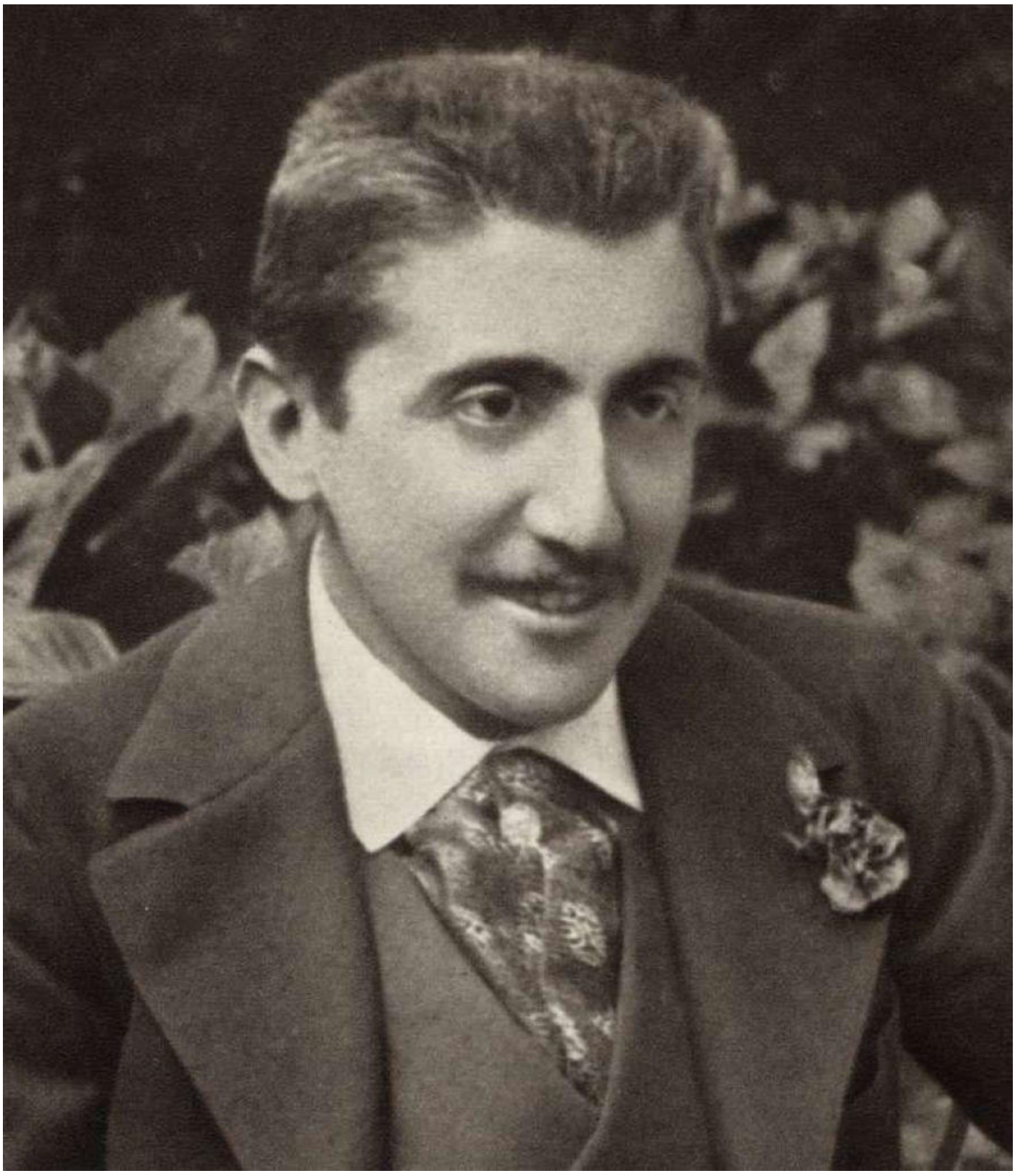

The End of Jealousy, Marcel Proust

The End of Jealousy

“Give us good things whether or not we ask for them, and keep evil away from us even if we ask for it.” This prayer strikes me as beautiful and certain. If you take issue with anything about it, do not hesitate to say so.
—PLATO

“My little tree, my little donkey, my mother, my brother, my country, my little God, my little stranger, my little lotus, my little seashell, my darling, my little plant, go away, let me get dressed, and I’ll join you on Rue de la Baume at eight P.M. Please do not arrive after eight-fifteen because I’m very hungry.”

She wanted to close her bedroom door on Honoré, but he then said, “Neck!” and she promptly held out her neck with an exaggerated docility and eagerness that made him burst out laughing:
“Even if you didn’t want to,” he said, “there would still be small special friendships between your neck and my lips, between your ears and my moustache, between your hands and my hands.

I’m certain those friendships wouldn’t stop if we fell out of love. After all, even though I’m not speaking to my cousin Paule, I can’t prevent my footman from going and chatting with her chambermaid every evening. My lips move toward your neck of their own accord and without my consent.”

They were now a step apart. Suddenly their gazes met and locked as they tried to rivet the notion of their love in each other’s eyes. She stood like that for a second, then collapsed on a chair, panting as if she had been running. And, pursing their lips as if for a kiss, they said, almost simultaneously and with a grave exaltation:
“My love!”

Shaking her head, she repeated, in a sad and peevish tone:
“Yes, my love.”

She knew he could not resist that small movement of her head; he swept her up in his arms, kissed her, and said slowly, “Naughty girl!” and so tenderly that her eyes moistened.
The clock struck seven-thirty. He left.

Returning home, Honoré kept repeating to himself: “My mother, my brother, my country”—he halted. “Yes, my country. . . . My little seashell, my little tree”; and he could not help laughing when saying those words, which he and she had so quickly gotten accustomed to using—those little words that can seem empty and that he and she filled with infinite meaning.

Entrusting themselves, without thinking, to the inventive and fruitful genius of their love, they had gradually been endowed, by this genius, with their own private language, just as a nation is supplied with arms, games, and laws.

While dressing for dinner, he automatically kept his mind focused on the moment when he would see her again, the way an acrobat already touches the still faraway trapeze toward which he is flying, or the way a musical phrase seems to reach the chord that will resolve it and that draws the phrase across the full distance between them, draws it by the very force of the desire that heralds the force and summons it.

That was how Honoré had been dashing through life for a year now, hurrying from morning to the afternoon hour when he would see her. And his days were actually composed not of twelve or thirteen different hours, but of four or five half-hours, of his anticipation and his memories of them.

Honoré had been in Princess Alériouvre’s home for several minutes when Madame Seaune arrived. She greeted the mistress of the house and the various guests and she seemed not so much to bid Honoré good evening as to take his hand the way she might have done in the middle of a conversation.

Had their affair been common knowledge, one might have assumed that they had arrived simultaneously and that she had waited at the door for several minutes to avoid entering with him.

But they could have spent two whole days apart (which had never once happened during that year) and yet not have experienced the joyous surprise of finding each other again—the surprise that is at the basis of every friendly greeting; for, unable to spend five minutes without thinking about one another, they could never meet by chance because they never separated.

During dinner, whenever they conversed with one another, they showed more vivacity and gentleness than two friends, but a natural and majestic respect unknown among lovers. They thus seemed like those gods who, according to fable, lived in disguise among human beings, or like two angels whose fraternal closeness exalts their joy but does not diminish the respect inspired by the common nobility of both their origin and their mysterious blood.

In experiencing the power of the roses and irises that languidly reigned over the table, the air gradually became imbued with the fragrance of the tenderness exhaled naturally by Honoré and Françoise. At certain moments, the air seemed to embalm the room with a violence that was more delicious than its usual sweetness, a violence that nature had refused to let the flowers moderate, any more than it permits heliotropes to moderate their perfume in the sun or blossoming lilacs their perfume in the rain.

Thus their affection, for not being secret, was all the more mysterious. Anyone could draw close to it as to those inscrutable and defenseless bracelets on the wrists of a woman in love—bracelets on which unknown yet visible characters spell out the name that makes her live or die, bracelets that incessantly offer the meaning of those characters to curious and disappointed eyes that cannot grasp it.

“How much longer will I love her?” Honoré mused to himself as he rose from the table. He remembered the brevity of all the passions that, at

their births, he had believed immortal, and the certainty that this passion would eventually come to an end cast a gloom on his tender feelings.

Then he remembered what he had heard that very morning, at mass, when the priest had been reading from the Gospel: “Jesus stretched forth his hand and told them: This is my brother, and also my mother, and all my brethren.” Trembling, Honoré had, for an instant, lifted up his entire soul to God, very high, like a palm tree, and he had prayed: “Lord! Lord! Grant me Your grace and let me love her forever! Lord! This is the only favor I ask of you. Lord, You can do it, make me love her forever!”

Now, in one of those utterly physical moments, when the soul takes a backseat to the digesting stomach, the skin enjoying a recent ablution and some fine linen, the mouth smoking, the eyes reveling in bare shoulders and bright lights, he repeated his prayer more indolently, doubting a miracle that would upset the psychological law of his fickleness, which was as impossible to flout as the physical laws of weight or death.

She saw his preoccupied gaze, stood up, and approached him without his noticing; and since they were quite far from the others, she said in that drawling, whimpering tone, that infantile tone which always made him laugh—she said as if he had just spoken:
“What?”

He laughed and said:
“Don’t say another word or I’ll kiss you—do you hear?—I’ll kiss you right in front of everybody!”
First she laughed, then, resuming her dissatisfied pouting in order to amuse him, she said:
“Yes, yes, that’s very good, you weren’t thinking of me at all!”
And he, seeing her laugh, replied: “How well you can lie!” And he gently added: “Naughty, naughty!”

She left him and went to chat with the others. Honoré mused: “When I feel my heart retreating from her, I will try to delay it so gently that she won’t even feel it. I will always be just as tender, just as respectful. When a new love replaces my love for her in my heart, I will conceal it from her as carefully as I now conceal the occasional pleasures that my body, and it alone, savors without her.” (He glanced at Princess Alériouvre.)

And as for Françoise, he would gradually allow her to attach her life elsewhere, with other bonds. He would not be jealous; he himself would designate the men who appeared capable of offering her a more decent or more glorious homage. The more he pictured Françoise as a different woman, whom he would not love, but all of whose spiritual charms he would relish wisely, the more noble and effortless the sharing seemed. Words of sweet and tolerant friendship, of lovely generosity in giving the worthiest people our most precious possessions—those words flowed softly to his relaxed lips.

At that instant, Françoise, noticing it was ten o’clock, said good night and left. Honoré escorted her to her carriage, kissed her imprudently in the dark, and went back inside.
Three hours later, Honoré was walking home, accompanied by Monsieur de Buivres, whose return from Tonkin had been celebrated that evening. Honoré was questioning him about Princess Alériouvre, who, widowed approximately at the same time, was far more beautiful than Françoise. While not being in love with the princess, Honoré would have delighted in possessing her if he could have been certain that Françoise would not find out and be made unhappy.

“Nobody knows anything about her,” said Monsieur de Buivres, “or at least nobody knew anything when I left Paris, for I haven’t seen anyone since my return.”
“So all in all there were no easy possibilities tonight,” Honoré concluded.

“No, not many,” Monsieur de Buivres replied, and since Honoré had reached his door, the conversation was about to end there, when Monsieur de Buivres added:
“Except for Madame Seaune, to whom you must have been introduced, since you attended the dinner. If you wanted to, it would be very easy. But as for me, I wouldn’t be interested!”
“Why, I’ve never heard anyone say what you’ve just said,” Honoré rejoined.

“You’re young,” replied de Buivres. “Come to think of it, there was someone there tonight who had quite a fling with her—there’s no denying it, I think. It’s that little François de Gouvres. He says she’s quite hot-blooded! But it seems her body isn’t all that great, and he didn’t want to continue. I bet she’s living it up somewhere at this very moment. Have you noticed that she always leaves a social function early?”

“Well, but now that she’s a widow, she lives in the same house as her brother, and she wouldn’t risk having the concierge reveal that Madame comes home in the middle of the night.”
“Come on, old chum! There’s a lot you can do between ten P.M. and one A.M.! Oh well, who knows?! Anyhow it’s almost one o’clock, I’d better let you turn in.”

De Buivres rang the bell himself; a second later, the door opened; de Buivres shook hands with Honoré, who said goodbye mechanically, entered, and simultaneously felt a wild need to go back out; but the door had closed heavily behind him, and there was no light aside from the candle waiting for him and burning impatiently at the foot of the staircase. He did not dare awaken the concierge in order to reopen the door for him, and so he went up to his apartment.

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.
—BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

Life had greatly changed for Honoré since the night when Monsieur de Buivres had made certain comments (among so many others) similar to those that Honoré himself had so often heard or stated with indifference, and which now rang in his ears during the day, when he was alone, and all through the night. He had instantly questioned Françoise, who loved him too deeply and suffered too deeply from his distress to so much as dream of taking offense; she swore that she had never deceived him and that she would never deceive him.

When he was near her, when he held her little hands, to which he softly recited:
You lovely little hands that will close my eyes,
when he heard her say, “My brother, my country, my beloved,” her voice lingering endlessly in his heart with the sweetness of childhood bells, he believed her. And if he did not feel as happy as before, at least it did not seem impossible that his convalescent heart should someday find happiness.

But when he was far away from Françoise, and also at times when, being near her, he saw her eyes glowing with fires that he instantly imagined as having been kindled at other times (who knows?—perhaps yesterday as they would be tomorrow), kindled by someone else; when, after yielding to a purely physical desire for another woman and recalling how often he had yielded and had managed to lie to Françoise without ceasing to love her, he no longer found it absurd to assume that she was lying to him, that, in order to lie to him it was not even necessary to no longer love him—to assume that before knowing him she had thrown herself upon others with the ardor that was burning him now—and it struck him as more terrible that the ardor he inspired in her did not appear sweet, because he saw her with the imagination, which magnifies all things.

Then he tried to tell her that he had deceived her; he tried not out of vengeance or a need to make her suffer like him, but so that she would tell him the truth in return, a need above all to stop feeling the lie dwelling inside him, to expiate the misdeeds of his sensuality, since, for

creating an object for his jealousy, it struck him at times that it was his own lies and his own sensuality that he was projecting onto Françoise.

It was on an evening, while strolling on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, that he tried to tell her he had deceived her. He was appalled to see her turn pale, collapse feebly on a bench, and, worse still, when he reached toward her, she pushed his hand away, not angrily but gently, in sincere and desperate dejection. For two days he believed he had lost her, or rather that he had found her again.

But this sad, glaring, and involuntary proof of her love for him did not suffice for Honoré. Even had he achieved the impossible certainty that she had never belonged to anyone but him, the unfamiliar agony his heart had experienced the evening Monsieur de Buivres had walked him to his door—not a kindred agony or the memory of that agony, but that agony itself—would not have faded, even if someone had demonstrated to him that his agony was groundless. Similarly, upon awakening, we still tremble at the memory of the killer whom we have already recognized as the illusion of a dream; and similarly, an amputee feels pain all his life in the leg he no longer has.

He would walk all day, wear himself out on horseback, on a bicycle, in fencing—all in vain; he would meet Françoise and escort her home—all in vain: in the evening he would gather peace, confidence, a honey sweetness from her hands, her forehead, her eyes, and then, calmed, and rich with the fragrant provision, he would go back to his apartment—all in vain: no sooner had he arrived than he started to worry; he quickly turned in so as to fall asleep before anything could spoil his happiness.

Lying gingerly in the full balm of this fresh and recent tenderness, which was barely one hour old, his happiness was supposed to last all night, until the next morning, intact and glorious like an Egyptian prince; but then de Buivres's words, or one of the innumerable images Honoré had formed since hearing those words, crept into his mind, and so much for his sleep.

This image had not yet appeared, but he felt it was there, about to surface; and, steeling himself against it, he would relight the candle, read, and struggle interminably to stuff the meanings of the sentences into his brain, leaving no empty spaces, so that the ghastly image would not find an instant, would not find even the tiniest nook to slip into.

But all at once, the image had stolen in, and now he could not make it leave; the gates of his attention, which he had been holding shut with all his strength, to the point of exhaustion, had been opened by surprise; the gates had then closed again, and he would be spending the entire night with that horrible companion.

So it was sure, it was done with: this night like all the others, he would not catch a wink of sleep. Fine, so he went to the bromide bottle, took three spoonfuls, and, certain he would now sleep, terrified at the mere notion of doing anything but sleeping, come what may, he began thinking about Françoise again, with dread, with despair, with hate. Profiting from the secrecy of their affair, he wanted to make bets on her virtue with other men, sic them upon her; he wanted to see if she would yield; he wanted to try to discover something, know everything, hide in a bedroom (he remembered doing that for fun when he was younger) and watch everything. He would not bat an eyelash since he would have asked facetiously (otherwise, what a scandal! What anger!); but above all on her account, to see if, when he asked her the next day, “You’ve never cheated on me?” she would reply, “Never,” with that same loving air.

She might perhaps confess everything and actually would have succumbed only because of his tricks. And so that would have been the salutary operation to cure his love of the illness that was killing him, the way a parasitical disease kills a tree (to be certain he only had to peer into the mirror, which was dimly lit by his nocturnal candle). But no, for the image would keep recurring, so much more powerful than the images of his imagination and with what forceful and incalculable blows to his poor head—he did not even dare picture it.

Then, all at once, he would think about her, about her sweetness, her tenderness, her purity, and he wanted to weep about the outrage that he had, for a moment, considered inflicting on her. The very idea of suggesting that to his boon companions!

Soon he would feel the overall shudder, the feebleness one experiences several minutes before sleep induced by bromide. Suddenly perceiving nothing, no dream, no sensation, between his last thought and this one, he would say to himself: “What? I haven’t slept yet?” But then seeing it was broad daylight, he realized that for over six hours he had been possessed by bromidic sleep without savoring it.

He would wait for the stabbing pains in his head to weaken a bit; then he would rise and, so that Françoise would not find him too ugly, he would try in vain to liven up his worn-out eyes, restore some color to his haggard face by dousing it with cold water and taking a walk. Leaving home, he went to church, and there, sagging and exhausted, with all the final, desperate strength of his failing body, which wanted to be revitalized, rejuvenated, his sick and aging heart, which wanted to be healed, his mind, which, endlessly harassed and gasping, wanted peace, he prayed to God—God, whom, scarcely two months ago, he had asked to grant Honoré the grace of letting him love Françoise forever.

He now prayed to God with the same force, always with the force of that love, which had once, certain of its death, asked to live, and which now, too frightened to live, begged for death; and Honoré implored God to grant him the grace of not loving Françoise anymore, not loving her too much longer, not loving her forever, to enable him to finally picture her in someone else’s arms without suffering, for now he could not picture her except in someone else’s arms. And perhaps he would stop picturing her like that if he could picture it without suffering.

Then he remembered how deeply he had feared not loving her forever, how deeply he had engraved her in his memory so that nothing would efface her, engraved her cheeks, always offered to his lips, engraved her forehead, her little hands, her solemn eyes, her adored features.

And abruptly, seeing them aroused from their sweet tranquillity by desire for someone else, he wanted to stop thinking about her, only to see her all the more obstinately, see her offered cheeks, her forehead, her little hands (oh, those little hands, those too!), her solemn eyes, her detested features.

From that day forward, though initially terrified of taking such a course, he never left her side; he kept watch on her life, accompanying her on her visits, following her on her shopping expeditions, waiting for an hour at every shop door. Had he figured that this would thus actually prevent her from cheating on him, he would probably have given up for fear of incurring her hatred.

But she let him continue because she enjoyed having him with her all the time, enjoyed it so much that her joy gradually took hold of him, slowly imbuing him with a confidence, a certainty that no material proof would have given him, like those hallucinating people whom one can sometimes manage to cure by having them touch the armchair, the living person who occupies the place where they think they see a phantom, and thus driving away the phantom from the real world by means of reality itself, which has no room for the phantom.

Thus, trailing Françoise and mentally filling all her days with concrete occupations, Honoré strove to suppress those gaps and shadows in which the evil spirits of jealousy and suspicion lay in ambush, pouncing on him every evening. He began to sleep again; his sufferings grew rarer, briefer, and if he then sent for her, a few moments of her presence calmed him for the entire night.

The soul may be trusted to the end. That which is so beautiful and attractive as these relations must be succeeded and supplanted only by what is more beautiful, and so on forever.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The salon of Madame Seaune, née Princess de Galaise-Orlandes, whom we spoke about in the first part of this story under her Christian name, Françoise, remains one of the most sought-after salons in Paris. In a

society in which the title of duchess would make her interchangeable with so many others, her nonaristocratic family name stands out like a beauty mark on a face; and in exchange for the title she lost when marrying Monsieur Seaune, she acquired the prestige of having voluntarily renounced the kind of glory that, for a noble imagination, exalts white peacocks, black swans, white violets, and captive queens.

Madame Seaune has entertained considerably this season and last, but her salon was closed during the three preceding years—the ones, that is, following the death of Honoré de Tenvres.
Honoré's friends, delighted to see him gradually regaining his healthy appearance and his earlier cheerfulness, now kept finding him with Madame Seaune at all hours of the day, and so they attributed his revival to this affair, which they thought had started just recently.

It was a scant two months since Honoré's complete recovery that he suffered the accident on the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, where both his legs were broken by a runaway horse.
The accident took place on the first Tuesday in May; peritonitis declared itself the following Sunday. Honoré received the sacraments on Monday and was carried off at six o'clock that evening. However, from Tuesday, the day of the accident, to Monday evening, he alone believed he was doomed.

On that Tuesday, toward six P.M., after the first dressing of the injuries, he had asked his servants to leave him alone, but to bring up the calling cards of people inquiring about his health.

That very morning, at most eight hours earlier, he had been walking down the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne. He had, breath by breath, been inhaling and exhaling the air, a blend of breeze and sunshine; women were admiring his swiftly moving beauty, and in the depths of their eyes he had recognized a profound joy—for an instant he was lost sight of in the sheer turning of his capricious merriment, then effortlessly caught up with and quite rapidly outstripped among the steaming, galloping horses, then he savored the coolness of his hungry mouth, which was moistened by the sweet air; and the joy he recognized was

the same profound joy that embellished life that morning, the life of the sun, of the shade, of the sky, of the stones, of the east wind, and of the trees, trees as majestic as men standing and as relaxed as women sleeping in their sparkling immobility.

At a certain point he had checked his watch, had doubled back, and then . . . then it had happened. Within an instant, the horse, which Honoré had not seen, had broken both his legs. In no way did that instant appear to have been inevitable.

At that same instant he might have been slightly further off, or slightly nearer, or the horse might have deviated, or, had it rained, he would have gone home earlier, or, had he not checked his watch, he would not have doubled back and he would have continued walking to the cascade. Yet that thing, which might so easily not have been, so easily that for a moment he could pretend it was only a dream—that thing was real, that thing was now part of his life, and not all his willpower could alter anything. He had two broken legs and a battered abdomen.

Oh, in itself the accident was not so extraordinary; he recalled that less than a week ago, during a dinner given by Dr. S., they had talked about C., who had been injured in the same manner by a runaway horse.

The doctor, when asked about C.'s condition, had said: "He's in a bad way." Honoré had pressed him, had questioned him about the injuries, and the doctor had replied with a self-important, pedantic, and melancholy air: "But it's not just his injuries; it's everything together; his sons are causing him problems; his circumstances are not what they used to be; the newspaper attacks have struck him to the quick.

I wish I were wrong, but he's in a rotten state." Since the doctor, having said that, felt that he himself, on the contrary, was in an excellent state, healthier, more intelligent, and more esteemed than ever; since Honoré knew that Françoise loved him more and more, that the world accepted their relationship and esteemed their happiness no less than Françoise's greatness of character; and since, finally, Dr. S.'s wife, deeply agitated by her visions of C.'s wretched end and abandonment,

cited reasons of hygiene for prohibiting herself and her children from thinking about sad events or attending funerals—given all these things, each diner repeated one final time: “That poor C., he’s in a bad state,” downed a final flute of Champagne, and the pleasure of drinking it made them feel that their own “state” was excellent.

But this was not the same thing at all. Honoré, now feeling overwhelmed by the thought of his misfortune, as he had often been by the thought of other people’s misfortunes, could no longer regain a foothold in himself. He felt the solid ground of good health caving in beneath him, the ground on which our loftiest resolutions flourish and our most gracious delights, just as oak trees and violets are rooted in the black, moist earth; and he kept stumbling about within himself.

In discussing C. at that dinner, which Honoré again recalled, the doctor had said: “When I ran into C. even before the accident and after the newspaper attacks, his face was sallow, his eyes were hollow, and he looked awful!” And the doctor had passed his hand, famous for its skill and beauty, across his full, rosy face, along his fine, well-groomed beard, and each diner had pleasurably imagined his own healthy look the way a landlord stops to gaze contentedly at his young, peaceable, and wealthy tenant. Now, peering at his reflection in the mirror, Honoré was terrified by his own “sallow face,” his “awful look.”

And instantly, he was horrified at the thought that the doctor would say the same thing about him as he had said about C., with the same indifference. Even people who would approach him full of pity would also rather quickly turn away from him as from a dangerous object; they would finally obey their protests of their good health, of their desire to be happy and to live.

Then his mind turned back to Françoise, and, his shoulders sagging, his head bowing in spite of himself, as if God’s commandment had been raised against him there, Honoré realized with an infinite and submissive sadness that he must give her up. With a sick man’s resignation he experienced the humility of his body, which, in its childlike feebleness, was bent by this tremendous grief, and he pitied

himself when, as so often at the start of his life, he had tenderly seen himself as an infant, and now he felt like crying.

He heard a knocking at the door. The concierge was bringing the cards that Honoré had asked for. Honoré knew very well that people would inquire about his condition, for he was fully aware that his accident was serious; nevertheless, he had not expected so many cards, and he was terrified to see that there were so many callers who barely knew him and who would have put themselves out only for his wedding or for his funeral. It was an overflowing mountain of cards, and the concierge carried it gingerly to keep it from tumbling off the large tray.

But suddenly, when all those cards were within reach, the mountain looked very small, indeed ridiculously small, far smaller than the chair or the fireplace. And he was even more terrified that it was so small, and he felt so alone that, in order to take his mind off his loneliness, he began feverishly reading the names; one card, two cards, three cards—ah! He jumped and looked again: “Count François de Gouvres.”

Now Honoré would certainly have expected Monsieur de Gouvres to inquire about his condition, but he had not thought about the count for a long time, and all at once he recalled de Buivres’s words: “There was someone there tonight who had quite a fling with her—It was François de Gouvres. He says she’s quite hot-blooded! But it seems her body isn’t all that great, and he didn’t want to continue”; and feeling all the old suffering which in an instant resurfaced from the depths of his consciousness, he said to himself: “Now I’ll be delighted if I’m doomed.

Not die, remain fettered here, and spend years envisioning her with someone else whenever she’s not near me, part of each day and all night long! And now there would be nothing unhealthy about envisioning her like that—it’s certain. How could she still love me? An amputee!” All at once he stopped. “And if I die, what happens after me?”

She was thirty; he leaped in one swoop over the more or less long period in which she would remember him, stay faithful to him. But a

moment would come. . . . “He said, ‘She’s quite hot-blooded. . . .’ I want to live, I want to live and I want to walk, I want to follow her everywhere, I want to be handsome, I want her to love me!”

At that moment he was frightened by the whistling in his respiration, he had a pain in his side, his chest felt as if it had shifted to his back, he no longer breathed freely, he tried to catch his breath but could not. At each second he felt himself breathing and not breathing enough. The doctor came. Honoré had only had a light attack of nervous asthma. When the doctor left, Honoré felt sadder; he would have preferred a graver illness in order to evoke pity.

For he keenly sensed that, if it was not grave, something else was grave and that he was perishing. Now he recalled all the physical sufferings of his life, he was in grief; never had the people who loved him the most ever pitied him under the pretext that he was nervous.

During the dreadful months after his walk home with de Buivres, months of dressing at seven o’clock after walking all night, Honoré’s brother, who stayed awake for at most fifteen minutes after any too copious dinner, said to him:
“You listen to yourself too much, there are nights when I can’t sleep either. And besides, a person thinks he doesn’t sleep, but he always sleeps a little.”

It was true that he listened to himself too much; in the background of his life he kept listening to death, which had never completely left him and which, without totally destroying his life, undermined it now here, now there. His asthma grew worse; he could not catch his breath; his entire chest made a painful effort to breathe. And he felt the veil that hides life from us (the death within us) being lifted, and he perceived how terrifying it is to breathe, to live.

Now he was transported to the moment when she would be consoled, and then, who would it be? And his jealousy was driven insane by the uncertainty of the event and its inevitability. He could have prevented it if alive; he could not live, and so? She would say that she would join a

convent; then, when he was dead, she would change her mind. No! He preferred not to be deceived twice, preferred to know.—Who?—de Gouvres, de Alériouvre, de Buivres, de Breyves?

He saw them all and, gritting his teeth, he felt the furious revolt that must be twisting his features at that moment. He calmed himself down. No, it will not be that, not a playboy. It has to be a man who truly loves her. Why don't I want it to be a playboy? I'm crazy to ask myself that, it's so obvious.

Because I love her for herself, because I want her to be happy.—No, it's not that, it's that I don't want anyone to arouse her senses, to give her more pleasure than I've given her, to give her any pleasure at all. I do want someone to give her happiness, I want someone to give her love, but I don't want anyone to give her pleasure. I'm jealous of the other man's pleasure, of her pleasure. I won't be jealous of their love. She has to marry, has to make a good choice. . . . But it'll be sad all the same.

Then one of his childhood desires came back, the desire of the seven-year-old, who went to bed at eight every evening. If, instead of remaining in her room, next to Honoré's, and turning in at midnight, his mother had to go out around eleven and get dressed by then, he would beg her to dress before dinner and to go anywhere else, for he could not stand the thought of someone in the house preparing for a soirée, preparing to go out, while the boy tried to fall asleep.

And in order to please him and calm him, his mother, all in evening attire and décolleté by eight o'clock, came to say good night, then went to a friend's home to wait for the ball to start. On those sad evenings when his mother attended a ball, that was the only way the boy, morose but tranquil, could fall asleep.

Now, the same plea he had made to his mother, the same plea to Françoise came to his lips. He would have liked to ask her to marry him immediately, so she would be ready and so he could at last go to sleep forever, disconsolate but calm, and not the least bit worried about what would occur after he fell asleep.

During the next few days, he tried to speak to Françoise, who, just like the doctor, did not consider Honoré doomed and who gently but firmly, indeed inflexibly, rejected his proposal.

Their habit of being truthful to one another was so deeply entrenched that each told the truth even though it might hurt the other, as if at their very depths, the depths of their nervous and sensitive being, whose vulnerabilities had to be dealt with tenderly, they had felt the presence of a God, a higher God, who was indifferent to all those precautions—suitable only for children—and who demanded and also owed the truth.

And toward this God who was in the depths of Françoise and toward this God who was in the depths of Honoré, Honoré and Françoise had, respectively, always felt obligations that overrode the desire not to distress or offend one another, overrode the sincerest lies of tenderness and compassion.

Thus when Françoise told Honoré that he would go on living, he keenly sensed that she believed it, and he gradually persuaded himself to believe it too:
“If I have to die, I will no longer be jealous when I’m dead; but until I’m dead?

As long as my body lives, yes! However, since I’m jealous only of pleasure, since it’s my body that’s jealous, since what I’m jealous of is not her heart, not her happiness, which I wish for her to find with the person most capable of making her happy; when my body fades away, when my soul gets the better of my flesh, when I am gradually detached from material things as on a past evening when I was very ill, when I no longer wildly desire the body and when I love the soul all the more—at that point I will no longer be jealous.

Then I will truly love. I can’t very well conceive of what that will be like since my body is still completely alive and rebellious, but I can imagine it vaguely when I recall those times in which, holding hands with

Françoise, I found the abatement of my anguish and my jealousy in an infinite tenderness free of any desire.

I'll certainly be miserable when I leave her, but it will be the kind of misery that once brought me closer to myself, that an angel came to console me for, the misery that revealed the mysterious friend in the days of unhappiness, my own soul, that calm misery thanks to which I will feel worthier when appearing before God, and not the horrible illness that pained me for such a long time without elevating my heart, like a physical pain that stabs, that degrades, and that diminishes.

It is with my body, with my body's desire, that I will be delivered from that.—Yes, but until then what will become of me? Feebler, more incapable of resisting than ever, hampered on my two broken legs, when, wanting to hurry over to her and make sure she is not where I will have pictured her, I will remain here, unable to budge, ridiculed by all those who can 'have a fling with her' as long as they like, before my very eyes, the eyes of a cripple whom they no longer fear."

The night of Sunday to Monday he dreamed he was suffocating, feeling an enormous weight on his chest. He begged for mercy, did not have the strength to displace all that weight; the feeling that all this weight had been upon him for a very long time was inexplicable; he could not endure it another second, it was smothering him. Suddenly he felt miraculously relieved of that entire burden, which was drawing further and further away after releasing him forever. And he said to himself: "I'm dead!"

And above him he saw everything that had been weighing down on him and suffocating him for such a long time, saw it all rising; at first he believed it was de Gouvres's face, then only his suspicions, then his desires, then those past days when he had started waiting in the morning, crying out for the moment when he would see Françoise, then his thoughts of Françoise.

At each moment that rising burden kept assuming a different shape, like a cloud; it kept growing, growing nonstop, and now he could no

longer explain how this thing, which he knew was as vast as the world, could have rested on him, on his small, feeble human body, on his poor, small, listless human heart, rested on him without crushing him. And he also realized that he had been crushed and that he had led the life of a crushed man. And this immense thing that had weighed on his chest with all the force of the world—he now realized it was his love.

Then he repeated to himself: “The life of a crushed man!”; and he recalled that in the instant when the horse had knocked him down, he had said to himself: “I’m going to be crushed!”; he recalled his stroll, recalled that he was supposed to have lunch with Françoise that morning; and then, through that circuitous path, he thought about his love again.

And he said to himself: “Was it my love that was weighing on me? What could it be if it wasn’t my love? My character, perhaps? Myself? Or was it life?” Then he thought: “No. When I die, I won’t be delivered from my love, I’ll be delivered from my carnal desires, my carnal longings, my jealousy.” Then he said: “Oh, Lord, make that hour come to me, make it come fast, oh, Lord, so that I may know perfect love.”

Sunday evening, peritonitis had declared itself; Monday morning around ten o’clock, he ran a fever; he wanted to see Françoise, called out to her, his eyes blazing: “I want your eyes to shine too, I want to give you more pleasure than I’ve ever given you . . . I want to give it to you . . . I want to hurt you.”

Then suddenly he turned livid: “I see why you don’t want to, I know very well what you had someone do to you this morning, and where, and who it was, and I know he wanted to bring me there, put me behind the door so I could see the two of you, and I wouldn’t be able to swoop down on you since my legs are gone, I wouldn’t be able to prevent you, for the two of you would have more pleasure if you could have seen me there the whole time; he really knows everything that gives you pleasure, but I’ll kill him first, and before that I’ll kill you, and before that I’ll kill myself. Look! I’ve killed myself!” And he fell back on the pillow, exhausted.

He calmed down bit by bit, still trying to determine whom she could marry after his death, but there were always the images he wanted to ward off, the face of François de Gouvres, of de Buivres, the faces that tortured him, that kept resurfacing.

At noon he received the last sacraments. The doctor had said he would not make it past the afternoon. His strength ebbed extremely swiftly; he could no longer absorb food and could barely hear. His mind remained lucid, and, saying nothing lest he hurt Françoise, who he could see was overcome with grief, he mused about what she would be once he was no more, once he knew about her no more, once she could no longer love him.

The names he had spoken mechanically that very morning, the names of men who might possess her, resumed parading through his head while his eyes followed a fly that kept approaching his finger as if to touch it, then flying away and coming back without, however, touching it; and yet, reviving his attention, which had momentarily lapsed, the name François de Gouvres kept returning, and Honoré told himself that de Gouvres might actually possess her, and at the same time Honoré thought: “Maybe the fly is going to touch the sheet? No, not yet”; then, brusquely rousing himself from his reverie: “What? Neither of those two things strikes me as more important than the other! Will de Gouvres possess Françoise, will the fly touch the sheet?

Oh! Possessing Françoise is a bit more important.” But his exactness in seeing the gap between those two events showed him that neither one particularly touched him more than the other.

And he said to himself: “Oh, it’s all the same to me! How sad it is!” Then he realized that he was saying “How sad it is!” purely out of habit and that, having changed completely, he was not the least bit sad about having changed. The shadow of a smile unclenched his lips. “This,” he told himself, “is my pure love for Françoise. I’m no longer jealous; it’s because I’m at death’s door. But so what? It was necessary so that I might at last feel true love for Françoise.”

But then, raising his eyes, he perceived Françoise amid the servants, the doctor, and two old relatives, all of whom were praying there, close to him. And it dawned on him that love, pure of all selfishness, of all sensuality, love that he wanted to have in him, so sweet, so vast, and so divine, now encompassed the old relatives, the servants, even the doctor as tenderly as Françoise, and that, already feeling for her the love for all creatures, with which his soul, kindred with their souls, was uniting him, he now felt no other love for her. And this thought could not even cause him pain, so thoroughly was all exclusive love for her, the very idea of a preference for her, now abolished.

Weeping at the foot of the bed, she murmured the most beautiful words of the past: “My country, my brother.” But Honoré, having neither the will nor the strength to undeceive her, smiled and mused that his “country” was no longer in her, but in heaven and all over the earth.

He repeated in his heart, “My brothers,” and though looking at her more than at the others, he did so purely out of pity for the stream of tears she was shedding before his eyes, his eyes, which would soon close and had already stopped weeping. But now he did not love her any more and any differently than he loved the doctor, his old relatives, or the servants. And that was the end of his jealousy.

The end