraits that adorn the streets - José Antonio, Franco - in all the measures taken by the leader. We found it at the *Auxilio Social* de Mercedes Bachiller and among the officers of the Cité Universitaire. Just as we find him at the men's masses that fill the chapels of Burgos Cathedral. Just as we see the fervour with which these officers, soldiers, red beret-wearing *requetes* and blue-shirted Phalangists kiss the sacred pillar of Our Lady of the Pilar in Zaragoza.

Of course, the sights that fill the streets are picturesque. But the picturesque is not everything, and we should pity those who would not discover in the new Spain the birth or rather the rebirth of a great destiny. The nation, having forgotten the liberal errors of the nineteenth century, is in the process of becoming once again what it was in the Golden Age. Tomorrow, the Spain of the conquistadores and of Charles V can astonish the world, a nation that is both old and new, bold and strong. At the height of the battle, we see a people reclaiming its Renaissance history with extraordinary courage and calm.

In the small, quiet towns we pass through - Avila, Vitoria, Burgos - and in the big cities like Valladolid and Zaragoza, we find the same Spanish genius, and I have to say that no people will probably ever be able to touch me as deeply as these people. Of course, there is still much to do, and perhaps we will have to fear something from them. But when

At the pace of peace,

the victorious flags celebrated in José Antonio's song, the task will already have begun, which is not only a warlike task but a work of construction. The men of our time will have found in Spain the place of all daring, all greatness, and all hope.

Pierre RAYNAUD, *La Revue grise*.

The doctor commanding the Cité Universitaire hospital to the lieutenant-colonel commanding the sector.

I have the honour of informing you that legionnaire Francesco Herbillo, who was seriously wounded by several mortar fragments eight days ago, can be evacuated without danger to his life. This evacuation should be carried out at night, as is our custom, via the gangway. The wounded man can be carefully transported to Avila, and from there perhaps to San Sebastian. The injured man is of French nationality.

The doctor in charge of the hospital in Avila to the doctor in charge of the hospital in San Sebastian,

I have the honour of informing you that legionnaire Francesco Herbillo, wounded at the Cité Universitaire, has asked to be evacuated to San Sebastian, so that he can eventually be ready to return to France, his country of origin. He made this request to his superiors, and an order was sent to me, signed by the Generalissimo himself. I am therefore obliged to evacuate him, although I have every reservation about his condition and the fatigue the journey will cause him.

The doctor in charge of the hospital at Saint-Sébastien to Monsieur Sénèque, in Paris.

Dear Sir

Legionnaire Francesco Herbillo (François Courtet) asks me to let you know that he is currently being treated at the military hospital in... in San Sebastian and that he would like to know his wife's current address so that she can be informed if possible. All possibilities would be organised by myself for his crossing the border. should be told that her husband was a brave legionnaire in our Holy Cause, and that we thank him for having represented the French knighthood to the Spanish hidalguia. His condition is not hopeless, and we will work towards his recovery. However, he has received the help of religion.

Please let us know if Mrs Courtet-Herbillo is coming with her husband, or else. Yours sincerely

VII - SPEECHES

My Polyeucte nearing its final hour.
CORNEILLE, *Polyeucte* (act IV, scene v).

THE SEVEN COLOURS

So I'm leaving. So I'm sitting in this compartment, almost alone, and I still don't understand what's going on inside me and what's happened. The train screamed earlier, and now it's making its steady little gasp, boiling around me on its tracks like a kettle. And here I am, my God, and I'm going to join my husband who's wounded, maybe dead, and my eyes are dry and I certainly couldn't cry, I already have so much trouble understanding. Since the little old man received that letter, however, it seems to me that everything has become clearer in my life, my poor, uncertain, torn-apart life. I knew that I couldn't do anything else, that I had to go there, and I did it, deep down, with immense relief, a kind of cowardice. Because it wasn't me who made the decision, it was the event that made it for me. It's so difficult to make a decision that you give in complacently when there's nothing else you can do. That's probably why people accept wars. Everything disappears from their lives and from their minds. I am well aware that they have other lives, other worries, but they are reduced to such slavery, to such powerlessness, that it is impossible for many of them not to accept this taking of power by fate as an immense liberation. They can no longer do anything; it's the event that decides for them. It was the event that decided for me.

And now here I am on this train, boiling all around me. Here I am for twelve hours, trapped in this machine that takes men and women through the night. I've got twelve hours to think about myself, about our life, about the past, about the mysterious future that makes my thoughts stumble. It's not too much. They think I'm probably asleep, and that young man at the other end of the compartment has lowered the blue cap of the lamp. But I'm not asleep and I can hear the train bubbling away outside and the tumultuous memories of those years echoing inside me.

One evening, he was gone. I didn't understand. Yet I had kept this shadow, this other away from me. I took him to his beautiful red car, like a Christmas toy that wasn't for me, a Christmas toy that looked at a poor little girl in a foggy window. And I went inside and sat down. And he didn't come back, there was nothing, not a letter, not a word; I waited all evening, I phoned his friends, his office. Fortunately, Lord, there was no servant, and no one near me knew anything! How far away those empty, muggy days are! I couldn't gather them around me in this grey, black and blue carriage. What have I done? How could I find him? I waited, and that's all there was to it, I waited by my window, a book in my fingers, and around me swirled my mother, and my sisters and all those unimportant ghosts. But I had to go and live with them, I had no more money. But what did the money matter? It was this incomprehensible departure that I was thinking about and not anything else, this departure at the very moment when I myself was staying, and I wanted to let go of everything, to abandon everything myself in the face of this appalling injustice. I don't know how I didn't leave for Germany. He sent me his address first, and nothing else, his address there in Nuremberg, where I'll never go. If I hadn't wanted to understand first and foremost, I would have come back to him, to my dear ghost. And then yesterday I found out that I'd been right to wait - he got married, over there, to some little German girl I can imagine, whose big childlike face and braids kept him there. For him, I was the shadow, I was the inconsistency. He did the right thing. I was all ready, like that, for twenty-four times an hour, for a visit from the little old man who would tell me that my husband, my real husband, was waiting for me, his wife, to come back to him. But how long they were, those first days without understanding, and perhaps even longer afterwards, those other days when I already knew from the little old man that he was in Spain, that he was cold, that he was running to the hazards of the war, and that from now on it takes the whole war as a counterweight so that I no longer exist and disappear. What have I done to deserve such a glorious counterbalance, such a glorious compensation, me, tiny, unimportant, poor and deprived of everything?

Why did this little clockmaker tell me where he was? I'll be seeing him for a long time, with his iron glasses on his nose, hesitating, and tugging at his goatee. Someone wrote to him and I read the letter. Why did his name stand out in the memory of the poor wounded man? Yes, I read this letter from this doctor, where I can see that he is calling me and waiting for me, and where I don't know if he believes in me. But why did he warn the little man? Why this little man, like an enchanted dwarf, between the ghost of my youth and the heavy, real being of my life? Always with his iron spectacles, his magnifying glass in his hand, ready to examine and guess at everything.

The days and months I waited for him were long, and I had all the time in the world to weigh up my reasons for wanting him. Just a year ago, I wouldn't have been able to count them out so clearly to myself. I've had the time to do it, I've had the time to see clearly, I who loved the shadows. I tried, in this deserted Paris, to reconstruct a youth, false or true, I don't know. I came back to the office where I knew him. It's an export office, I didn't dare go in, there'd probably be nothing there,

neither human being nor piece of furniture, to remind me of that time. And then, at times, I stumbled over my earlier youth, the youth of my studies and walks in Paris, where he wasn't. How difficult it is to get rid of youth! How difficult it is to get rid of youth! I remember how I met this dwarf who was a maid at Patrice's boarding house. She's still there, and dwarfs never grow old. I spoke to her. This strange creature always wears a red ribbon around her hair. I asked her why, without really knowing why I was asking. She looked at me with a strange dignity.

- I was ill when I was little," she told me, "and my parents gave me to the devil to cure me.

I shuddered. Do people invent such things? Of course not. I'm sure she wasn't lying to me, and I don't have any friendship for that silly, nasty creature. But I stayed with her, I even bought her a café crème in a little bistro in the rue Saint-Jacques. She had a woven straw bag, like the ones the peasant women in my grandmother's country have. She should have wondered why I was talking to her, but Théodore must find everything natural. And I, through this abandoned Paris, wandered for so many days, waiting, searching for my truth, sometimes chasing the ghost, sometimes the real man, both equally gone.

- Men," Théodore the dwarf told me, "are all mad. You mustn't care for them. Those who don't care about them, they keep them.

Who was she thinking of? Her dwarf? The giant Chinese man she had an affair with? Others? I don't know, and I don't know why she was pouring her vulgar wisdom on me. But women can't imagine thinking about anything other than a man. What a strange sight we must have been, this red-ribboned dwarf and me leaning against the fogged-up window, reading the owner's name upside down. I let her tell me all about the Pension Souris, the old ladies and Mr Seneca. It seems that Mr Pentecost found his wife, lost her again, and returned to the boarding house. It all seems so strange to me that I don't think I've ever been around such a life. And yet here I am, as if I wanted, before abandoning Patrice completely, to get drunk on everything that was our shared youth and the backdrop to his life. She throws her muffler over her shoulder and giggles from time to time as she looks at me. Born devoted? But they don't understand much, those who imagine that the lives of little people are simple. Whenever I've been near them, I've found their existence to be frantically complicated, and they live in inextricable situations with perfect naturalness. This red-ribboned dwarf is still one of the simplest examples, and simple too no doubt, old Seneca and Pentecost, with their eclipsing wives. She left and put her hand on my shoulder, not with kindness, but with a cold assurance that did me more good than pity.

- You know," she said, "you have to know what kind of man you want. Then you have to stick to it. The rest is

fantasy. And she disappeared, smoothing her red ribbon. I'm done, you rude dwarf, with fantasy time.

I'll have to tell François how I walked around waiting for him. I was looking for a job too, I had to. If I hadn't known about him, I might have gone to some college in the autumn, if I could. But I couldn't make up my mind, and everyone around me knew that I couldn't make up my mind, and they let me wander and run, like a leaf, through the streets of Paris and all the crossroads of contradictory winds.

Then there was the day I sat by the Luxembourg pool. It was cold. There was only one child, pushing a sailboat with a long stick. I looked at this child for a long time. He had brown hair and a round head. He looked a bit like a photograph of François when he was two. Why didn't we have a child? That's what we're missing, that's what should join us in a life outside dreams. I looked at this child, I think I spoke to him, from a distance, without daring to approach him. He didn't even hear me. I must have looked like a madwoman, like those old women you meet who talk to themselves. I did a lot more of that, through Paris, constantly tired, constantly broken, always sitting on some bench, next to some gate; like a drunk woman. Fortunately I was left free at home, and only occasionally did my mother look at me for a long moment, without saying anything. But they were all just shadows, I couldn't help it.

And am I a shadow? I wonder, as the train that is taking me away throws the yellow rectangles of its windows and doors across the black fields. Oh, how quickly we change, and how hard it is to remember what we once were, whether in the gardens of our childhood or through the grey walls of our study rooms and Parisian crossroads. How hard it is!

I ran as a little girl by the sandy sea, I had my warm attic in summer, my cool church. And I've known the confusion of friends, the family island, the joy without a tomorrow. All that was my life, and then one day I met a restless and charming boy, and then I met this other one whom I married, and I am as far from the young girl as the child by the sea. Here I am, changed again, without a single blood cell in my arteries that is the same as it was when I was eighteen: just a few more thoughts that are bothering me and that I might as well get rid of.

My adventure is so banal, I couldn't tell you about it without disappointing you, oh fellow travellers who watch me open my eyes and fidget, impatient and unable to define my confusion. It's not a good romantic story. It is a

that of the shadow of the first emotion, and of the reality of the union, and that's all. I believed in this marriage of our twenties, in our common syncope in a small forgotten room, and one day I realised that it was nothing compared to the deep, real and carnal union. That's all it is, and nothing more. You have nothing to marvel at: go back to sleep in your corner, call the sweaty sleep, the noisy and sweet night.

Yes, the other is only a ghost in my life, a dream of my abstract youth. He has become as transparent as a young girl's imagination. Deep down, I don't even know if he has any more consistency than the perfume of the June morning I met him on, or the colour of the sky on that July afternoon so many years ago. But he is in my life as well as in myself, and I hold him, and I know him. He's the one who held himself above me on his elbows so as not to weigh too much on my body, he's the one who leaned gently, irresistibly on me, and who pulled my knees apart with his knee, and who made me so weak, so soft, startled, wet, when he advanced into me like the bow of a ship. It's not the other one, it's him, and all I have to do is close my eyes to recognise his smell, to open my mouth with a little suffocation, to turn my head away, as I did on those days, on those nights, when he rolled his big head covered with black foliage over my shoulder. I won't stop any of this. I won't stop him from holding himself inside me, tense and swollen, and from clinging to him, and squeezing my fingers on the hollow of his loins and squeezing the soft insides of my legs on his, to hold him inside me, to consolidate him inside me, so that he never goes away again. It was he, and not someone else, whom I felt unravelling above me, letting himself go like a destroyed figure, his nerves severed, his head and legs and arms thrown anywhere, shipwrecked marvellously above myself, without strength, already asleep, my little one, and so childlike, my little one, that I cradled him in my arms and soothed him. What else could I dream, what could be more beautiful? And then he fled from me, he let himself escape from me without moving, slipping away from me like a seized fish that springs up and withdraws. It was him and not someone else. Let me, today when you are ill, death's door, let me remember what was and what will not be taken away from me. Let me wake you, as you used to wake from sleep after lovemaking, to caress my shoulder, to come back, above myself, and barely dragging me out of the sleep into which I had fallen, to move my body before me, to shake it gently, to soften it, and, suddenly stopped, to let the sap of your arteries gush out, arched over your knees and elbows, my head thrown back beside mine. The night, panting around me under the blue night-lights, carries these men and women across the countryside. What does it matter to them what I cry, what I feel? I'm just a traveller, sometimes motionless, sometimes suddenly stirring, sitting with my eyes closed in a corner, and they don't know that you're there, beside me, against me, and that I'm not sitting, but lying, lying beneath your imaginary, wonderful body. I don't move, I don't even move my lips, I sit quietly and sleepily, and you, who are far away, are no doubt suffering on an iron bed, and a nurse who doesn't speak your language may be taking your hand to feel your pulse. But we are next to each other as we were on the nights of yore, and I can hear through the clatter of the wheels your little gasp, your heart pounding against my ribs, and I can see the vein moving at your temple, and I can see you.

Everything conspired to reach us, so much more than you think. Have I changed? If I had the heart and the desire to plead for myself, I would look on without indignation at this slide that has taken me from the dream of my youth to the very exact and very real man that I am going to meet again in a moment. I hadn't realised to what extent the first was just a preparation, a sketch of the other. They looked the same, they both do, except that one is false and the other is true. What differentiated them, a patient and friendly combination of circumstances and demons has more or less erased. They were both orphans, without family, and one, like the other, went on adventures beyond mountains and frontiers, and the true one modelled his opinions on the false one, and he seems to have set out to reproduce in his mind, in his life and in his actions everything that the other was, everything that the other did. I stand there before this banal miracle, and I don't know whether I'm apologising to myself as a woman, or silently thanking fate for having allowed me to rediscover, incarnate at last, the misty teenager of my youth, and I don't know whether I'm being faithful to the ghost by loving this very real body, or whether the ghost was just the indistinct announcement of the body. I don't care! I'm not surprised, and I accept this life that must have a meaning. I don't know who it is any more, and I only know that a whole conspiracy pushed me towards the man who is now my true companion, and whom I was undoubtedly waiting for.

I will find him again. Sick, wounded, needing more than anyone to be protected and loved, but alive, I hope, my God, alive.

These modern men are harder to get hold of than the kings of tragedy. They always have some great destiny standing between them and happiness, and *Berenice* and *Horace* and *Polyeucte* are played in all the homes of revolutionaries, nationalists and mobilisers. These men of today, we don't keep them, they escape our fingers, they run the roads and the trenches, they conspire all night long, Alba names them, Rome crowns them, and glory too, and strange baptisms, and they embrace us weeping on the threshold of imaginary kingdoms, They are emperors, Lord, and they weep, and they leave all the same, and the metalworkers of Belleville, the bourgeois, the proletarians, they interweave their sentimental destiny with a great destiny that is beyond them, very proudly. These men of today, they play tragedy on every street corner, with their party card or their mobilisation pamphlet, they smash the statues, the idols in the temple, they want for themselves the torments of kings and queens, they want the mask of the tragic ancients against the gas and against happiness. These men of today...

But I'll find mine again, I'm sure, and I'll have to tear it away from the pleasures of tragedy and take it with me, for a at least, to our common security, our common happiness. He is the one who exists. The other doesn't exist. But what about me? How my life is fading, what I had held for my life! Slowly dissolved, slowly dispersed in smoke, like a bit of ink in the sea! It seemed to me that I was bound to this other man with all the strongest ties of youth and blood. And then, for so long

other images, for him, came to be superimposed on mine, gradually erasing it! She did reappear, however, one day in Paris, almost as new, almost as bright, but we already knew that nothing can be resurrected and that she was just a ghost. Here I am, diluted in the air, non-existent for him, and I feel all mixed up with this robust and wounded man whom I am going to join, and I exist only for him, and I think that nothing else ever existed for me: but perhaps it is I who no longer exists.

I met the other in an indecisive, easy time, when dreams were made. Today we have gained years that are more or less hard, that want a more solid support. The first was indeed the teenager of those brilliant months that have now disappeared: here I am before the true companion of difficult times. That's it, my God, that's it. To live again, it's this solidity that I need to build around me, and complete. It is the rest, the indecisive, the dream, that must be eliminated like poison, and there is still some left in our existence, and that is what must not last. We haven't led our true lives. With the other, with the other, I'm sure I could have played at love, pleasure, travel and games in Paris for a long time to come. The other's domain was there, in that fleeting stroll, in the trembling lightness. It wasn't our domain, dear, heavy, serious husband. We played too much, we didn't want to understand our existence soon enough, to surround ourselves with the tight, heavy ties that should bind us to the most certain shore. Here we are now, all ready to find you again, through so many invisible journeys, absence, and pain, and injury, and present death. Our life will be with us, thick and material, as it should be, and our love real, our friendship carnal. Won't the children play around us in our house, warm in winter, cool in summer, and we'll say goodbye to the burning scratches of youth, as distant as the torn knees of our childhood? I will find you again, very real, I will find you again, and we will lean against each other like two trees.

The other evening, when it was already dark, I went to see the Canal Saint-Martin and the Pont de La Villette again, which you loved because you loved Paris too. You thought there was no more beautiful or magical place in the city. The Japanese bridges that link the poor gardens of charcoal and boxwood, the grey hotels and warehouses, under the misty moon, had the colour you loved. I wandered through the deserted cobbled streets of La Villette, behind the wooden sheds, and climbed up onto the immense bridge from which you can see Paris glittering in the basin, the black water, the gaslights reflected in the puddles, the sad walls. The silence was so great that I could hear its big clock beating, and I leaned over the bridge. No, don't worry, I didn't want to end it all, I never even thought about it, I would have had to despair of you to do so. I only thought that if I had wanted to, a lot of time would have passed before I would have been found, in this cool, silent, deserted night. But your shadow took me by the shoulders and mercifully led me away.

But it wasn't you that I met at the bottom of the Pont de La Villette, by gate. Let me remember that evening, that evening that I may never tell you about, but which is still one of the reasons I go to see you. I don't remember what time it was, on the big clock above the water. I had said I wouldn't be coming home for dinner, and I wasn't hungry, and I didn't know what time it was. A boy stood leaning against the wall, his cap a little askew, watching this strange walker as she shuffled down the narrow steps. He said good evening to me, I replied good evening, I was thinking of something else, and it was natural that he took this reply as an acquiescence. He started walking beside me, and we followed the quay between the warehouses and the walls with our sonorous steps.

- Would you like me to come with you?

At first I didn't answer, then I tried to speak. No, I'd rather you left me alone.

One sentence came to mind, a ridiculous sentence, which I stopped: "I'm not the woman you think I am". But as I didn't add anything, the boy continued to walk beside me. How old could he be? Eighteen? Twenty? I don't know. He had a slightly tanned face, or rather a face that looked as if it had been tanned that evening, as if he'd just come back from a holiday. Not very tall, skinny, a sort of alley cat like so many you see in Paris, with a slightly aged muzzle. I can't remember at all what he started to say to me:

- Are you hungry? Not thirsty? Aren't you cold? You don't want us to go a bistro?

He had a soft drawl. And also a quiet assurance that struck me. It wasn't the confidence of a heartbreaker, but something stranger, something even more certain. I'm sure he wouldn't have minded if I'd left him there. He was with me, and within these high walls, I didn't know how to escape him. I ended up answering, too, and when we reached the crossroads, I hesitated for a moment, but he looked at me, and I obediently followed him along the Canal Saint-Martin.

- What were you doing on the Pont de La Villette? This isn't your neighbourhood, is it?

- I was out for a walk.

- you look sad? Has he left you?

Always the same thing, always love, always abandonment? Is there no other reason to leave each other, to be sad? I wanted to tell her a lie, but I didn't know how. Out of a laughable concern for respectability, I said:

- My husband left me.

I don't think he paid any attention. So many women say: "My husband! He only came closer to me, with his long cat-like step, without touching me. We were walking along the canal, the flat water that flushes the banks. The weather was fine, and it seemed to me that it wasn't so cold. Clouds rolled across the sky. Cars hardly ever passed by. And he continued to question me, gently, almost fraternally, without indiscretion, it seemed to me.

- Do you know where he went?

- I was told he was in Spain.

He looked surprised, smiled and showed me his hand, a large paw with two fingers missing.

- Really? I've been to Spain too. See what I mean? A stupid accident, not even a real injury, but they had to cut off two of my fingers. Luckily it was on my left hand. They sent me back.

Then he stopped abruptly, looked at me from head to toe, and looked a little embarrassed:

- But tell me, which side did your husband take? The Republican side or the rebel side?

- I don't know. Franco's, I think.

He didn't say anything for a moment, then resumed:

- I once saw a French prisoner who had come from the rebels. It was funny. We talked. I think he was shot the next day. He had been a metal worker in Pantin. I never saw him again. It was near Madrid. We had a hard time. Well, to each his own. And you, are you a fascist?

- I'm nothing.

- Women, it's better not to get involved in politics. And what

do you do now?

I don't do anything. The comrades help me. I was supposed to do my service in April, but with two fingers missing I'll have to cut it short, that's for sure. I'll manage. I've got a room in Bagnolet. I'm not paying for it, but that's something.

Then he said something I didn't hear. I asked him to repeat it:

- Don't you want to come and see my room?

- No. I don't mind going for a walk with

you. He shrugged.

- It's a long way, but I'll pay for a taxi.

- It's not because it's far away.

- Then come and have a coffee. I'm tired of walking.

On the Quai de Jemmapes, we entered a tepid, empty little bistro. He had a coffee, like me. He talked to me about Spain and the war.

- I had a brother, older than me, he left at the beginning, he was killed in Irun. So I went to take his place. I had to, didn't I?

I didn't reply. I just looked at him. And I hope he understood that I couldn't blame him. I remember that café where there was no one, the lights through the Vitte, the owner washing a glass at the counter, who was perhaps listening to us.

- So your husband went there? He left you to go over there? It's hard, you know, and I imagine it's hard for them too. Have you heard from him?

- I don't have any.

He fell silent and drummed on the marble table for a very long time. I looked at him. Up close, I could see how young he was, and how old he looked, worn out by battle, by life, with blond eyelashes that looked a little burnt, and a skinny neck peeking out of his rolled jumper. He had started talking again, looking past me:

- You know, I would have liked to see you again. Oh, I know you're not my kind of woman. But that's all right. It's not because your husband's a fascist. No, it's something else. But it's funny to think that he and I might have been in the same bad corner three months ago. You're here, you're listening to me, that's funny too. Is it true that you don't want to come into my room later?

He looked at me and I blushed a little. But I replied straight away, as gently as I could

- No.
- Never mind.

He didn't even seem keen on it, and as a joke, I told him:

- I should be offended.
- There's no need, you know.

He had fallen back into his silence. Suddenly, he looked at me quickly and started talking again:

- Don't you know what you should do? You haven't told me why your husband left you, I'm not asking you to, that's your business. But you must try to find him. He only has to see you to know that you regret him. And when a man goes to the front, it's not because he wants to hurt his wife. So you have to find him. With us, it was easy to find people, it was well organised, you know. We wrote to Propaganda. There must be something like that among fascists, isn't there? Give it a try. That's what you're missing.

I didn't reply. He got up, paid and walked me to the metro. It was the next day that I found out where you were, before I had taken the slightest step. But what I can't tell you yet, François, what I'll probably never tell you, is that before I left this pale kid, I kissed him on the cheek, fraternally, and also that he gave me his name, a name that came back from beyond the ages, a name that linked me to you as it had first linked me to the other. Since this name was that of the child of Saint-Germain-de-Charonne, since this name was that of the child Patrice.

Thus closes the circle of adolescence. Thus ends the path that led me, deep down and without knowing it, towards you alone. This is how the promises of the destiny that is taking me through the shadows towards the wounded who will rise again must be fulfilled. The first time Patrice and Catherine (I didn't say anything, I didn't ask where Catherine was) had only brought me dreams, abstractions. Their present is more precious now, because it's this big, bulky person towards whom I'm going, and the house of the future, and life, and old age, and pain mixed with pleasure, and children. I often hear a distant bell that doesn't even make me open my eyes. The Pont de La Villette and the night over Paris are the last images I want to remember before I meet you again, because they clearly showed me what I had to do, and because chance alone governs our lives and brings us the most beautiful hours, the ones we can do nothing about. I look forward with confidence to the time when we will meet again. It's a warm night. The warm train night, blue and clammy, envelops me. I close my eyes under the lights, I close my eyes but don't sleep, and I feel the rough sheet against my legs, itching. A fat lady in her corner is tossing and turning in her sleep, opening her mouth, sucking in the air, closing it again, finally opening it with a big, determined bang and letting her fat face roll onto her shoulders. How hot it is! How you think that all your life you're going to roll like that, through the revolving lights, on those smooth, invisible rails, a little sweat on your shoulders, in the smell of dust, warm sheets and coal, numb without sleeping, without any effort to raise your eyelids, and exposed to all the images of life.

It seems to me that a slightly grey glow is beginning to run low over the ground, towards east.

Paris, Sens, May 1938 - April 1939.

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