

**M A N I F E S**

*Translated from the French by*

*Richard Seaver and*

*Helen R. Lane*

**T O E S**

**O F**



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**S U R**

**R E A L I S M**

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**PREFACE  
FOR A REPRINT  
OF  
THE MANIFESTO  
(1929)**

*It was to be expected that this book would change, and to the extent that it questioned our terrestrial existence by charging it nonetheless with everything that it comprises on this or that side of the limits we are in the habit of assigning to it, that its fate would be closely bound up with my own, which is, for example, to have written and not to have written books. Those attributed to me do not seem to me to exercise any greater influence on me than many others, and no doubt I am no longer as fully familiar with them as it is possible to be. Regardless of whatever controversy that may have arisen concerning the Manifesto of Surrealism between 1924 and 1929—without arguing the pros and cons of its validity—it is obvious that, independent of this controversy, the human adventure continued to take place with the minimum of risks, on almost all sides at once, according to the whims of the imagination which alone causes real things. To allow a work one has written to be republished, a work not all that different from one you might more or less have read by someone else, is tantamount to “recognizing” I would not even go so far as to say a child*

whose features one had already ascertained were reasonably friendly, whose constitution is healthy enough, but rather something which, no matter how bravely it may have been, can no longer be. There is nothing I can do about it, except to blame myself for not always and in every respect having been a prophet. Still very much apropos is the famous question Arthur Craven, "in a very tired, very weary tone," asked André Gide: "Monsieur Gide, where are we with respect to time?" To which Gide, with no malice intended, replied: "Fifteen minutes before six." Ah! it must indeed be admitted, we're in bad, we're in terrible, shape when it comes to time.

Here as elsewhere admission and denial are tightly interwoven. I do not understand why, or how, how I am still living, or, for all the more reason, what I am living. If, from a system in which I believe, to which I slowly adapt myself, like Surrealism, there remains, if there will always remain, enough for me to immerse myself in, there will nonetheless never be enough to make me what I would like to be, no matter how indulgent I am about myself. A relative indulgence compared to that others have shown me (or non-me, I don't know). And yet I am living, I have even discovered that I care about life. The more I have sometimes found reasons for putting an end to it the more I have caught myself admiring some random square of parquet floor: it was really like silk, like the silk that would have been as beautiful as water. I liked this lucid pain, as though the entire universal drama of it had then passed through me and I was suddenly worth the trouble. But I liked it in the light of, how shall I say, of new things that I had never seen glow before. It was from this that I understood that, in spite of everything, life was given, that a force independent of that of expressing and making oneself heard spiritually presided—insofar as a living man is concerned—over reactions of invaluable interest, the secret of which will disappear with him. This secret has not been revealed

to me, and as far as I am concerned its recognition in no way invalidates my confessed inaptitude for religious meditation. I simply believe that between my thought, such as it appears in what material people have been able to read that has my signature affixed to it, and me, which the true nature of my thought involves in something but precisely what I do not yet know, there is a world, an imperceptible world of phantasms, of hypothetical realizations, of wagers lost, and of lies, a cursory examination of which convinces me not to correct this work in the slightest. This book demands all the vanity of the scientific mind, all the puerility of this need for perspective which the bitter vicissitudes of history provide. This time again, faithful to the tendency that I have always had to ignore any kind of sentimental obstacle, I shall waste no time passing judgment on those among my initial companions who have become frightened and turned back, I shall not yield to the temptation to substitute names by means of which this book might be able to lay claim to being up-to-date. Fully mindful, however, that the most precious gifts of the mind cannot survive the smallest particle of honor, I shall simply reaffirm my unshakable confidence in the principle of an activity which has never deceived me, which seems to me more deserving than ever of our unstinting, absolute, insane devotion, for the simple reason that it alone is the dispenser, albeit at intervals well spaced out one from the other, of transfiguring rays of a grace I persist in comparing in all respects to divine grace.

**MANIFESTO OF SURREALISM  
(1924)**

So strong is the belief in life, in what is most fragile in life—*real* life, I mean—that in the end this belief is lost. Man, that inveterate dreamer, daily more discontent with his destiny, has trouble assessing the objects he has been led to use, objects that his nonchalance has brought his way, or that he has earned through his own efforts, almost always through his own efforts, for he has agreed to work, at least he has not refused to try his luck (or what he calls his luck!). At this point he feels extremely modest: he knows what women he has had, what silly affairs he has been involved in; he is unimpressed by his wealth or poverty, in this respect he is still a newborn babe and, as for the approval of his conscience, I confess that he does very nicely without it. If he still retains a certain lucidity, all he can do is turn back toward his childhood which, however his guides and mentors may have botched it, still strikes him as somehow charming. There, the absence of any known restrictions allows him the perspective of several lives lived at once; this illusion becomes firmly rooted within him; now he is only interested in the fleeting, the extreme facility of everything. Children set off each day without a

worry in the world. Everything is near at hand, the worst material conditions are fine. The woods are white or black, one will never sleep.

But it is true that we would not dare venture so far, it is not merely a question of distance. Threat is piled upon threat, one yields, abandons a portion of the terrain to be conquered. This imagination which knows no bounds is henceforth allowed to be exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of an arbitrary utility; it is incapable of assuming this inferior role for very long and, in the vicinity of the twentieth year, generally prefers to abandon man to his lusterless fate.

Though he may later try to pull himself together upon occasion, having felt that he is losing by slow degrees all reason for living, incapable as he has become of being able to rise to some exceptional situation such as love, he will hardly succeed. This is because he henceforth belongs body and soul to an imperative practical necessity which demands his constant attention. None of his gestures will be expansive, none of his ideas generous or far-reaching. In his mind's eye, events real or imagined will be seen only as they relate to a welter of similar events, events in which he has not participated, *abortive* events. What am I saying: he will judge them in relationship to one of these events whose consequences are more reassuring than the others. On no account will he view them as his salvation.

Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality.

The mere word "freedom" is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism. It doubtless satisfies my only legitimate aspiration. Among all the many misfortunes to which we are heir, it is only fair to admit that we are allowed the greatest degree of freedom of thought. It is up to us not to misuse it. To reduce the imagination to a state of slavery

—even though it would mean the elimination of what is commonly called happiness—is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself. Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake (as though it were possible to make a bigger mistake). Where does it begin to turn bad, and where does the mind's stability cease? For the mind, is the possibility of erring not rather the contingency of good?

There remains madness, "the madness that one locks up," as it has aptly been described. That madness or another. . . . We all know, in fact, that the insane owe their incarceration to a tiny number of legally reprehensible acts and that, were it not for these acts their freedom (or what we see as their freedom) would not be threatened. I am willing to admit that they are, to some degree, victims of their imagination, in that it induces them not to pay attention to certain rules—outside of which the species feels itself threatened—which we are all supposed to know and respect. But their profound indifference to the way in which we judge them, and even to the various punishments meted out to them, allows us to suppose that they derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination, that they enjoy their madness sufficiently to endure the thought that its validity does not extend beyond themselves. And, indeed, hallucinations, illusions, etc., are not a source of trifling pleasure. The best controlled sensuality partakes of it, and I know that there are many evenings when I would gladly tame that pretty hand which, during the last pages of Taine's *L'Intelligence*, indulges in some curious misdeeds. I could spend my whole life prying loose the secrets of the insane. These people are honest to a fault, and their naiveté has no peer but my own. Christopher Columbus should have set out to discover America



with a boatload of madmen. And note how this madness has taken shape, and endured.

It is not the fear of madness which will oblige us to leave the flag of imagination furled.

The case against the realistic attitude demands to be examined, following the case against the materialistic attitude. The latter, more poetic in fact than the former, admittedly implies on the part of man a kind of monstrous pride which, admittedly, is monstrous, but not a new and more complete decay. It should above all be viewed as a welcome reaction against certain ridiculous tendencies of spiritualism. Finally, it is not incompatible with a certain nobility of thought.

By contrast, the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit. It is this attitude which today gives birth to these ridiculous books, these insulting plays. It constantly feeds on and derives strength from the newspapers and stultifies both science and art by assiduously flattering the lowest of tastes; clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life. The activity of the best minds feels the effects of it; the law of the lowest common denominator finally prevails upon them as it does upon the others. An amusing result of this state of affairs, in literature for example, is the generous supply of novels. Each person adds his personal little "observation" to the whole. As a cleansing antidote to all this, M. Paul Valéry recently suggested that an anthology be compiled in which the largest possible number of opening passages from novels be offered; the resulting insanity, he predicted, would be a source of considerable edification. The most famous authors would be included. Such a thought reflects great credit on Paul

Valéry who, some time ago, speaking of novels, assured me that, so far as he was concerned, he would continue to refrain from writing: "The Marquise went out at five." But has he kept his word?

If the purely informative style, of which the sentence just quoted is a prime example, is virtually the rule rather than the exception in the novel form, it is because, in all fairness, the author's ambition is severely circumscribed. The circumstantial, needlessly specific nature of each of their notations leads me to believe that they are perpetrating a joke at my expense. I am spared not even one of the character's slightest vacillations: will he be fairhaired? what will his name be? will we first meet him during the summer? So many questions resolved once and for all, as chance directs; the only discretionary power left me is to close the book, which I am careful to do somewhere in the vicinity of the first page. And the descriptions! There is nothing to which their vacuity can be compared; they are nothing but so many superimposed images taken from some stock catalogue, which the author utilizes more and more whenever he chooses; he seizes the opportunity to slip me his postcards, he tries to make me agree with him about the clichés:

*The small room into which the young man was shown was covered with yellow wallpaper: there were geraniums in the windows, which were covered with muslin curtains; the setting sun cast a harsh light over the entire setting. . . . There was nothing special about the room. The furniture, of yellow wood, was all very old. A sofa with a tall back turned down, an oval table opposite the sofa, a dressing table and a mirror set against the pierglass, some chairs along the walls, two or three etchings of no value portraying some German girls with birds in their hands—such were the furnishings.\**

\*Dostoevski, *Crime and Punishment*.

I am in no mood to admit that the mind is interested in occupying itself with such matters, even fleetingly. It may be argued that this school-boy description has its place, and that at this juncture of the book the author has his reasons for burdening me. Nevertheless he is wasting his time, for I refuse to go into his room. Others' laziness or fatigue does not interest me. I have too unstable a notion of the continuity of life to equate or compare my moments of depression or weakness with my best moments. When one ceases to feel, I am of the opinion one should keep quiet. And I would like it understood that I am not accusing or condemning lack of originality *as such*. I am only saying that I do not take particular note of the empty moments of my life, that it may be unworthy for any man to crystallize those which seem to him to be so. I shall, with your permission, *ignore* the description of that room, and many more like it.

Not so fast, there; I'm getting into the area of psychology, a subject about which I shall be careful not to joke.

The author attacks a character and, this being settled upon, parades his hero to and fro across the world. No matter what happens, this hero, whose actions and reactions are admirably predictable, is compelled not to thwart or upset—even though he looks as though he is—the calculations of which he is the object. The currents of life can appear to lift him up, roll him over, cast him down, he will still belong to this *readymade* human type. A simple game of chess which doesn't interest me in the least—man, whoever he may be, being for me a mediocre opponent. What I cannot bear are those wretched discussions relative to such and such a move, since winning or losing is not in question. And if the game is not worth the candle, if objective reason does a frightful job—as indeed it does—of serving him who calls upon it, is it not fitting and proper to avoid all contact with these categories? "Diversity is so vast that every different tone of voice, every step,

cough, every wipe of the nose, every sneeze. . . ."

\* If in a cluster of grapes there are no two alike, why do you want me to describe this grape by the other, by all the others, why do you want me to make a palatable grape? Our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable. The desire for analysis wins out over the sentiments.\*\* The result is statements of undue length whose persuasive power is attributable solely to their strangeness and which impress the reader only by the abstract quality of their vocabulary, which moreover is ill-defined. If the general ideas that philosophy has thus far come up with as topics of discussion revealed by their very nature their definitive incursion into a broader or more general area, I would be the first to greet the news with joy. But up till now it has been nothing but idle repartee; the flashes of wit and other niceties vie in concealing from us the true thought in search of itself, instead of concentrating on obtaining successes. It seems to me that every act is its own justification, at least for the person who has been capable of committing it, that it is endowed with a radiant power which the slightest gloss is certain to diminish. Because of this gloss, it even in a sense ceases to happen. It gains nothing to be thus distinguished. Stendhal's heroes are subject to the comments and appraisals—appraisals which are more or less successful—made by that author, which add not one whit to their glory. Where we really find them again is at the point at which Stendhal has lost them.

We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape

\*Pascal.

\*\*Barrès, Proust.

us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately expedient, and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense. Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices. It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer—and, in my opinion by far the most important part—has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally forming by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much further, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them—first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason. The analysts themselves have everything to gain by it. But it is worth noting that no means has been designated a priori for carrying out this undertaking, that until further notice it can be construed to be the province of poets as well as scholars, and that its success is not dependent upon the more or less capricious paths that will be followed.

Freud very rightly brought his critical faculties to bear upon the dream. It is, in fact, inadmissible that this considerable portion of psychic activity (since, at least from

man's birth until his death, thought offers no solution of continuity, the sum of the moments of dream, from the point of view of time, and taking into consideration only the time of pure dreaming, that is the dreams of sleep, is not inferior to the sum of the moments of reality, or, to be more precisely limiting, the moments of waking) has still today been so grossly neglected. I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams. It is because man, when he ceases to sleep, is above all the plaything of his memory, and in its normal state memory takes pleasure in weakly retracing for him the circumstances of the dream, in stripping it of any real importance, and in dismissing the only *determinant* from the point where he thinks he has left it a few hours before: this firm hope, this concern. He is under the impression of continuing something that is worthwhile. Thus the dream finds itself reduced to a mere parenthesis, as is the night. And, like the night, dreams generally contribute little to furthering our understanding. This curious state of affairs seems to me to call for certain reflections:

1) Within the limits where they operate (or are thought to operate) dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization. Memory alone arrogates to itself the right to excerpt from dreams, to ignore the transitions, and to depict for us rather a series of dreams than the *dream itself*. By the same token, at any given moment we have only a distinct notion of realities, the coordination of which is a question of will.\* What is

\*Account must be taken of the *depth* of the dream. For the most part I retain only what I can glean from its most superficial layers. What I most enjoy contemplating about a dream is everything that sinks back below the surface in a waking state, everything I have forgotten about my activities in the course of the preceding day, dark foliage, stupid branches. In "reality," likewise, I prefer to *fall*.

worth noting is that nothing allows us to presuppose a greater dissipation of the elements of which the dream is constituted. I am sorry to have to speak about it according to a formula which in principle excludes the dream. When will we have sleeping logicians, sleeping philosophers? I would like to sleep, in order to surrender myself to the dreamers, the way I surrender myself to those who read me with eyes wide open; in order to stop imposing, in this realm, the conscious rhythm of my thought. Perhaps my dream last night follows that of the night before, and will be continued the next night, with an exemplary strictness. *It's quite possible*, as the saying goes. And since it has not been proved in the slightest that, in doing so, the "reality" with which I am kept busy continues to exist in the state of dream, that it does not sink back down into the immemorial, why should I not grant to dreams what I occasionally refuse reality, that is, this value of certainty in itself which, in its own time, is not open to my repudiation? Why should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from a degree of consciousness which is daily more acute? Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life? Are these questions the same in one case as in the other and, in the dream, do these questions already exist? Is the dream any less restrictive or punitive than the rest? I am growing old and, more than that reality to which I believe I subject myself, it is perhaps the dream, the difference with which I treat the dream, which makes me grow old.

2) Let me come back again to the waking state. I have no choice but to consider it a phenomenon of interference. Not only does the mind display, in this state, a strange tendency to lose its bearings (as evidenced by the slips and mistakes the secrets of which are just beginning to be revealed to us), but, what is more, it does not appear that, when the mind is functioning normally, it really responds to anything but the suggestions which come to it from the

depths of that dark night to which I commend it. However conditioned it may be, its balance is relative. It scarcely dares express itself and, if it does, it confines itself to verifying that such and such an idea, or such and such a woman, has made an impression on it. What impression it would be hard pressed to say, by which it reveals the degree of its subjectivity, and nothing more. This idea, this woman, disturb it, they tend to make it less severe. What they do is isolate the mind for a second from its solvent and spirit it to heaven, as the beautiful precipitate it can be, that it is. When all else fails, it then calls upon chance, a divinity even more obscure than the others to whom it ascribes all its aberrations. Who can say to me that the angle by which that idea which affects it is offered, that what it likes in the eye of that woman is not precisely what links it to its dream, binds it to those fundamental facts which, through its own fault, it has lost? And if things were different, what might it be capable of? I would like to provide it with the key to this corridor.

3) The mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him. The agonizing question of possibility is no longer pertinent. Kill, fly faster, love to your heart's content. And if you should die, are you not certain of reawaking among the dead? Let yourself be carried along, events will not tolerate your interference. You are nameless. The ease of everything is priceless.

What reason, I ask, a reason so much vaster than the other, makes dreams seem so natural and allows me to welcome unreservedly a welter of episodes so strange that they would confound me now as I write? And yet I can believe my eyes, my ears; this great day has arrived, this beast has spoken.

If man's awaking is harder, if it breaks the spell too abruptly, it is because he has been led to make for himself too impoverished a notion of atonement.

4) From the moment when it is subjected to a method-

ical examination, when, by means yet to be determined, we succeed in recording the contents of dreams in their entirety (and that presupposes a discipline of memory spanning generations; but let us nonetheless begin by noting the most salient facts), when its graph will expand with unparalleled volume and regularity, we may hope that the mysteries which really are not will give way to the great Mystery. I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.

A story is told according to which Saint-Pol-Roux, in times gone by, used to have a notice posted on the door of his manor house in Camaret, every evening before he went to sleep, which read: THE POET IS WORKING.

A great deal more could be said, but in passing I merely wanted to touch upon a subject which in itself would require a very long and much more detailed discussion; I shall come back to it. At this juncture, my intention was merely to mark a point by noting the *hate of the marvelous* which rages in certain men, this absurdity beneath which they try to bury it. Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.

In the realm of literature, only the marvelous is capable of fecundating works which belong to an inferior category such as the novel, and generally speaking, anything that involves storytelling. Lewis' *The Monk* is an admirable proof of this. It is infused throughout with the presence of

the marvelous. Long before the author has freed his main characters from all temporal constraints, one feels them ready to act with an unprecedented pride. This passion for eternity with which they are constantly stirred lends an unforgettable intensity to their torments, and to mine. I mean that this book, from beginning to end, and in the purest way imaginable, exercises an exalting effect only upon that part of the mind which aspires to leave the earth and that, stripped of an insignificant part of its plot, which belongs to the period in which it was written, it constitutes a paragon of precision and innocent grandeur.\* It seems to me none better has been done, and that the character of Mathilda in particular is the most moving creation that one can credit to this *figurative* fashion in literature. She is less a character than a continual temptation. And if a character is not a temptation, what is he? An extreme temptation, she. In *The Monk*, the "nothing is impossible for him who dares try" gives it its full, convincing measure. Ghosts play a logical role in the book, since the critical mind does not seize them in order to dispute them. Ambrosio's punishment is likewise treated in a legitimate manner, since it is finally accepted by the critical faculty as a natural denouement.

It may seem arbitrary on my part, when discussing the marvelous, to choose this model, from which both the Nordic literatures and Oriental literatures have borrowed time and time again, not to mention the religious literatures of every country. This is because most of the examples which these literatures could have furnished me with are tainted by puerility, for the simple reason that they are addressed to children. At an early age children are weaned on the marvelous, and later on they fail to retain a sufficient virginity of mind to thoroughly enjoy fairy tales. No matter

\*What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real.

how charming they may be, a grown man would think he were reverting to childhood by nourishing himself on fairy tales, and I am the first to admit that all such tales are not suitable for him. The fabric of adorable improbabilities must be made a trifle more subtle the older we grow, and we are still at the stage of waiting for this kind of spider. . . . But the faculties do not change radically. Fear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant are all devices which we can always call upon without fear of deception. There are fairy tales to be written for adults, fairy tales still almost blue.

The marvelous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time. In these areas which make us smile, there is still portrayed the incurable human restlessness, and this is why I take them into consideration and why I judge them inseparable from certain productions of genius which are, more than the others, painfully afflicted by them. They are Villon's gibbets, Racine's Greeks, Baudelaire's couches. They coincide with an eclipse of the taste I am made to endure, I whose notion of taste is the image of a big spot. Amid the bad taste of my time I strive to go further than anyone else. It would have been I, had I lived in 1820, I "the bleeding nun," I who would not have spared this cunning and banal "let us conceal" whereof the parodical Cuisin speaks, it would have been I, I who would have reveled in the enormous metaphors, as he says, all phases of the "silver disk." For today I think of a *castle*, half of which is not necessarily in ruins; this castle belongs to me, I picture it in a rustic setting, not far from Paris. The outbuildings are too numerous to mention, and, as for the interior, it has been frightfully restored, in such a manner as to leave

nothing to be desired from the viewpoint of comfort. Automobiles are parked before the door, concealed by the shade of the trees. A few of my friends are living here as permanent guests: there is Louis Aragon leaving; he only has time enough to say hello; Philippe Soupault gets up with the stars, and Paul Eluard, our great Eluard, has not yet come home. There are Robert Desnos and Roger Vitrac out on the grounds poring over an ancient edict on dueling; Georges Auric, Jean Paulhan; Max Morise, who rows so well, and Benjamin Péret, busy with his equations with birds; and Joseph Delteil; and Jean Carrière; and Georges Limbour, and Georges Limbours (there is a whole hedge of Georges Limbours); and Marcel Noll; there is T. Fraenkel waving to us from his captive balloon, Georges Malkine, Antonin Artaud, Francis Gérard, Pierre Naville, J.-A. Boiffard, and after them Jacques Baron and his brother, handsome and cordial, and so many others besides, and gorgeous women, I might add. Nothing is too good for these young men, their wishes are, as to wealth, so many commands. Francis Picabia comes to pay us a call, and last week, in the hall of mirrors, we received a certain Marcel Duchamp whom we had not hitherto known. Picasso goes hunting in the neighborhood. The spirit of *demoralization* has elected domicile in the castle, and it is with it we have to deal every time it is a question of contact with our fellowmen, but the doors are always open, and one does not begin by "thanking" everyone, you know. Moreover, the solitude is vast, we don't often run into one another. And anyway, isn't what matters that we be the masters of ourselves, the masters of women, and of love too?

I shall be proved guilty of poetic dishonesty: everyone will go parading about saying that I live on the rue Fontaine\* and that he will have none of the water that flows therefrom. To be sure! But is he certain that this castle

\*Breton's pun eludes translation: Fontaine=Fountain.—Tr.

into which I cordially invite him is an image? What if this castle really existed! My guests are there to prove it does; their whim is the luminous road that leads to it. We really live by our fantasies when we *give free rein to them*. And how could what one might do bother the other, there, safely sheltered from the sentimental pursuit and at the trysting place of opportunities?

Man proposes and disposes. He and he alone can determine whether he is completely master of himself, that is, whether he maintains the body of his desires, daily more formidable, in a state of anarchy. Poetry teaches him to. It bears within itself the perfect compensation for the miseries we endure. It can also be an organizer, if ever, as the result of a less intimate disappointment, we contemplate taking it seriously. The time is coming when it decrees the end of money and by itself will break the bread of heaven for the earth! There will still be gatherings on the public squares, and *movements* you never dared hope participate in. Farewell to absurd choices, the dreams of dark abyss, rivalries, the prolonged patience, the flight of the seasons, the artificial order of ideas, the ramp of danger, time for everything! May you only take the trouble to *practice* poetry. Is it not incumbent upon us, who are already living off it, to try and impose what we hold to be our case for further inquiry?

It matters not whether there is a certain disproportion between this defense and the illustration that will follow it. It was a question of going back to the sources of poetic imagination and, what is more, of remaining there. Not that I pretend to have done so. It requires a great deal of fortitude to try to set up one's abode in these distant regions where everything seems at first to be so awkward and difficult, all the more so if one wants to try to take someone

there. Besides, one is never sure of really being there. If one is going to all that trouble, one might just as well stop off somewhere else. Be that as it may, the fact is that the way to these regions is clearly marked, and that to attain the true goal is now merely a matter of the travelers' ability to endure.

We are all more or less aware of the road traveled. I was careful to relate, in the course of a study of the case of Robert Desnos entitled *ENTRÉE DES MÉDIUMS*,\* that I had been led to "concentrate my attention on the more or less partial sentences which, when one is quite alone and on the verge of falling asleep, become perceptible for the mind without its being possible to discover what provoked them." I had then just attempted the poetic adventure with the minimum of risks, that is, my aspirations were the same as they are today but I trusted in the slowness of formulation to keep me from useless contacts, contacts of which I completely disapproved. This attitude involved a modesty of thought certain vestiges of which I still retain. At the end of my life, I shall doubtless manage to speak with great effort the way people speak, to apologize for my voice and my few remaining gestures. The virtue of the spoken word (and the written word all the more so) seemed to me to derive from the faculty of foreshortening in a striking manner the exposition (since there was exposition) of a small number of facts, poetic or other, of which I made myself the substance. I had come to the conclusion that Rimbaud had not proceeded any differently. I was composing, with a concern for variety that deserved better, the final poems of *Mont de piété*, that is, I managed to extract from the blank lines of this book an incredible advantage. These lines were the closed eye to the operations of thought

\*See *Les Pas perdus*, published by N. R. F.

that I believed I was obliged to keep hidden from the reader. It was not deceit on my part, but my love of shocking the reader. I had the illusion of a possible complicity, which I had more and more difficulty giving up. I had begun to cherish words excessively for the space they allow around them, for their tangencies with countless other words that I did not utter. The poem *BLACK FOREST* derives precisely from this state of mind. It took me six months to write it, and you may take my word for it that I did not rest a single day. But this stemmed from the opinion I had of myself in those days, which was high, please don't judge me too harshly. I enjoy these stupid confessions. At that point cubist pseudo-poetry was trying to get a foothold, but it had emerged defenseless from Picasso's brain, and I was thought to be as dull as dishwater (and still am). I had a sneaking suspicion, moreover, that from the viewpoint of poetry I was off on the wrong road, but I hedged my bet as best I could, defying lyricism with salvos of definitions and formulas (the Dada phenomena were waiting in the wings, ready to come on stage) and pretending to search for an application of poetry to advertising (I went so far as to claim that the world would end, not with a good book but with a beautiful advertisement for heaven or for hell).

In those days, a man at least as boring as I, Pierre Reverdy, was writing:

*The image is a pure creation of the mind.*

*It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities.*

*The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be—the greater its emotional power and poetic reality...\**

These words, however sibylline for the uninitiated, were extremely revealing, and I pondered them for a long

\**Nord-Sud*, March 1918.

time. But the image eluded me. Reverdy's aesthetic, a completely a posteriori aesthetic, led me to mistake the effects for the causes. It was in the midst of all this that I renounced irrevocably my point of view.

One evening, therefore, before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word, but nonetheless removed from the sound of any voice, a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent relationship to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was then involved, a phrase which seemed to me insistent, a phrase, if I may be so bold, *which was knocking at the window*. I took cursory note of it and prepared to move on when its organic character caught my attention. Actually, this phrase astonished me: unfortunately I cannot remember it exactly, but it was something like: "There is a man cut in two by the window," but there could be no question of ambiguity, accompanied as it was by the faint visual image\* of a man walking cut half way up by a

\*Were I a painter, this visual depiction would doubtless have become more important for me than the other. It was most certainly my previous predispositions which decided the matter. Since that day, I have had occasion to concentrate my attention voluntarily on similar apparitions, and I know that they are fully as clear as auditory phenomena. With a pencil and white sheet of paper to hand, I could easily trace their outlines. Here again it is not a matter of drawing, but simply of tracing. I could thus depict a tree, a wave, a musical instrument, all manner of things of which I am presently incapable of providing even the roughest sketch. I would plunge into it, convinced that I would find my way again, in a maze of lines which at first glance would seem to be going nowhere. And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something "never seen." The proof of what I am saying has been provided many times by Robert Desnos: to be convinced, one has only to leaf through the pages of issue number 36 of *Feuilles libres* which contains several of his drawings (*Romeo and Juliet*, *A Man Died This Morning*, etc.) which were taken by this magazine as the drawings of a madman and published as such.



window perpendicular to the axis of his body. Beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt, what I saw was the simple reconstruction in space of a man leaning out a window. But this window having shifted with the man, I realized that I was dealing with an image of a fairly rare sort, and all I could think of was to incorporate it into my material for poetic construction. No sooner had I granted it this capacity than it was in fact succeeded by a whole series of phrases, with only brief pauses between them, which surprised me only slightly less and left me with the impression of their being so gratuitous that the control I had then exercised upon myself seemed to me illusory and all I could think of was putting an end to the interminable quarrel raging within me.\*

Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at that time, and familiar as I was with his methods of examination which I had had some slight occasion to use on some patients during the war, I resolved to obtain from myself what

\*Knut Hamsum ascribes this sort of revelation to which I had been subjected as deriving from *hunger*, and he may not be wrong. (The fact is I did not eat every day during that period of my life). Most certainly the manifestations that he describes in these terms are clearly the same:

"The following day I awoke at an early hour. It was still dark. My eyes had been open for a long time when I heard the clock in the apartment above strike five. I wanted to go back to sleep, but I couldn't; I was wide awake and a thousand thoughts were crowding through my mind.

"Suddenly a few good fragments came to mind, quite suitable to be used in a rough draft, or serialized; all of a sudden I found, quite by chance, beautiful phrases, phrases such as I had never written. I repeated them to myself slowly, word by word; they were excellent. And there were still more coming. I got up and picked up a pencil and some paper that were on a table behind my bed. It was as though some vein had burst within me, one word followed another, found its proper place, adapted itself to the situation,

we were trying to obtain from them, namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*. It had seemed to me, and still does—the way in which the phrase about the man cut in two had come to me is an indication of it—that the speed of thought is no greater than the speed of speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the fast-moving pen. It was in this frame of mind that Philippe Soupault—to whom I had confided these initial conclusions—and I decided to blacken some paper, with a praiseworthy disdain for what might result from a literary point of view. The ease of execution did the rest. By the end of the first day we were able to read to ourselves some fifty or so pages obtained in this manner, and begin to compare our results. All in all, Soupault's pages and mine proved to be remarkably similar: the same overconstruction, shortcomings of a similar nature, but also, on both our parts, the illusion of an extraordinary verve, a great deal of emotion, a considerable choice of images of a quality such that we would not have been capable of preparing a single one in longhand, a very special picturesque quality and, here and there, a strong comical effect. The only difference between our two texts seemed to me to derive essentially from our respective tempers, Soupault's being less static than mine, and, if he does not mind my

scene piled upon scene, the action unfolded, one retort after another welled up in my mind, I was enjoying myself immensely. Thoughts came to me so rapidly and continued to flow so abundantly that I lost a whole host of delicate details, because my pencil could not keep up with them, and yet I went as fast as I could, my hand in constant motion, I did not lose a minute. The sentences continued to well up within me, I was pregnant with my subject."

Apollinaire asserted that Chirico's first paintings were done under the influence of cenesthetic disorders (migraines, colics, etc.).

offering this one slight criticism, from the fact that he had made the error of putting a few words by way of titles at the top of certain pages, I suppose in a spirit of mystification. On the other hand, I must give credit where credit is due and say that he constantly and vigorously opposed any effort to retouch or correct, however slightly, any passage of this kind which seemed to me unfortunate. In this he was, to be sure, absolutely right.\* It is, in fact, difficult to appreciate fairly the various elements present; one may even go so far as to say that it is impossible to appreciate them at a first reading. To you who write, these elements are, on the surface, *as strange to you as they are to anyone else*, and naturally you are wary of them. Poetically speaking, what strikes you about them above all is their *extreme degree of immediate absurdity*, the quality of this absurdity, upon closer scrutiny, being to give way to everything admissible, everything legitimate in the world: the disclosure of a certain number of properties and of facts no less objective, in the final analysis, than the others.

In homage to Guillaume Apollinaire, who had just died and who, on several occasions, seemed to us to have followed a discipline of this kind, without however having sacrificed to it any mediocre literary means, Soupault and I baptized the new mode of pure expression which we had at our disposal and which we wished to pass on to our friends, by the name of SURREALISM. I believe that there is no point today in dwelling any further on this word and that the meaning we gave it initially has generally prevailed over its Apollinarian sense. To be even fairer, we could

\*I believe more and more in the infallibility of my thought with respect to myself, and this is too fair. Nonetheless, with this *thought-writing*, where one is at the mercy of the first outside distraction, "ebullitions" can occur. It would be inexcusable for us to pretend otherwise. By definition, thought is strong, and incapable of catching itself in error. The blame for these obvious weaknesses must be placed on suggestions that come to it from without.

probably have taken over the word SUPERNATURALISM employed by Gérard de Nerval in his dedication to the *Filles de feu*.\* It appears, in fact, that Nerval possessed to a tee the spirit with which we claim a kinship, Apollinaire having possessed, on the contrary, naught but *the letter*, still imperfect, of Surrealism, having shown himself powerless to give a valid theoretical idea of it. Here are two passages by Nerval which seem to me to be extremely significant in this respect:

I am going to explain to you, my dear Dumas, the phenomenon of which you have spoken a short while ago. There are, as you know, certain storytellers who cannot invent without identifying with the characters their imagination has dreamt up. You may recall how convincingly our old friend Nodier used to tell how it had been his misfortune during the Revolution to be guillotined; one became so completely convinced of what he was saying that one began to wonder how he had managed to have his head glued back on.

. . . And since you have been indiscreet enough to quote one of the sonnets composed in this SUPERNATURALISTIC dream-state, as the Germans would call it, you will have to hear them all. You will find them at the end of the volume. They are hardly any more obscure than Hegel's metaphysics or Swedenborg's MEMORABILIA, and would lose their charm if they were explained, if such were possible; at least admit the worth of the expression. . . \*\*

Those who might dispute our right to employ the term SURREALISM in the very special sense that we understand it are being extremely dishonest, for there can be no doubt

\*And also by Thomas Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* ([Book III] Chapter VIII, "Natural Supernaturalism"), 1833-34.

\*\*See also *L'Idéoréalisme* by Saint-Pol-Roux.

that this word had no currency before we came along. Therefore, I am defining it once and for all:

**SURREALISM, n.** Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

**ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy.** Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. The following have performed acts of **ABSOLUTE SURREALISM**: Messrs. Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Eluard, Gérard, Limbour, Malkine, Morise, Naville, Noll, Péret, Picon, Soupault, Vitrac.

They seem to be, up to the present time, the only ones, and there would be no ambiguity about it were it not for the case of Isidore Ducasse, about whom I lack information. And, of course, if one is to judge them only superficially by their results, a good number of poets could pass for Surrealists, beginning with Dante and, in his finer moments, Shakespeare. *In the course of the various attempts I have made to reduce what is, by breach of trust, called genius, I have found nothing which in the final analysis can be attributed to any other method than that.*

Young's *Nights* are Surrealist from one end to the other; unfortunately it is a priest who is speaking, a bad priest no doubt, but a priest nonetheless.

Swift is Surrealist in malice,  
Sade is Surrealist in sadism.

Chateaubriand is Surrealist in exoticism.  
Constant is Surrealist in politics.  
Hugo is Surrealist when he isn't stupid.  
Desbordes-Valmore is Surrealist in love.  
Bertrand is Surrealist in the past.  
Rabbe is Surrealist in death.  
Poe is Surrealist in adventure.  
Baudelaire is Surrealist in morality.  
Rimbaud is Surrealist in the way he lived, and elsewhere.  
Mallarmé is Surrealist when he is confiding.  
Jarry is Surrealist in absinthe.  
Nouveau is Surrealist in the kiss.  
Saint-Pol-Roux is Surrealist in his use of symbols.  
Fargue is Surrealist in the atmosphere.  
Vaché is Surrealist in me.  
Reverdy is Surrealist at home.  
Saint-Jean-Perse is Surrealist at a distance.  
Roussel is Surrealist as a storyteller.  
Etc.

I would like to stress this point: they are not always Surrealists, in that I discern in each of them a certain number of preconceived ideas to which—very naively!—they hold. They hold to them because they had not *heard the Surrealist voice*, the one that continues to preach on the eve of death and above the storms, because they did not want to serve simply to orchestrate the marvelous score. They were instruments too full of pride, and this is why they have not always produced a harmonious sound.\*

But we, who have made no effort whatsoever to filter, who in our works have made ourselves into simple recep-

\*I could say the same of a number of philosophers and painters, including, among these latter, Uccello, from painters of the past, and, in the modern era, Seurat, Gustave Moreau, Matisse (in "La Musique," for example), Derain, Picasso, (by far the most pure), Braque, Duchamp, Picabia, Chirico (so admirable for so long), Klee, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and, one so close to us, André Masson.

tacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments* who are not mesmerized by the drawings we are making, perhaps we serve an even nobler cause. Thus do we render with integrity the "talent" which has been lent to us. You might as well speak of the talent of this platinum ruler, this mirror, this door, and of the sky, if you like.

We do not have any talent; ask Philippe Soupault:

*"Anatomical products of manufacture and low-income dwellings will destroy the tallest cities."*

Ask Roger Vitrac:

*"No sooner had I called forth the marble-admiral than he turned on his heel like a horse which rears at the sight of the North star and showed me, in the plane of his two-pointed cocked hat, a region where I was to spend my life."*

Ask Paul Eluard:

*"This is an oft-told tale that I tell, a famous poem that I reread: I am leaning against a wall, with my verdant ears and my lips burned to a crisp."*

Ask Max Morise:

*"The bear of the caves and his friend the bittern, the vol-au-vent and his valet the wind, the Lord Chancellor with his Lady, the scarecrow for sparrows and his accomplice the sparrow, the test tube and his daughter the needle, this carnivore and his brother the carnival, the sweeper and his monocle, the Mississippi and its little dog, the coral and its jug of milk, the Miracle and its Good Lord, might just as well go and disappear from the surface of the sea."*

Ask Joseph Delteil:

*"Alas! I believe in the virtue of birds. And a feather is all it takes to make me die laughing."*

Ask Louis Aragon:

*"During a short break in the party, as the players were*

*gathering around a bowl of flaming punch, I asked the tree if it still had its red ribbon."*

And ask me, who was unable to keep myself from writing the serpentine, distracting lines of this preface.

Ask Robert Desnos, he who, more than any of us, has perhaps got closest to the Surrealist truth, he who, in his still unpublished works\* and in the course of the numerous experiments he has been a party to, has fully justified the hope I placed in Surrealism and leads me to believe that a great deal more will still come of it. Desnos *speaks Surrealist* at will. His extraordinary agility in orally following his thought is worth as much to us as any number of splendid speeches which are lost, Desnos having better things to do than record them. He reads himself like an open book, and does nothing to retain the pages, which fly away in the windy wake of his life.

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## SECRETS OF THE MAGICAL SURREALIST ART

*Written Surrealist composition  
or  
first and last draft*

After you have settled yourself in a place as favorable as possible to the concentration of your mind upon itself, have writing materials brought to you. Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything. Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not re-

\*NOUVELLES HÉBRIDES, DÉSORDRE FORMEL, DEUIL POUR DEUIL.

member what you're writing and be tempted to reread what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard. It is somewhat of a problem to form an opinion about the next sentence; it doubtless partakes both of our conscious activity and of the other, if one agrees that the fact of having written the first entails a minimum of perception. This should be of no importance to you, however; to a large extent, this is what is most interesting and intriguing about the Surrealist game. The fact still remains that punctuation no doubt resists the absolute continuity of the flow with which we are concerned, although it may seem as necessary as the arrangement of knots in a vibrating cord. Go on as long as you like. Put your trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur. If silence threatens to settle in if you should ever happen to make a mistake—a mistake, perhaps due to carelessness—break off without hesitation with an overly clear line. Following a word the origin of which seems suspicious to you, place any letter whatsoever, the letter "I" for example, always the letter "I," and bring the arbitrary back by making this letter the first of the following word.

*How not to be bored any longer when with others*

This is very difficult. Don't be at home for anyone, and occasionally, when no one has forced his way in, interrupting you in the midst of your Surrealist activity, and you, crossing your arms, say: "It doesn't matter, there are doubtless better things to do or not do. Interest in life is indefensible. Simplicity, what is going on inside me, is still tiresome to me!" or any other revolting banality.

*To make speeches*

Just prior to the elections, in the first country which deems

it worthwhile to proceed in this kind of public expression of opinion, have yourself put on the ballot. Each of us has within himself the potential of an orator: multicolored loin cloths, glass trinkets of words. Through Surrealism he will take despair unawares in its poverty. One night, on a stage, he will, by himself, carve up the eternal heaven, that *Peau de l'ours*. He will promise so much that any promises he keeps will be a source of wonder and dismay. In answer to the claims of an entire people he will give a partial and ludicrous vote. He will make the bitterest enemies partake of a secret desire which will blow up the countries. And in this he will succeed simply by allowing himself to be moved by the immense word which dissolves into pity and revolves in hate. Incapable of failure, he will play on the velvet of all failures. He will be truly elected, and women will love him with an all-consuming passion.

*To write false novels*

Whoever you may be, if the spirit moves you burn a few laurel leaves and, without wishing to tend this meager fire, you will begin to write a novel. Surrealism will allow you to: all you have to do is set the needle marked "fair" at "action," and the rest will follow naturally. Here are some characters rather different in appearance; their names in your handwriting are a question of capital letters, and they will conduct themselves with the same ease with respect to active verbs as does the impersonal pronoun "it" with respect to words such as "is raining," "is," "must," etc. They will command them, so to speak, and wherever observation, reflection, and the faculty of generalization prove to be of no help to you, you may rest assured that they will credit you with a thousand intentions you never had. Thus endowed with a tiny number of physical and moral characteristics, these beings who in truth owe you so little will thereafter deviate not one iota from a certain line of conduct about which you need not concern yourself any fur-

ther. Out of this will result a plot more or less clever in appearance, justifying point by point this moving or comforting denouement about which you couldn't care less. Your false novel will simulate to a marvelous degree a real novel; you will be rich, and everyone will agree that "you've really got a lot of guts," since it's also in this region that this something is located.

Of course, by an analogous method, and provided you ignore what you are reviewing, you can successfully devote yourself to false literary criticism.

*How to catch the eye of a woman  
you pass in the street*

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.....

*Against death*

Surrealism will usher you into death, which is a secret society. It will glove your hand, burying therein the profound M with which the word Memory begins. Do not forget to make proper arrangements for your last will and testament: speaking personally, I ask that I be taken to the cemetery in a moving van. May my friends destroy every last copy of the printing of the *Speech concerning the Modicum of Reality*.



Language has been given to man so that he may make Surrealist use of it. To the extent that he is required to make himself understood, he manages more or less to express himself, and by so doing to fulfill certain functions

culled from among the most vulgar. Speaking, reading a letter, present no real problem for him, provided that, in so doing, he does not set himself a goal above the mean, that is, provided he confines himself to carrying on a conversation (for the pleasure of conversing) with someone. He is not worried about the words that are going to come, nor about the sentence which will follow after the sentence he is just completing. To a very simple question, he will be capable of making a lightning-like reply. In the absence of minor tics acquired through contact with others, he can without any ado offer an opinion on a limited number of subjects; for that he does not need to "count up to ten" before speaking or to formulate anything whatever ahead of time. Who has been able to convince him that this faculty of the first draft will only do him a disservice when he makes up his mind to establish more delicate relationships? There is no subject about which he should refuse to talk, to write about prolifically. All that results from listening to oneself, from reading what one has written, is the suspension of the occult, that admirable help. I am in no hurry to understand myself (basta! I shall always understand myself). If such and such a sentence of mine turns out to be somewhat disappointing, at least momentarily, I place my trust in the following sentence to redeem its sins: I carefully refrain from starting it over again or polishing it. The only thing that might prove fatal to me would be the slightest loss of impetus. Words, groups of words *which follow one another*, manifest among themselves the greatest solidarity. It is not up to me to favor one group over the other. It is up to a miraculous equivalent to intervene—and intervene it does.

Not only does this unrestricted language, which I am trying to render forever valid, which seems to me to adapt itself to all of life's circumstances, not only does this language not deprive me of any of my means, on the contrary it lends me an extraordinary lucidity, and it does so in an area where I least expected it. I shall even go so far as to

maintain that it instructs me and, indeed, I have had occasion to use *surreally* words whose meaning I have forgotten. I was subsequently able to verify that the way in which I had used them corresponded perfectly with their definition. This would lead one to believe that we do not "learn," that all we ever do is "relearn." There are felicitous turns of speech that I have thus familiarized myself with. And I am not talking about the *poetic consciousness of objects* which I have been able to acquire only after a spiritual contact with them repeated a thousand times over.

The forms of Surrealist language adapt themselves best to dialogue. Here, two thoughts confront each other; while one is being delivered, the other is busy with it; but how is it busy with it? To assume that it incorporates it within itself would be tantamount to admitting that there is a time during which it is possible for it to live completely off that other thought, which is highly unlikely. And, in fact, the attention it pays is completely exterior; it has only time enough to approve or reject—generally reject—with all the consideration of which man is capable. This mode of language, moreover, does not allow the heart of the matter to be plumbed. My attention, prey to an entreaty which it cannot in all decency reject, treats the opposing thought as an enemy; in ordinary conversation, it "takes it up" almost always on the words, the figures of speech, it employs; it puts me in a position to turn it to good advantage in my reply by distorting them. This is true to such a degree that in certain pathological states of mind, where the sensorial disorders occupy the patient's complete attention, he limits himself, while continuing to answer the questions, to seizing the last word spoken in his presence or the last portion of the Surrealist sentence some trace of which he finds in his mind.

Q. "How old are you?" A. "You." (*Echolalia.*)

Q. "What is your name?" A. "Forty-five houses." (*Ganser syndrome, or beside-the-point replies.*)

There is no conversation in which some trace of this disorder does not occur. The effort to be social which dictates it and the considerable practice we have at it are the only things which enable us to conceal it temporarily. It is also the great weakness of the book that it is in constant conflict with its best, by which I mean the most demanding, readers. In the very short dialogue that I concocted above between the doctor and the madman, it was in fact the madman who got the better of the exchange. Because, through his replies, he obtrudes upon the attention of the doctor examining him—and because he is not the person asking the questions. Does this mean that his thought at this point is the stronger? Perhaps. He is free not to care any longer about his age or name.

Poetic Surrealism, which is the subject of this study, has focused its efforts up to this point on reestablishing dialogue in its absolute truth, by freeing both interlocutors from any obligations of politeness. Each of them simply pursues his soliloquy without trying to derive any special dialectical pleasure from it and without trying to impose anything whatsoever upon his neighbor. The remarks exchanged are not, as is generally the case, meant to develop some thesis, however unimportant it may be; they are as disaffected as possible. As for the reply that they elicit, it is, in principle, totally indifferent to the personal pride of the person speaking. The words, the images are only so many springboards for the mind of the listener. In *Les Champs magnétiques*, the first purely Surrealist work, this is the way in which the pages grouped together under the title *Barrières* must be conceived of—pages wherein Soupault and I show ourselves to be impartial interlocutors.

Surrealism does not allow those who devote themselves to it to forsake it whenever they like. There is every reason

to believe that it acts on the mind very much as drugs do; like drugs, it creates a certain state of need and can push man to frightful revolts. It also is, if you like, an artificial paradise, and the taste one has for it derives from Baudelaire's criticism for the same reason as the others. Thus the analysis of the mysterious effects and special pleasures it can produce—in many respects Surrealism occurs as a *new vice* which does not necessarily seem to be restricted to the happy few; like hashish, it has the ability to satisfy all manner of tastes—such an analysis has to be included in the present study.

1. It is true of Surrealist images as it is of opium images that man does not evoke them; rather they "come to him spontaneously, despotically. He cannot chase them away; for the will is powerless now and no longer controls the faculties."\* It remains to be seen whether images have ever been "evoked." If one accepts, as I do, Reverdy's definition it does not seem possible to bring together, voluntarily, what he calls "two distant realities." The juxtaposition is made or not made, and that is the long and the short of it. Personally, I absolutely refuse to believe that, in Reverdy's work, images such as

*In the brook, there is a song that flows*

or:

*Day unfolded like a white tablecloth*

or:

*The world goes back into a sack*

reveal the slightest degree of premeditation. In my opinion, it is erroneous to claim that "the mind has grasped the relationship" of two realities in the presence of each other.

\*Baudelaire.

First of all, it has seized nothing consciously. It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*, to which we are infinitely sensitive. The value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors. When the difference exists only slightly, as in a comparison,\* the spark is lacking. Now, it is not within man's power, so far as I can tell, to effect the juxtaposition of two realities so far apart. The principle of the association of ideas, such as we conceive of it, militates against it. Or else we would have to revert to an elliptical art, which Reverdy deplores as much as I. We are therefore obliged to admit that the two terms of the image are not deduced one from the other by the mind for the specific purpose of producing the spark, that they are the simultaneous products of the activity I call Surrealist, reason's role being limited to taking note of, and appreciating, the luminous phenomenon.

And just as the length of the spark increases to the extent that it occurs in rarefied gases, the Surrealist atmosphere created by automatic writing, which I have wanted to put within the reach of everyone, is especially conducive to the production of the most beautiful images. One can even go so far as to say that in this dizzying race the images appear like the only guideposts of the mind. By slow degrees the mind becomes convinced of the supreme reality of these images. At first limiting itself to submitting to them, it soon realizes that they flatter its reason, and increase its knowledge accordingly. The mind becomes aware of the limitless expanses wherein its desires are made manifest, where the pros and cons are constantly consumed, where its obscurity does not betray it. It goes forward,

\*Compare the image in the work of Jules Renard.



borne by these images which enrapture it, which scarcely leave it any time to blow upon the fire in its fingers. This is the most beautiful night of all, the *lightning-filled night*: day, compared to it, is night.

The countless kinds of Surrealist images would require a classification which I do not intend to make today. To group them according to their particular affinities would lead me far afield; what I basically want to mention is their common virtue. For me, their greatest virtue, I must confess, is the one that is arbitrary to the highest degree, the one that takes the longest time to translate into practical language, either because it contains an immense amount of seeming contradiction or because one of its terms is strangely concealed; or because, presenting itself as something sensational, it seems to end weakly (because it suddenly closes the angle of its compass), or because it derives from itself a ridiculous *formal* justification, or because it is of a hallucinatory kind, or because it very naturally gives to the abstract the mask of the concrete, or the opposite, or because it implies the negation of some elementary physical property, or because it provokes laughter. Here, in order, are a few examples of it:

*The ruby of champagne.* (LAUTRÉAMONT)

*Beautiful as the law of arrested development of the breast in adults, whose propensity to growth is not in proportion to the quantity of molecules that their organism assimilates.* (LAUTRÉAMONT)

*A church stood dazzling as a bell.* (PHILIPPE SOUPAULT)

*In Rrose Sélavy's sleep there is a dwarf issued from a well who comes to eat her bread at night.* (ROBERT DESNOS)

*On the bridge the dew with the head of a tabby cat lulls itself to sleep.* (ANDRÉ BRETON)

*A little to the left, in my firmament foretold, I see—*

*but it's doubtless but a mist of blood and murder—the gleaming glass of liberty's disturbances.* (LOUIS ARAGON)

*In the forest aflame*

*The lions were fresh.* (ROBERT VITRAC)

*The color of a woman's stockings is not necessarily in the likeness of her eyes, which led a philosopher who it is pointless to mention, to say: "Cephalopods have more reasons to hate progress than do quadrupeds."*

(MAX MORISE)

1st. Whether we like it or not, there is enough there to satisfy several demands of the mind. All these images seem to attest to the fact that the mind is ripe for something more than the benign joys it allows itself in general. This is the only way it has of turning to its own advantage the ideal quantity of events with which it is entrusted.\* These images show it the extent of its ordinary dissipation and the drawbacks that it offers for it. In the final analysis, it's not such a bad thing for these images to upset the mind, for to upset the mind is to put it in the wrong. The sentences I quote make ample provision for this. But the mind which relishes them draws therefrom the conviction that it is on the *right track*; on its own, the mind is incapable of finding itself guilty of cavil; it has nothing to fear, since, moreover, it attempts to embrace everything.

2nd. The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood. For such a mind, it is similar to the certainty with which a person who is drowning reviews once more, in the space of less than a second, all the insurmountable moments of

\*Let us not forget that, according to Novalis' formula, "there are series of events which run parallel to real events. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of circumstances, so that it seems imperfect; and their consequences are also equally imperfect. Thus it was with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism, we got Lutheranism."

his life. Some may say to me that the parallel is not very encouraging. But I have no intention of encouraging those who tell me that. From childhood memories, and from a few others, there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of *having gone astray*, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's "real life"; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his *laissez-passer*, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective, risk-free possession of oneself. Thanks to Surrealism, it seems that opportunity knocks a second time. It is as though we were still running toward our salvation, or our perdition. In the shadow we again see a precious terror. Thank God, it's still only Purgatory. With a shudder, we cross what the occultists call *dangerous territory*. In my wake I raise up monsters that are lying in wait; they are not yet too ill-disposed toward me, and I am not lost, since I fear them. Here are "the elephants with the heads of women and the flying lions" which used to make Soupault and me tremble in our boots to meet, here is the "soluble fish" which still frightens me slightly. SOLUBLE FISH, am I not the soluble fish, I was born under the sign of Pisces, and man is soluble in his thought! The flora and fauna of Surrealism are inadmissible.

3rd. I do not believe in the establishment of a conventional Surrealist pattern any time in the near future. The characteristics common to all the texts of this kind, including those I have just cited and many others which alone could offer us a logical analysis and a careful grammatical analysis, do not preclude a certain evolution of Surrealist prose in time. Coming on the heels of a large number of essays I have written in this vein over the past five years, most of which I am indulgent enough to think are extremely disordered, the short anecdotes which comprise

the balance of this volume offer me a glaring proof of what I am saying. I do not judge them to be any more worthless, because of that, in portraying for the reader the benefits which the Surrealist contribution is liable to make to his consciousness.

Surrealist methods would, moreover, demand to be heard. Everything is valid when it comes to obtaining the desired suddenness from certain associations. The pieces of paper that Picasso and Braque insert into their work have the same value as the introduction of a platitude into a literary analysis of the most rigorous sort. It is even permissible to entitle POEM what we get from the most random assemblage possible (observe, if you will, the syntax) of headlines and scraps of headlines cut out of the newspapers:

## POEM

A burst of laughter  
of sapphire in the island of Ceylon

***The most beautiful straws***  
**HAVE A FADED COLOR**  
**UNDER THE LOCKS**

**on an isolated farm**

*FROM DAY TO DAY*

the pleasant  
grows worse

**A carriage road**

takes you to the edge of the unknown

**coffee**

preaches for its saint

THE DAILY ARTISAN OF YOUR BEAUTY

**MADAM,**

a pair

**of silk stockings**

is not

**A leap into space**

**A STAG**

*Love above all*

**Everything could be worked out so well**

**PARIS IS A BIG VILLAGE**

Watch out for  
**the fire that covers**  
THE PRAYER  
**of fair weather**

Know that  
The ultraviolet rays  
have finished their task  
*short and sweet*

**THE FIRST WHITE PAPER  
OF CHANCE**  
Red will be

The wandering singer  
**WHERE IS HE?**  
**in memory**  
**in his house**  
**AT THE SUITORS' BALL**

I do  
as I dance  
**What people did, what they're going to do**

And we could offer many many more examples. The theater, philosophy, science, criticism would all succeed in finding their bearings there. I hasten to add that future Surrealist techniques do not interest me.

Far more serious, in my opinion\*—I have intimated it often enough—are the applications of Surrealism to action. To be sure, I do not believe in the prophetic nature of the Surrealist word. "It is the oracle, the things I

\*Whatever reservations I may be allowed to make concerning responsibility in general and the medico-legal considerations which determine an individual's degree of responsibility—complete responsibility, irresponsibility, limited responsibility (sic)—however difficult it may be for me to accept the principle of any kind of responsibility, I would like to know how the first punishable offenses, the Surrealist character of which will be clearly apparent, will be *judged*. Will the accused be acquitted, or will he merely be given the benefit of the doubt because of extenuating circumstances? It's a shame that the violation of the laws governing the Press is today scarcely repressed, for if it were not we would soon see a trial of this sort: the accused has published a book which is an outrage to public decency. Several of his "most respected and honorable" fellow citizens have lodged a complaint against him, and he is also charged with slander and libel. There are also all sorts of other charges against him, such as insulting and defaming the army, inciting to murder, rape, etc. The accused, moreover, wastes no time in agreeing with the accusers in "stigmatizing" most of the ideas expressed. His only defense is claiming that he does not consider himself to be the author of his book, said book being no more and no less than a Surrealist concoction which precludes any question of merit or lack of merit on the part of the person who signs it; further, that all he has done is copy a document without offering any opinion thereon, and that he is at least as foreign to the accused text as is the presiding judge himself.

What is true for the publication of a book will also hold true for a whole host of other acts as soon as Surrealist methods begin to enjoy widespread favor. When that happens, a new morality must be substituted for the prevailing morality, the source of all our trials and tribulations.

say."\* Yes, *as much as I like*, but what of the oracle itself? \*\* Men's piety does not fool me. The Surrealist voice that shook Cumae, Dodona, and Delphi is nothing more than the voice which dictates my less irascible speeches to me. My *time* must not be its time, why should this voice help me resolve the childish problem of my destiny? I pretend, unfortunately, to act in a world where, in order to take into account its suggestions, I would be obliged to resort to two kinds of interpreters, one to translate its judgments for me, the other, impossible to find, to transmit to my fellow men whatever sense I could make out of them. This world, in which I endure what I endure (don't go see) this modern world, I mean, what the devil do you want me to do with it? Perhaps the Surrealist voice will be stilled, I have given up trying to keep track of those who have disappeared. I shall no longer enter into, however briefly, the marvelous detailed description of my years and my days. I shall be like Nijinski who was taken last year to the Russian ballet and did not realize what spec-

\*Rimbaud.

\*\*Still, STILL. . . . We must absolutely get to the bottom of this. Today, June 8, 1924, about one o'clock, the voice whispered to me: "Béthune, Béthune." What did it mean? I have never been to Béthune, and have only the vaguest notion as to where it is located on the map of France. Béthune evokes nothing for me, not even a scene from *The Three Musketeers*. I should have left for Béthune, where perhaps there was something awaiting me; that would have been too simple, really. Someone told me they had read in a book by Chesterton about a detective who, in order to find someone he is looking for in a certain city, simply scoured from roof to cellar the houses which, from the outside, seemed somehow abnormal to him, were it only in some slight detail. This system is as good as any other.

Similarly, in 1919, Soupault went into any number of impossible buildings to ask the concierge whether Philippe Soupault did in fact live there. He would not have been surprised, I suspect, by an affirmative reply. He would have gone and knocked on his door.

tacle it was he was seeing. I shall be alone, very alone within myself, indifferent to all the world's ballets. What I have done, what I have left undone, I give it to you.

And ever since I have had a great desire to show forbearance to scientific musing, however unbecoming, in the final analysis, from every point of view. Radios? Fine. Syphilis? If you like. Photography? I don't see any reason why not. The cinema? Three cheers for darkened rooms. War? Gave us a good laugh. The telephone? Hello. Youth? Charming white hair. Try to make me say thank you: "Thank you." Thank you. If the common man has a high opinion of things which properly speaking belong to the realm of the laboratory, it is because such research has resulted in the manufacture of a machine or the discovery of some serum which the man in the street views as affecting him directly. He is quite sure that they have been trying to improve his lot. I am not quite sure to what extent scholars are motivated by humanitarian aims, but it does not seem to me that this factor constitutes a very marked degree of goodness. I am, of course, referring to true scholars and not to the vulgarizers and popularizers of all sorts who take out patents. In this realm as in any other, I believe in the pure Surrealist joy of the man who, forewarned that all others before him have failed, refuses to admit defeat, sets off from whatever point he chooses, along any other path save a reasonable one, and arrives wherever he can. Such and such an image, by which he deems it opportune to indicate his progress and which may result, perhaps, in his receiving public acclaim, is to me, I must confess, a matter of complete indifference. Nor is the material with which he must perforce encumber himself; his glass tubes or my metallic feathers . . . As for his method, I am willing to give it as much credit as I do

mine. I have seen the inventor of the cutaneous plantar reflex at work; he manipulated his subjects without respite, it was much more than an "examination" he was employing; *it was obvious that he was following no set plan*. Here and there he formulated a remark, distantly, without nonetheless setting down his needle, while his hammer was never still. He left to others the futile task of curing patients. He was wholly consumed by and devoted to that sacred fever.

Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete *nonconformism* clearly enough so that there can be no question of translating it, at the trial of the real world, as evidence for the defense. It could, on the contrary, only serve to justify the complete state of distraction which we hope to achieve here below. Kant's absentmindedness regarding women, Pasteur's absentmindedness about "grapes," Curie's absentmindedness with respect to vehicles, are in this regard profoundly symptomatic. This world is only very relatively in tune with thought, and incidents of this kind are only the most obvious episodes of a war in which I am proud to be participating. Surrealism is the "invisible ray" which will one day enable us to win out over our opponents. "You are no longer trembling, carcass." This summer the roses are blue; the wood is of glass. The earth, draped in its verdant cloak, makes as little impression upon me as a ghost. It is living and ceasing to live that are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.

**SOLUBLE FISH**  
**(1924)**

The park, at this time of day, stretched its blond hands over the magic fountain. A meaningless castle rolled along the surface of the earth. Close to God the register of this château was open at a drawing of shadows, feathers, irises. The Young Widow's Kiss was the name of the country inn caressed by the speed of the automobile and the drapings of horizontal grasses. Thus the branches dated the year before never stirred at the approach of the window blinds, when the light sends the women hurrying to the balcony. The young girl from Ireland, troubled by the jeremiads of the east wind, listened in her breast to the seabirds laughing.

"Daughters of the blue sepulcher, feast days, forms of the angelus of my eyes and my head that ring when I awaken, customs of provinces set aflame, you bring me the sun of white carpentry shops, of mechanical saw-mills and wine. My hands, so reassured, are my pale angel. Seagulls of the lost paradise!"

The phantom enters on tiptoe. He quickly inspects the tower and descends the triangular staircase. His red silk stockings throw a whirling light on the slopes of rushes. The phantom is around two hundred years old; he still speaks a bit of French. But in his transparent flesh the dew of evening and the sweat of stars are paired. He is lost to himself in this countryside moved to pity. The dead elm and the bright green catalpa alone sigh in the avalanche of milk from the fierce stars. A fruit stone bursts into a fruit. Then the nacelle-fish passes, its hands over its eyes, asking for pearls or gowns.

A woman is singing at the window of this fourteenth-century château. In her dreams are black walnut trees. I do not know her yet because the phantom too often brings on nice weather around him. Night has suddenly fallen like a great rose window of flowers turned inside out over our heads.

A building is the steeple bell of our flights: flight at five o'clock in the morning, when paleness assails beautiful lady travelers on the express in their bed of ferns, flight at one o'clock in the afternoon as one passes through the olive of murder. A building is the steeple bell of our flight into a church resembling the shadow of Madame de Pompadour. But I was ringing the bell at the gate of the château.

Several maidservants came to meet me clad in satin tights the color of daylight. In the mad night, their compassionate faces were proof of the fear of being compromised. "What may I do for you?"

"Tell your mistress that the edge of her bed is a river of flowers. Take her back into the theater vault where three years ago the heart of a capital that I have forgotten beat longingly. Tell her that her time is precious to me and that all her reveries are aflame in the chandelier of my head. Do not forget to inform her of my desires incubating under the stones that you are. And you who are more beautiful than a grain of sunshine in the beak of the dazzling parakeet in this doorway, tell me immediately how she is, whether it is true that the

drawbridge of the ivy vines of speech is lowered here simply by knocking with the stirrup."

"You are right," she says to me. "The shadow here present went out on horseback a while ago. The reins were made of words of love, I believe, but since the nostrils of fog and the sachets of azure have brought you to this eternally swinging door, enter and caress me all the way up these stairs seeded with thought."

Great isosceles wasps flew up from below. The pretty dawn of evening preceded me, its eyes on the heaven of my eyes, without turning round. Thus do ships lie down in the silver storm.

Several echos answer one another on land: the echo of rains like a cork on a line, the echo of the sun like solder mixed with sand. The present echo is that of tears, and of the beauty appropriate to unreadable adventures, to mutilated dreams. We were arriving at the destination. The phantom who took a notion along the way to assume the body of Saint Denis claimed he saw his severed head in each rose. A stammering glued to the windowpanes and the railing, a cold stammering, mingled with our unrestrained kisses.

On the edge of the clouds a woman stands, on the edge of the islands a woman stands as grape clusters ripen on high walls decorated with sparkling grapevines, with beautiful black and gold grapes. There is also the American grapevine, and this woman was an American grapevine, of the sort most recently acclimated to France that produces seeds of that purple foxglove whose full flavor has not yet been savored. She was walking back and forth in a corridor apartment like the corridor pullmans of the great European express trains, the one difference being that the light shed by the lamps did not clearly pick out the lava flows, the minarets, and the great indolence of the beasts of the air and the water. I coughed several times and the train in question glided through tunnels, put suspension bridges to sleep. The divinity of the place staggered. Having caught her in my arms, all rustling, I placed my lips on her throat



without a word. What happens next escapes me almost entirely. It is only later that I find us again, her in a terribly bright-colored outfit that makes her look like a gear in a brand-new machine, me buried as deeply as possible inside this impeccable black suit that I have not taken off since.

Meanwhile, I must have passed through a cabaret run by very elderly Leaguers whom my civil status threw into a bird's perplexity. I also remember a crane raising packages heavenward that must have been hair, and, my God, how frighteningly light they were. Then it was the future, the very future itself. The Flame-Child, the marvelous Wave of just a while before, guided my footsteps like garlands. The small cracks in the sky finally awoke me: there was no more park, no more night or day, no more white burials conducted by glass hoops. The woman who was standing near me caught sight of her feet in a puddle of winter water.

Looking back I no longer see clearly, it is as if a waterfall stood between the theater of my life and me, who am not the principal actor in it. A much-cherished buzzing accompanies me, along which grasses yellow and even break. When I say to her: "Take this smoked glass which is my hand in your hands, an eclipse is here," she smiles and dives into the seas to bring back the branch of blood coral. We are not far from the meadow of death and yet we take refuge from the wind and from hope in this faded salon. I have dreamed of loving her the way one loves in reality. But I have not been able to rid myself completely of half a green lemon, her scull-like hair, the inadvertence of traps for catching animals alive. She is sleeping now, facing the boundlessness of my loves, in front of this mirror that earthly breaths cloud. It is when she is asleep that she really belongs to me; I enter her dream like a thief and I truly lose her as one loses a crown. I am stripped, surely, of golden roots, but I hold the strings of the storm and I keep the wax seals of crime.

The least hem of the breezes, there where the pheas-

ant of the moon flees and dies, there where the dazzling comb of dungeons wanders, there where the hyacinth of evil steeples, I have described in my rarer and rarer moments of lucidity, lifting this distant fog too tenderly. Now it is tenderness that takes hold once again, the boulevard like a swamp seasoning the luminous signboards with salt. I bring back wild fruits, sunny bays that I give her and that in her hands are immense jewels. Shivers must still be awakened in the underbrush of the bedroom, brooks must be laced into the window of day. This task is the amusing apotheosis of everything which keeps us, a man and a woman, awake, though we are rather tired, in accordance with the itineraries of light when it has been possible to slow it down. Maidservants of frailty, maidservants of happiness, the women take unfair advantage of the light in a burst of laughter.

## 2

Less time than it takes to tell, fewer tears than it takes to die: I have counted everything, and there you are. I have made an inventory of the stones; they number as many as my fingers and a few more besides; I have distributed prospectuses to the plants, but all of them refused to accept them. I have played along with the music just for a second, and now I don't know what to think of suicide, for if I want to separate myself from myself the exit is on this side and, I spitefully add, the entry, the reentry is on this other side. You see what else you still have to do. I don't keep reasonable track of the hours, of sorrow; I am alone, I am looking through the window; there isn't anybody going by, or rather nobody *goes by* (I underline *goes by*). Don't you know this gentleman? It's Monsieur Likewise. Allow me to introduce Madame Madame. And their children. Then I retrace my footsteps, my footsteps go back too, but I don't know exactly what they're going back on. I consult a timetable; the names

of the cities have been replaced by names of persons who have been rather closely related to me. Shall I go to A, shall I return to B, shall I change at X? Yes, naturally, I'll change at X. If only I don't miss the connection with boredom! Here we are: boredom, neat parallels, oh how neat parallels are beneath God's perpendicular!

## 3

In those days the one thing people were all talking about around the place de la Bastille was an enormous wasp that went down the boulevard Richard-Lenoir in the morning singing at the top of its lungs and asking the children riddles. The little modern sphinx had already made quite a few victims when, as I left the café whose façade some thought would look good with a cannon, although the Prison in the neighborhood may pass today for a legendary building, I met the wasp with the waist of a pretty woman and it asked me the way.

"Good heavens, my pretty one, it is not up to me to put a point on your lipstick. The sky-slate has just been wiped clean and you know that miracles no longer happen except between seasons. Go back home; you live on the fourth floor of a nice-looking building and even though your windows look out on the court, you will perhaps find some way not to bother me any more."

The insect's buzzing, as unbearable as a lung congestion, at this moment drowned out the noise of the tramways, whose trolley was a dragonfly. The wasp, after having looked at me for a long time, no doubt for the purpose of conveying to me its ironical surprise, now approached me and said in my ear: "I'll be back." It did disappear, as a matter of fact, and I was already delighted to be rid of it so easily when I noticed that the Genius of the place, ordinarily very alert, seemed to be having an attack of vertigo and be on the verge of falling on people passing by. This could only be a hallucination on my part,

due to the great heat: the sun, moreover, kept me from concluding that there had been a sudden transmission of natural powers, for it was like a long aspen leaf, and I had only to close my eyes to hear the motes of dust sing.

The wasp, whose approach had nonetheless made me feel most uncomfortable (people for several days now had been talking about the exploits of mysterious stingers that respected neither the coolness of subways nor the solitude of the woods), had not completely ceased having her say.

Not far from there, the Seine was inexplicably carrying along an adorably polished woman's torso, although it had no head or members, and a few hooligans who had pointed it out not long before maintained that this torso was an intact body, but a new body, a body such as had never been seen before, never been caressed before. The police, who were worn out, were deeply moved, but since the boat that had been launched to pursue the new Eve had never come back, they had given up a second more costly expedition, and there had been an unconfirmed report that the beautiful palpitating white breasts had never belonged to a living creature of the sort that still haunts our desires. She was beyond our desires, like flames, and she was, as it were, the first day of the feminine season of flame, just one March 21st of snow and pearls.

## 4

Birds lose their form after they lose their colors. They are reduced to a spider-like existence so deceptive that I throw the gauntlet down far away. My yellow gauntlets with the black stitching fall on a plain with a fragile tower looking down on it. I then cross my arms and watch. I watch for laughs that come out of the ground and immediately flower, umbels. Night has come, like a carp jumping on the surface of violet water, and strange

laurels are interlaced in the sky that descends from the sea. Someone ties together a bundle of burning faggots in the woods and the woman or the fairy who loads it on her back seems to be flying now, while stars the color of champagne become motionless. Rain begins to fall; it is an eternal grace and it has the most delicate reflections. In a single drop there is the passage of a yellow bridge through lilac gypsy caravans; in another that outdistances it are a carefree life and crimes in country inns. In the south, in a cove, love shakes its hair full of shadow and is a propitious boat that circles on the roofs. But the rings of water break one by one and the dawn of a finger is placed on the towering packet of nocturnal landscapes. The prostitute begins her song that is more roundabout than a cool brook in the country of Cloven Garlic, but despite everything it is only an absence. A real lily elevated to the glory of stars undoes the thighs of combustion that is awakening and the group that they form goes off to find the shore. But the soul of the other woman is covered with white feathers that gently fan her. Truth rests on the mathematical reeds of the infinite and everything moves forward by order of the eagle riding pillion, while the genius of vegetable flotillas claps and the oracle is pronounced by fluid electric fish.

## 5

Leo the cameo had just taken the floor. He waved his feather duster back and forth in front of me as he addressed me in the fourth person as befits a valet of his hazy sort. With all the playfulness of which I am capable I one by one raised objections concerning the noise, the perfect idiocy of the upper floors and the elevator cage which presented newcomers with a great tidal wave of light. The last to enter, a man and woman in the business of amorous navigation, wished to speak to Madame de Rosen. That is what Leo the cameo came to tell me when the bell rang and the *brilliantine* began to slide. From my

bed all I could see was the enormous night light of the hotel beating in the street like a heart; on one of the arteries was written the word *central*, on another the word *cold*—lion's cold, duck's cold, or baby's cold? But Leo the cameo knocked at my door again. The sun was just finishing emptying its billets from his waistcoat with the vibrations that were well defined up as far as the roots of his moustache. He uttered imprudent words, wanting absolutely to annoy me. At that point I was terrified by tenderness and the contract to stand watch that the dears at the foot of the table had tried to make me sign. The great shoulderer of lights asked me to point out the road to immortality to him. I reminded him of the famous seance in the printing plant, when, as I descended the stairway of shellfish, I took ignorance by the sleeve like an ordinary little typist. If I had listened to him, Leo the cameo would have gone to wake up Madame de Rosen. It was probably about four o'clock in the morning, the hour when the fog kisses dining rooms with an orange-colored brise-bise; the storm was raging inside the houses. The end had come with the milkman's trucks, tinnabulating in the laurel corridors of the peevish day. At the first alert, I had taken refuge in the stone cuirassier, where no one could find me. Using my last resources, as when one abandons an agricultural machine to bindweed, I closed my eyes to spy or purify myself. Madame de Rosen was still sleeping and her lilac curls on the pillow, in the direction of Romainville, were nothing but distant plumes of smoke from the railway. I needed only to fascinate Leo the cameo for him to take the gaping windows by the ears and go off to sell them at auction. The light of day barely filtered through in the shape of a little girl who knocks at the door of your bedroom: you go to open it, and looking in front of you, you are surprised at first not to see anybody. Madame de Rosen and I would soon be the prisoners of the most pleasant murmurs. Leo was changing the magnolias' water. This pupil that slowly dilates at the surface of murder, the pupil of a unicorn or a griffon, made me promise to get along without its services. For I was not to see Madame de Rosen

again, and that very day, taking advantage of a suspension of the seance to refresh myself—a great debate in the house of lords that night—I broke on a step the head of the cameo that came to me from the empress Julie and delighted the lovely one-legged lady of the boulevards with the sunshade of crows.

## 6

The ground beneath my feet is nothing but an enormous unfolded newspaper. Sometimes a photograph comes by; it is a nondescript curiosity, and from the flowers there uniformly rises the smell, the good smell, of printers' ink. I heard it said in my youth that the smell of hot bread is intolerable to sick people, but I repeat that the flowers smell of printers' ink. The trees themselves are only more or less interesting minor news items: a fire here, a derailment there. As for the animals, they have long since withdrawn from the commerce of men; with these latter, women now have only episodic relations, that are like shop windows early in the morning when the head window dresser goes out onto the street to see the effect of the waves of ribbon, the slots, the wheedling winks of mannequins.

The majority of this newspaper I am looking through is devoted, properly speaking, to ship movements and places to vacation in the country, a column that occupies a fine place at the top of the first page. It says there, in particular, that tomorrow I shall go to Cyprus.

At the bottom of the fourth page the newspaper has an unusual fold that I can describe as follows: it looks as if it has been wrapped around a metallic object, judging by a rusty spot that might be a forest, and this metallic object might be a weapon of an unfamiliar shape, akin to the dawn and a large Empire bed. The writer signing the fashion column, near the aforementioned forest, speaks a most obscure language in which I nonetheless

believe that I can make out that the negligee of the young bride will be ordered this season at the Partridge Company, a new department store that has just opened in the Glacière district. The author, who seems to be particularly interested in the trousseaus of young women, emphasizes that these latter are free to change their body linen for soul linen in the event of divorce.

I go on to read a few advertisements, well-written ones, in which contradiction plays a lively role: it really served as a hand-blotter in this advertising agency. The light—which, moreover is very poor—that falls on the fattest letters, this very same light is celebrated by great poets with an abundance of detail that does not allow it to be judged other than by analogy with white hair, for example.

There is also a remarkable view of the sky, in the very same style as business letterheads showing a factory with all its chimneys smoking.

Politics, finally, which it seems to me has been given scant space, tends above all to govern good relations between men of different metal, the first rank of which is occupied by calcium men. In the minutes of the seances in the chamber, as simple as a chemistry report, they have been more than partial: thus the movements of wings have not been recorded.

It doesn't matter, since the steps that led me to this desolate shore will take me farther another time, even more desperately farther! I have only to close my eyes if I do not wish to bestow my attention, which is mechanical and therefore most unfavorable, on the Great Awakening of the Universe.

## 7

If the resplendent posters betrayed their secret, we would be forever lost to ourselves, knights that we are of this white marble table at which we take our places each eve-

ning. The echoing apartment! The floor is an immense pedal. Bolts of lightning from time to time scatter the splendid silver service, from the time of the Incas. We have at our disposal a great variety of crimes of passion, endlessly capable of moving the Friends of the Variant. This is the name we call ourselves by on occasion, eye to eye, at the end of one of those afternoons when we can no longer find anything to divide us. The number of secret doors within us keeps us most favorably disposed, but the alert is very seldom given. We also play games of strength and skill, as the case may be. While we sleep, the queen of caprices, with the collar of dead stars, takes a hand in choosing the color of time. Thus the rare intermediate states of life take on unparalleled importance. Just look at these marvelous knights. From very far away, from a vast height, from the place that one is not sure of coming back from, they throw the marvelous lasso made of the two arms of a woman. Then the planks floating on the river tip over and the lights of the salon tip along with them (for the whole central salon rests on a river); the furniture is suspended from the ceiling; when one raises one's head one discovers great grassplots which no longer exist and birds fulfilling their usual role between earth and sky. The *sky-plots* are just barely reflected in the river where the birds are drinking.

We seldom enter this room unless we are wearing glass diving suits that permit us, as we go where the tipping planks take us, to meet when necessary at the bottom of the sea. This is where we spend our best moments. The number of women sliding into these depths—our ever-changing guests—is difficult to imagine. They too are dressed, naturally, in glass; some of them add to this monotonous accoutrement one or two gayer accessories: hat trimmings made of wood shavings, spider-web veils, gloves, and a sunflower parasol. Vertigo takes possession of them, they hardly pay any attention to us but we rap on the bottom with the shoe of our horse every time we want to signal to one or the other of them that we would be very happy to take her back to the surface. A cloud of

flying fish then escapes from the prints of the shoes and shows the imprudent beauties the way. There is an underwater bedroom built on the model of a bank basement, with armored beds, and novel dressing tables where one's head is seen right side up, upside down, and lying horizontally to the right or left. There is an underwater smoking room, constructed in a particularly clever way, which is bounded in the water by a shadow theater that we have found a way to project without any apparent screen, the shadow of hands picking hideous flowers and getting pricked, the shadow of charming and fearful beasts, the shadow of ideas too, not to mention the shadow of the marvelous that no one has ever seen.

We are the prisoners of the mechanical orgy pursued inside the earth, for we have dug mines, underground galleries through which we sneak in a band beneath the cities that we want to blow up. We already have Sicily, and Sardinia. It is we who provoke at will the tremors that those delightfully sensitive instruments record. I needn't add that a year ago certain of us approached the Korea Strait. The great mountain chains on the border are the only thing that forces us to make detours, but the delay will not be so great, in spite of everything. It is all a question of living where life is still capable of provoking upheaval or general conversion without resorting to anything other than the reproduction of natural phenomena. The aurora borealis in one's bedroom, that's one thing accomplished; that is not all. Love shall be. We shall reduce art to its simplest expression, which is love; we shall also reduce work, to what, in heaven's name? To the music of slow corrections that are paid for with death. We shall greet births, as an experiment, with that air appropriate to the occasion that we assume when funeral processions pass by. All births. Light will follow; the day will make honorable amends, barefoot, a string of stars around its neck, in a green shirt. I swear to you that we, the last kings, will know how to render injustice beneath an invisible reed. For the moment we are taking the machines that have ceased to be useful, and also a few others

that were beginning to be useful, to the bottom of the water, at great expense, and it is a pleasure to see the mud voluptuously paralyze things that worked so well. We are the creators of wrecks; there is nothing in our minds that anyone will manage to set afloat again. We take our places at the underwater command post of these balloons, these bad vessels built on the principle of the lever, the winch, and the inclined plane. We start up this or that, in order to assure ourselves that all is lost, that this compass is finally constrained to pronounce the word *South*, and we laugh up our sleeves at the great immaterial destruction under way.

One day, however, we brought back from our expeditions a ring that jumped from finger to finger; the danger of the ring did not become apparent to us until much later. The ring did us a great deal of harm before the day that we hurriedly threw it away. Before sinking into the water it described a blinding spiral of fire in the air, so white it burned us. But the state of ignorance we have remained in as regards its precise intentions allows us to take no further notice of it, or so it seems to me at least. Furthermore, we have never seen it again. Let us keep on looking for it, if you like.

Here I am in the corridors of the palace with everyone asleep. Are verdigris and rust really the song of sirens?

## 8

On the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève is a large watering trough where at nightfall all the disturbing animals and surprise-plants still left in Paris come to refresh themselves. You would think it was dried up if, on examining things more closely, you did not see a little red stream that nothing can dry up gliding capriciously over the stone. What precious blood, then, continues to flow in this place, that the feathers, the down, the white hairs, the

dechlorophylled leaves that it runs past turn away from its apparent goal? What princess of royal blood thus devotes herself after her disappearance to the upkeep of what is most sovereignly tender in the flora and fauna of this country? What saint with an apron of roses has caused this divine extract to flow in veins of stone? Each evening the marvelous casting, more beautiful than a breast, opens itself to new lips, and the thirst-quenching virtue of the rose-blood is communicated to all the sky round about, while on a milestone a young child counting the stars shivers; in a short while he will take his flock with age-old hair back from the archer or arrow of water that has three hands, one for extracting, another for caressing, the other for shading or guiding, from the archer of my days to the Alsatian that has one blue eye and one yellow eye, the dog of the anaglyphs of my dreams, the faithful companion of the tides.

## 9

Foul night, night of flowers, night of death rattles, heady night, deaf night whose hand is a contemptible kite held back by threads on all sides, black threads, shameful threads! Countryside of red and white bones, what have you done with your unspeakably filthy trees, your arborescent candor, your fidelity that was a purse with dense rows of pearls, flowers, so-so inscriptions, and when all is said and done, meanings? And you, you bandit, you bandit, ah, you are killing me, water bandit that sharpens your knives in my eyes, you have no pity then, radiant water, lustral water that I cherish! My imprecations will long follow you like a frighteningly pretty child who shakes her gorse broom in your direction. At the end of each branch there is a star and this is not enough, no, chicory of the Virgin. I don't want to see you any more, I want to riddle your birds that aren't even leaves any more with little lead pellets, I want to chase you from

my doorway, hearts with seeds, brains of love. Enough crocodiles over there, enough crocodile teeth on the cuirasses of samurais, enough spurts of ink anyway, and renegades everywhere, renegades with purple sleeves, renegades with currant eyes, with hen's hair! It is over and done with, I shall no longer hide my shame, I shall now be calmed by nothing, by less than nothing. And if the shuttlecocks are big as houses, how do you expect us to play, to keep our vermin, to place our hands on the lips of shells that speak endlessly (who will finally silence these shells?). No more breaths, no more blood, no more soul but hands to knead the air, to toast but once the bread of the air, to slam the great eraser of sleeping flags, of solar hands, finally, frozen hands!

## 10

A man is passing one arm, then the other, but never the two of them at once, through the sides of a solidly nailed crate. Then the crate slides down the hillsides, the arm is no more, and where is the man? Where is the man, the great silk neckerchiefs of brooks ask, where is the man, the evening ankle-boots ask too. And the crate bumps against each of the trees, one by one, that cast bright blue sunlight on it for a few hours, when a bull more courageous than the others, or a rock, makes no attempt to stave it in. A curious remark: on the side of the box Top and Bottom do not exist, and I have been told that a shepherd read Paul and Virginia where one would have expected to read Fragile. Yes, Paul and Virginia, semicolon. At first I did not want to believe my ears as a fine caterpillar crossed the road looking to the right and to the left. It was on the second floor of a miserable hotel that I once again found the box that I left one day in search of, having nothing to guide me but the inimitable seals that boldness impresses on events that the marvelous has something to do with.

The crate was standing upright on its base in a dark corner of the landing, among iron hoops and heads of herring. It appeared to have suffered somewhat, which is quite natural, but not enough for me to desire to haul it back into the light. Phosphorescent as it was, I couldn't dream of bringing it aboard; the other pieces of baggage would have called the cabin boys to help them and perhaps even those squill-fish whose path beneath the water is exactly the same as their path through the air, and whose wings crackle when one takes them in one's hand. I put Paul and Virginia on my shoulders. A terrible storm broke immediately. The inside of shelves remained the only thing visible in the houses: in some of them were dead girls, in others a white form like a sack two times too tall was rolled up in a ball, in others still a lamp of flesh, real flesh, was lighted. Far from protecting my eyes with my forearm I was busily using my lips to tie up a bouquet of oaths that two days later I wanted to betray.

The crate had nothing in it but starch. Paul and Virginia were two crystallized forms of this substance that I was never to see again, love having taken me back at this time and driven me to other outbursts that I shall be pleased to tell you about.

## 11

The place du Porte-Manteau, with all the windows open this morning, is furrowed by taxis with green flags and the cars of masters. Beautiful inscriptions in letters of silver spell out the names of bankers, of celebrated runners, on every floor. In the center of the square, the Port-manteau itself, with a roll of paper in its hand, seems to be showing its horse the road where once the birds of paradise that appeared one evening over Paris swooped down. The horse, whose white mane is dragging on the ground, rears up with all the majesty desirable, and little lights whirling round despite the broad daylight ricochet



in its shadow. Casks are smashed open on the left side of the square; the boughs of the trees dip down into them now and again and then spring back covered with crystal buds and inordinately long wasps. The windows of the square resemble slices of lemon, both because of their circular form, called an *oeil-de-boeuf*, and because of their perpetual vaporizations of women in a state of undress. One of them leans down over the visibility of the shells on the bottom, the ruins of a stairway that plunges into the ground, the stairway that miracle one day took. For a long time she palpates the walls of dreams like a bouquet of fireworks rising above a garden. In a show window the hull of a superb white ocean liner whose seriously damaged prow is a prey to ants of an unknown species. All the men are in black but are wearing the uniform of a bank messenger, the one difference being that the traditional briefcase with a chain is replaced by a screen or by a black mirror. Rapes take place on the place du Porte-Manteau and disappearance has had a latticework summer shelter built there.

## 12

A certain journal made a specialty of publishing the results of psychic operations that up to that time were unheard of and gave rise to completely different opinions as to their advisability. The journal thus decided to send one of its best reporters to the grand master of deadly speculation, for the sole purpose of getting the opinion of the illustrious expert on the long-envisaged reform of the death rites, particularly as regards the procession for violent death, that it is not very moral not to be able to distinguish from the procession of compulsory death.

The journalist got into the scientist's laboratory—not without some difficulty—thanks to his acquaintance with a woman of easy virtue who was a reader for the scientist.

He spent almost a whole day hidden in a stack of oats which concealed the latest model of torture machine from all eyes, and when night had fallen he managed to visit the lodgings of the master without disturbing any of the patients stretched out mercilessly on sheets of glass that followed the contour of their bodies. One of them that caught his attention was a woman who was the victim of shared love, on whom Professor T was trying out a progressive depersonalization from which he expected marvelous results. Thus each morning a letter said to be from the woman's beloved was delivered to her, the most beautiful sample imaginable of all the figures of thought, particularly poisonous new varieties of which had just been acclimatized. From a clever mixture of little lies and these rare flowers, the experimenter was expecting an effect so toxic that the subject was as good as dead.

Another patient, around fifteen years old, was submitted to the treatment by images, which was decomposed as follows: each time he awoke, there was so-called compensation treatment, in the course of which the boy was given permission to exercise his night rights, insofar as this was possible, naturally, but this domain was extended by all possible means, including the crudest hoaxes. Thus an extremely emotional state was reached, conducive to the sudden discouragement that allowed the next stage to be reached, from the moment, for example, that the patient asked for a glass of water he said he needed and was brought leeches instead. In the second stage cosmography, as well as chemistry and music, was taught directly through images. In order to inculcate some few notions of these sciences it was necessary, obviously, to keep to generalities. Thus, for example, the blackboard which was to serve for the demonstrations was represented by a very elegant young priest who I suppose celebrated the law of falling bodies as a mass is celebrated. Another time theories of almost-naked girls developed ethics rhythmically. The very talented boy who served for the magnificent proof sought by Professor T, being thus deprived of all possibility of abstraction but



not of the wish to abstract, was incapable of experiencing the most elementary desires: he was perpetually led back to the sources of his ideas by the images themselves, each of them pledged to possess him mortally.

Professor T was to lecture on his system the next day, in a completely empty hall with a ceiling made up of a single flat mirror, but during the night the reporter took it into his head to divide the mirror into two equal parts that he set up as a roof above the lecture hall, after which he made himself up so as to look exactly like the scientist and entered the hall at the same time that he did. He slowly sat down next to him, and favored by a ray of sunshine, he succeeded, without saying a word, in persuading the formidable inquisitor that the tumblers of solar fire, so familiar to the young boy in the amphitheater, were having fun dividing him into his active person and his passive person, which caused him to find this latter very likable and allowed him to take a few liberties with the reporter. Unfortunately this was not all he did; as the reporter made a feeble gesture, in deference to the unacceptable privacy that he had just been the object of, the scientist suddenly threw himself upon him and shoved him into a plaster bath, in which he immersed him, trying to get him to harden in the masterful pose of the dead Marat, but a Marat stabbed by Scientific Curiosity, whose allegorical and threatening statue he caused to be erected near him. The inquiry was not pursued and the journal that had conducted it later had its share in lighting the fire of progress.

## 13

Out of fear that men who follow her in the street may get a wrong idea of her feelings, this young girl employed a charming trick. Instead of making herself up as for the theater (aren't the footlights sleep itself and isn't it advisable to signal stage entrances right on women's legs?)

she used chalk, red-hot coal, and an extremely rare green diamond that her first lover had left her in exchange for several drums of flowers. In the bed, after having carefully thrown back the eggshell sheets, she bent her right leg so as to place her right heel on her left knee, and with her head turned to the right, she prepared to touch the red-hot coal with the tip of her breasts, round about which the following things happened: a sort of green halo the color of the diamond formed and came to be studded with entrancing stars; blades of straw gave birth to ears whose grains were like the spangles on dancers' dresses. She then thought the moment had come to *moiré* the air as she passed, and to do this she again called on the diamond and threw it against the window pane. The diamond, which hasn't fallen yet, dug a little hole in the glass of the same shape and exactly the same size as itself, and in the sunlight, as the precious stone continued its flight, it took on the appearance of an egret of the ditches. Then she delightedly bit into the astonishing white stratifications that remained at her disposal, that is to say the sticks of chalk, and these wrote the word *love* on the slate of her mouth. She thus ate a veritable little château of chalk, built in a patient and insane style, after which she threw a mouse-colored mantle over her shoulders, and with two mouse skins as shoes she descended the stairway of freedom which led to the illusion of the *jamais-vu*. The guards let her pass; they were green plants kept at the edge of the water by a feverish card game. She thus reached the Stock Exchange, which gave not the slightest sign of life after butterflies took a notion to proceed with a capital execution there: I still see them all lined up when I close my eyes. The young girl sat down on the fifth step and there called upon the horny powers to appear to her and subject her to the savage roots of the place. Since that day she goes below the famous stairway every afternoon, an underground rumor putting the trumpet of ruin to her lips at certain fixed hours.

## 14

After the closing of the cemetery my tomb takes on the form of a seaworthy boat. There is no one in this boat except one woman, now and then, through the venetian blinds of the night, a sort of figurehead for my skyworthy dream. Elsewhere, in a farmyard probably, a woman is juggling with several balls of bluing, which burn in the air like fingernails. The anchors of women's eyebrows, that's what you're getting at. The day has been one long party on the sea. Whether the barn ascends or descends, it's just a hop, skip, and a jump into the countryside. At worst, if it rains, the wait will be bearable in this roofless house made of multiform birds and winged seeds that we are heading toward. The fence that surrounds it, far from distracting me from my reverie, does not shut very well on the sea side, on the side of the sentimental spectacle of the sea withdrawing like two sisters of charity.

This is the story of the second sister, of the blue ball and of a supernumerary who will make his appearance soon enough. Flowers, stars, open slowly on the soft boat of the cemetery. A voice says: "Are you ready?" and the boat rises noiselessly. It glides at a low altitude over plowed fields, whose song no longer matters to you, but which is very old and winds itself around fortified châteaux. The boat scatters the evening fogs whose white hairs go back all by themselves to the stable on the farm draped with night which is all the attention that one is incapable of. A red plant runs down one side of the boat, like an immense mane of fire. The invisible crew badly mistreats the butterflies that lag behind, and when the ascent of lights to the ring of branches, as hangings take place in the woods, comes to break the pebbles on the road, only a highway worker who is thought to be mad remembers having picked up a diamond necklace, heavier than the heaviest chains, by raising his hand. This boat where the satisfactions of the day are running low, as can

be seen by anyone who keeps an eye open, is now like an all-white train of a lady's dress because it passes above a bridge twisted by the wind. A train of dust and sand, the birds bite you and you sometimes break away to discover a painfully beautiful face, as unforgettable as the muddy bottoms. Is it true that on stormy days you grow tense in the elegant gale of leaves, to the point of robbing me of the best of myself? The boat, as silent and long as forgetfulness, uses up the air by shamming its breaths and we do not notice it.

Fire has never departed this equivocal shore to cast a spell on colored rings. The search for the sea is pursued among waves of incense. If the will of men is then done, it is through surprise, I assure you, and the highest rocks have nothing to do with it. The race to the stars grows uneven. The blue ball has been replaced by a ring of the same nature that encircles all women around the waist and unfortunately causes them to pale. The boat tacks into the current beyond suspicion that results from the convergent glances of the night. Fantasy passes over the bell towers, with handcuffs on its wrists, nonetheless fleeing sanity and insanity. And the man that I am erases even the most humble memory of his stops on the braids of the earth. In order to keep on living in intimacy, in rhythm with the music of the tables, with a very beautiful companion who holds out the cord of pardon.

## 15

In the school's chalk there is a sewing machine; the little children shake their curls of silver paper. The sky is a blackboard ominously erased from moment to moment by the wind. "You know what happened to the lilies that wouldn't go to sleep," the teacher begins, and the birds begin to let their voices be heard a short while before the last train goes by. The class is on the topmost branches of the corner, between green linnets and burns. It's rusti-

cating in every sense of the word. The prince of stagnant pools, who bears the name of Hugues, is at the oars of sunset. He is spying on the wheel with a thousand spokes that is cutting glass in the country and that the little children, those at least who have colchicum eyes, will warmly welcome. The Catholic pastime is abandoned. If ever the bell tower turns back into grains of corn, it will be the end of factories, and the bottom of the sea will no longer light up except under certain conditions. The children break the windows of the sea at this time of day and assume heraldic emblems so as to approach the château. They let their turn on night patrol go by and count on their fingers the signs that they will not have to rid themselves of. The day is defective and applies itself more to rekindling slumbers than to reviving acts of courage. An oncoming day that has grown no higher than a woman's dress of the sort that are on the watch for the great violins of nature. A proud and fierce day that has no need to count on the indulgence of the earth and that will surely end up tying its bouquet of stars up like the others when the little children come back, their eyes slung over their shoulders, along the roads of chance. We will speak of this day again, from top to bottom, in the royal courts, in the printing plants. We will speak of it again so as to be silent about it.

## 16

Plain rain is divine; that is why when storms shake their great ornaments over us, and throw us their purse, we make a vague gesture of revolt which is comparable only to a rustle of leaves in a forest. I saw great lords with jabots of rain pass by on horseback one day, and I am the one who welcomed them at the Good Inn. There is yellow rain, whose raindrops as large as our heads of hair fall straight down on the fire and put it out, and black rain that streams down our window panes with

terrifying courtesy, but let us not forget that plain rain is divine.

On this rainy day, a day like so many others when I am the only one guarding the flock of my windows on the edge of a precipice spanned by a bridge of tears, I look at my hands which are masks on faces, dominoes that adapt themselves so well to the lace of my sensations. Sad hands, you perhaps hide all beauty from me; I don't like your conspiratorial look. I will cut off your heads, it is not from you that I am waiting for a signal; I am waiting for rain like a lamp raised three times in the night, like a crystal column ascending and descending between the sudden arborescences of my desires. My hands are Virgins in the little work-niche with a blue background: what are they holding? I don't want to know; I don't want to know anything but the rain like a harp at two o'clock in the afternoon in a salon of Malmaison, the divine rain, the orange-colored rain with fern leaves on its underside, the rain like entirely transparent eggs of hummingbirds and like snatches of voices sent back by the thousandth echo.

My eyes are no more expressive than these raindrops that I like to catch in the hollow of my hand; inside my thought there falls a rain that pulls the stars along as a clear river carries gold that will make blind men kill each other. A dazzling pact has been drawn up between the rain and me, and it is in memory of this pact that it sometimes rains even when the sun is shining. Greenery is also rain, o lawns, lawns. The underground cave at the entrance of which there is a gravestone engraved with my name is the cave where it rains the best. Rain is the shadow beneath the immense straw hat of the young girl of my dreams, the ribbon of which is a rill of rain. How beautiful she is and how much her song, in which the names of famous roofers are heard again and again, how much this song touches me! What could be done with diamonds, except make rivers of them? The rain, the white rain that women dress themselves in for their wedding, and that smells of apple blossoms, swells these rivers.

Even though people keep ringing my bell continually, I only open my door to rain, and I am on the verge of fainting as their ring becomes insistent, but I am counting on the jealousy of rain to finally deliver me, and when I set out my nets to catch the birds of sleep, I hope above all to capture the marvelous paradise of total rain; there is a rain-bird as there is a lyre-bird. So don't ask me if I will soon force my way into the consciousness of love as certain people would have it; I repeat that if you see me heading toward a glass château where nicked measures of volume are preparing to welcome me, it is to surprise the Sleeping Rain Beauty who is to become my beloved.

## 17

On a magnificent September afternoon two men were chatting in a park, talking, naturally, of love since it was September, at the end of one of those dusty days that provide women with minuscule jewels which their maids quite wrongly throw out the window the next day, using to loosen them one of those musical instruments whose sound has always been a particular favorite of mine and whose name is *brushes*.

There are several sorts of brushes, among which I shall cite, so as to be incomplete, the hairbrush and the shoe-polishing brush. There are also the sun and the horsehair massage glove, but properly speaking these are not brushes.

The two men, then, were walking in the park smoking long cigars which, even though partially consumed, nonetheless measured one yard five inches and one yard thirty-five inches respectively. Explain that as best you can after I have told you that they had lighted both of them at the same time. The younger man, the one whose cigar ash was a young blonde that he could make out very well by lowering his eyes and who gave signs of un-

paralleled excitement, gave his arm to the second man, whose cigar ash, a brunette, had already fallen.

## 18

The lamppost imperceptibly creeping toward the post office that night stopped at each moment to listen. Does this mean that it was afraid?

In the Turkish bath, two very beautiful, severely made-up women had rented the most luxurious stall an hour before, and as they were expecting not to be alone there, it had been arranged that on the first signal (in this particular case an unusually large Japanese flower that would open in a glass of water) a saddled chestnut horse would stand behind the door. This animal pranced proudly and the fire from his nostrils threw white spiders on the walls, as when one is within earshot of distant naval gunnery practice.

The crowd came and went on the boulevard without being familiar with anything. From time to time it cut bridges, or took as witnesses great pearl geometrical locuses. It trampled underfoot a space that might be judged to be equal to that of coolness around fountains or that covered by illusions brought on by the mantle of youth, that mantle that the sword of dreams riddles with holes. The lamppost avoided being caught in the shuffle. Up at the porte Saint-Denis a dead song was still befuddling a child and two representatives of law and order: the newspaper *Le Matin* entranced by the thickets of its linotypes, and the Globe Café occupied by lancers or else by music-hall performers brought there by disdain.

The view of Paris, the nightingale of the world, varied from one minute to the next, and its pretty spring trees, equal to the angle of inclination of the soul on the horizon, shot up among the waxes of its hairdressers.

It was then that the lamppost, which had gone down the rue Etienne Marcel, thought it wise to stop, so I was

able to overhear a part of its monologue as I happened to pass by like an artist's portfolio under my own arm, as meanwhile it played a trick in order not to stop the bus that was charmed by its green hands which were like a network of mosquitoes dogging my footsteps.

The lamppost: "Sonia and Michelle really ought to be suspicious of the branch of fever guarding the gates of Paris; there is evidence that the wood of love will not be split before tonight. So that . . . so that I won't see them looking white in this nocturnal spring, even if their horse is momentarily frightened. It would be better for them to avoid the curiosity of lips, if they succumb to the temptation of bridges spanning glances. (I am going to trace them.)"

These words didn't worry me at all, even as day was breaking in the form of a little acrobat whose head was bandaged and who appeared to be on the verge of fainting. After carelessly leaning against the lamppost, the boy shot off toward the "Special Pickup" mailbox, and before I could stop him he slid his arm far down inside the opening. I had begun tying my shoelace on the stairs when he came down, thinner than ever, worn out from his effort, covered with dust and feathers like someone who has fallen into a hedge, a simple car accident that one doesn't always die from.

The chronology of these facts, of the first of them at least, a chronology in which I appeared to take an inexplicable part at the beginning of this tale, leads me to add that the timbre of the absent instruments, Sonia and Michelle, was much more muted after the letter had gone. Moreover, this chronology was to catch up with them shortly. In fact, barely ten minutes had gone by when I again heard a shirt, which was probably green, slide slowly from the back of the chair of the stall onto the floor, where for a time it led the life of a thistle in sand at the edge of the sea. The lamppost had moved to a boulevard in Dieppe where it was trying to beam for a man of forty or so who was busy looking for something in the sand. I could have shown him this lost object, for

it was a carnation. But he walked back and forth without managing to find it and I couldn't help smiling when he decided that this little game had lasted long enough, and when, making a wild decision, he began to follow the road to the left, which is the continuation of the avenue of the casino. Michelle next undid her bracelet, put it on the window sill, and then closed the window again, after having admired the charming mark that the bracelet left on her skin. This woman, a blonde, seemed rather cold-hearted to me, and for a long time I chased her as she ran before me like a gazelle. Sonia, a creature of splendid mahogany, had long since got undressed, and her body was modeled by the light of the most marvelous house of pleasure that I have ever seen. Her glances were green and blue serpentines, in the midst of which, though it was continually broken, there even spiraled a white serpentine, like a special favor saved for me. Between the bars of water she sang these words that I have not learned:

"Death of azure and delicate storm, untie these boats, wear out these knots. Give divinities calm, and humans wrath. I know you, death of powder and acacia, death of glass. I too am dead, beneath kisses."

The lure of dreams is now stimulating the music of my head. These two women belonged to me for the whole of a day when I was gloomily ceasing to be young. And here I am, a prophet with a temple purer than mirrors, enchained by the lights of my story, covered with chilling loves, a prey to the phantasmagorias of the broken wand and asking that, out of pity, I be brought back to life, in one brilliant finale.

Enter the spring. The spring has gone through the city looking for a bit of shade. She has not found what she needed, she complains as she tells what she has seen: she

has seen the sunlight of lamps, that is more touching than the other sunlight, to be sure; she has sung one or two tunes on the terrace of a café and people have thrown heavy yellow and white flowers at her; she has pulled her hair over her face but its perfume was strong. She is only too inclined to fall asleep; is it necessary for her to sleep under the stars among her necklaces of insects, her glass bracelets? The spring laughs softly, she has not felt my hand on her; she bends imperceptibly beneath my hand, thinking of the birds which want nothing of her but her coolness. Let her be on her guard; I am capable of taking her to quite different places, where there are no longer either cities or countryside. A beautiful mannequin will model the Mirage dress for elegant women this winter, and do you know who will make this adorable creation a great success? Why, the spring, of course, the spring that I have no trouble taking into those latitudes where my ideas withdraw beyond the possible, and even beyond the inorganic sand where the Tuaregs, with origins less obscure than mine, are content to live a nomad life with their overdressed women. The spring is all of me that passes into the whirl of leaves standing watch up there beyond my shifting ideas that the slightest draft displaces; she is the tree that the woodsman's axe endlessly attacks; she bleeds in the sun and she is the mirror of my words.

## 20

Someone took it into his head one day to gather the fuzz of fruits in a white earthenware bowl; he coated several mirrors with this vapor and came back long after: the mirrors had disappeared. The mirrors had got up one after the other and left, trembling. Much later still, someone confessed that as he was coming home from work he found one of these mirrors that had drawn imperceptibly closer and had taken it home with him. He was a young

apprentice who was very handsome in his overalls that made him look like a basin full of water that a wound has been washed in. The head of this water had smiled like a thousand birds in a tree with submerged roots. He had got the mirror up the stairs of his house with no trouble, and all he remembered was that two doors had slammed as he went past them, two doors that each had a narrow glass plate around the handle. He held his two arms away from his sides so as to support his load and put it very carefully down in a corner of the single room on the eighth floor that he lived in, and then he went to bed. He didn't close his eyes all night long: the mirror reflected itself, to an unprecedented depth, an incredible distance. Cities only had time enough to make their appearance between two of its thicknesses: fever-cities traversed in every direction by women alone, abandoned cities, cities of genius too, whose buildings had animated statues on top, whose freight elevators were built to resemble human beings, cities of sorry storms, this one more beautiful and more fleeting than the others, all of whose palaces and factories were in the form of flowers: a violet was the mooring for boats. On the back side of the cities the only open fields were heavens, mechanical heavens, chemical heavens, mathematical heavens where the signs of the zodiac went round and round, each in its own element, but the Twins came round more often than the others. The young man hurriedly got up about one in the morning, convinced that the mirror was leaning forward and about to fall. He straightened it up with great difficulty and, suddenly worried, he decided it was dangerous to go back to bed and remained sitting in a rickety chair just one step away from the mirror and exactly opposite it. He then thought he heard someone else breathing in the room, but no, it was nothing. He now saw a young man in a great doorway. This young man was almost naked; behind him there was nothing but a black landscape that might have been made of burnt paper. Only the forms of objects remained and it was possible to make out the substances these objects were molded out of.

There is nothing more tragic, really. Some of these things had belonged to him: jewels, gifts of love, relics of his childhood, and even a little bottle of perfume whose cork was nowhere to be found. Others were unknown to him, and he doubtless could not make out what they would be used for in the future. The apprentice looked farther and farther into the ashes. He felt a guilty sense of satisfaction when he saw this smiling man, whose face was like a globe inside which two hummingbirds were flying, draw closer to hand. He took him by the waist, which was the mirror's waist, you see, and after the birds had flown away music rose along their line of flight. What ever happened in this room? The fact remains that since that day the mirror has not been found again, and I never put my lips closer to one of its possible shatterings without feeling strong emotion, even though I thus chance never seeing those rings of down, swans on the verge of bursting into song.

## 21

The characters in the comedy are assembling beneath a porch, the ingénue with the spicurl of honeysuckle, the duenna, the wax knight, and the child villain. Skirts fly up above the brooks that are gallant prints, unless arms like those of Achilles are offered to the beauties to help them cross the alleys. The signal for the departure of the corvettes bearing gold and printed cloth is sounded over and over in the little port. The charming currant bush in bloom which is a farmer-general slowly holds out its arms on its couch. Its sword at its side is a blue dragonfly. When it walks, a prisoner of the graces, the winged horses that paw the ground in its stable seem about to take off in the maddest of directions.

Meanwhile the mountebanks taunt each other for their pink shadows; they raise their favorite monkey with butterfly cuffs to the sun. In the distance can be

seen a fire in which great iron gates are swallowed up: this is because the forests stretching as far as the eye can see are on fire and the laughter of women looks like mistletoe on the trees of the canal. The stalactites of night, in every color, make the flames still brighter toward Cythera and the dew, that slowly fastens its necklace around the shoulders of the plants, is a marvelous prism for the end of the century of centuries. The thieves are musicians who have been standing motionless against the wall of the church since the instruments of their profession were found intermingled with violas, guitars, and flutes. A golden greyhound is playing dead in each of the rooms of the château. Nothing can stop time in its flight since the same clouds as the evening before are making their way to the boiling sea.

On the ramparts of the city a company of light cavalry caressed by gray shadows, corsets, and coats of mail, goes off to take cover at the bottom of the water.

## 22

I met this woman in an immense grapevine, a few days before the harvest, and one night I followed her around the wall of a convent. She was in full mourning, and I felt that I could not resist this crow's nest that the brilliance of her face had looked like to me a short while before, when I tried to levitate the garments of red leaves inside which sleigh bells were dangling. Where did she come from and what did this grapevine in the center of a city where there was a theater remind me of? I wondered. She had not turned around to me again, and without the sudden glitter of her calf that the road gave me glimpses of now and then, I would have despaired of ever touching her. I was getting set, however, to catch up with her when she suddenly turned about, half-opened her coat, and showed me her nakedness, more bewitching than birds. She had stopped and was holding me away



with one hand, as if it were a question of my climbing to unknown heights, or to snows that were too high. I could find no way, moreover, to profit from the dazzling radiance of this moment and managed only to pronounce words heard by marvels when one makes an attempt on one's own life or when one decides that it is time not to wait for oneself any longer. This woman, who was the very image of the bird called the widow-bird, then described a splendid curve in the air, her veil dragging on the ground as she rose.

Seeing how fatal patience would be for me, I changed my mind in time to grab one corner of the veil that I had put my foot on, and this brought into my hands the whole of her coat, that was like the look of an ermine when it feels itself trapped. This veil was extremely light and the material it was made of was unusual in that even though it was transparent and had no lining whatsoever the outer meshes of it were black, while the meshes that had been turned toward her flesh had kept their color. I brought the inside of the cloth, which was warm and perfumed, to my lips, and as if I had expected long-lasting pleasures from this mysterious tunic, I took it home so as to enjoy its disturbing properties. The laugh of the most desirable woman sang within me—was it in the veil, or was it in my memory? The fact remains that once she had freed herself of her outer garment, she had disappeared immediately, and I resolved not to pay any more attention to the disappointing miracle of the grapevine so as to devote my entire attention to the admirable real coat.

I had thrown this impalpable shadow, which only the very pleasant sensations that I was feeling conferred any semblance of life on, over my shoulders. Delightful! It was as if a woman had given me a glance full of promises and I had been shut up inside this look, as if the pressure of a hand had concealed all the strange complicities of forest plants whose leaves are impatient to turn yellow. I put the veil on my bed and there rose from it a music a thousand times more beautiful than that of love.

I was at a concert given by instruments shaped like many others but whose strings were black, as if spun out of glass for looking at eclipses. The veil stirred a little with undulating movements like those of a river in the dark, but a river that one surmises is terribly clear without seeing it. A fold that it formed on the edge of the bed opened sudden sluices of milk or flowers; I was both before a fan of roots and a waterfall. The walls of the room were covered with tears which, as they detached themselves, evaporated before they touched the floor, and were strung up again by a rainbow so small that one could easily have taken hold of it. When I touched it, the veil gave a distinct sigh, and each time that I threw it back on the bed I noticed that it had a tendency always to present me its light side, though it was made of all possible stars. I made love to it several times, and when I awoke after barely an hour of sleep at daybreak, the only thing I could put my hands on was the laggard shadow of a lamp with a green shade that I had forgotten to turn out.

Since the oil happened to be running out, I had time to hear the last gasps of the flame, that came at greater and greater intervals until it went out completely, the end of them being marked by a noise that I shall never forget, the laughter of the veil when it left me, as the woman whose shadow it was had left me.

You will know later, when I will no longer be worth the rain to hang me, when the cold, pressing its hands on the window panes there where a blue star has not yet played its role, at the edge of a forest, will come to say to all those women who remain faithful to me without having known me: "He was a handsome captain, with stripes of grass and black cuffs, a mechanic perhaps who gave his life for life. He had no orders to carry out in that regard, that



would have been too soft, but the end of his dreams was the meaning that had to be given to the movements of the celestial Balance that made him tireless when night fell and miserable when day broke. He was far from sharing your joys and your sorrows; he didn't split hairs. He was a fine captain. In his rays of sunshine there was more shadow than in shadow, but he really never tanned except in the midnight sun. Deer made his head swim in the clearings, especially white deer whose horns are strange musical instruments. He would dance then, and see to the free growth of the ferns whose blond scrolls later loosen in your hair. Comb your hair for him; never stop combing it, that's the only thing he asks. He isn't here any more but he's going to come back; perhaps he's already back. Don't let another woman draw water at the fountain: if he came back, that is doubtless the way he'd come. Comb your hair at the fountain and let them flood the plain with it." And you will see into the bowels of the earth, you will see me more alive than I am now when the boarding saber of the sky threatens me. You will take me farther than I have been able to go, and your arms will be roaring grottoes full of pretty animals and ermines. You will make only a sigh of me, that will go on and on through all the Robinsons of earth. I am not lost to you: I am only apart from what resembles you, on the high seas, where the bird called Heartbreak gives its cry that raises the pommels of ice of which the stars of day are the broken guard.

"A kiss is so soon forgotten"; I was listening to this refrain pass by in the grand promenades of my head, in the province of my head, and I no longer knew anything about my life that was unfolding on its blond track. What madness to want to hear past oneself, past this wheel, one of the spokes of which there ahead of me barely brushes

the ruts. I had spent the night in the company of a frail and experienced woman, squatting in the high grass of a public square in the direction of the Pont-Neuf. We laughed for an hour over the vows that the late evening strollers who came to sit down one by one on the closest bench suddenly exchanged. We stretched our hands out toward the capuchin nuns leaning out of a balcony of the City Hotel, with the intention of abolishing everything in the air that has the ring of hard cash, like the antique coins that were circulating that night contrary to the usual order of things.

My lady friend spoke in such aphorisms as "He who beds me often forgets himself better," but it was only a game of paradise, and as we threw flags down around us that ended up being placed at windows, we gave up little by little all insouciance, so that in the morning all that was left of us was that song—"A Kiss Is So Soon Forgotten"—that lapped a bit of night water in the center of the square. The milkmen noisily drove their gold-bearing trucks about instead of fleeing forever. We separated, yelling at the top of our hearts. I was alone and along the Seine I discovered benches full of birds, benches full of fish; I cautiously dove into the thickets of nettles of a white village. This village was cluttered with those reels of telegraph wires that one sees hanging at equal distances apart on both sides of poles along major highways. It looked like one of those pages of a romance that can be bought for a few pennies in suburban population centers. "A Kiss Is So Soon Forgotten." On the cover of the village that was turned toward the ground and was the only thing that remained of the countryside, one could barely make out a sort of woman of easy virtue jumping rope at the edge of a forest of gray laurel.

I plunged into this wood, where the hazelnuts were red. Rusty hazelnuts, were you the lovers of the kiss that pursued me so that I might forget it? I was afraid so; I quickly drew away from each bush. My eyes were the flowers of a hazel tree, my right eye the male flower, my left the female flower. But I had long since ceased to

please myself. Paths whistled on all sides ahead of me. Near a spring the beauty of the night joined me again, panting. A kiss is so soon forgotten. Her hair was nothing but a patch of pink mushrooms, among pine needles and very fine glassware of dry leaves.

We thus reached the city of Squirrel-by-the-Sea. There fishermen were unloading baskets full of earth-shells, with a great many ears among them, that stars circulating through the city were painfully cupping over their hearts to hear the sound of the earth. In this way they were able to reconstruct, to their pleasure, the noise of streetcars and great pipe organs, just as in our loneliness we seek out the sounds of levels under water, the purr of underwater elevators. We passed by unnoticed by the curves down there, sinusoids, parabolas, geysers, rains. We now belonged only to the despair of our song, to the sempiternal evidence of those words about the kiss. Very close to that spot we vanished, what's more, into a window display where the only thing the men and women showed was what is most generally visibly naked, that is to say, roughly, the face and the hands. One girl, however, was barefoot. We in turn put on the garments of the pure air.

## 25

Who is he? Where is he going? What has become of him? What has become of the silence around him, and what about this pair of socks, this pair of silk socks, that were his most chaste thoughts? What did he do with his long stains, his eyes of mad gasoline, his noises of a human crossroads, and what happened between his triangles and his circles? The circles wasted the noise that reached his ears; the triangles were the stirrups that he put on to go where wise men don't go when someone comes to say that it is time to sleep, when a messenger with a white shadow comes to say that it is time to sleep. What wind pushes

him, him whose way up the stairway of the occasion is lighted by the candle of his tongue? And in what style do you picture the buffoons of his eyes at the world scrap-iron fair? What have you done with his courtesy to you when he wished you a good cellar and the sun dressed the red brick chimneys that were his flesh, that smoked with the music of his flesh? Aren't his intakes of current from you, along the canal of the Ourcq, of such a sort as to move away the little ice cream and nougat truck parked under the subway overpass? And did he himself not reject the agreement? Did he not follow the path that disappears into the burial vaults of the idea, was he not part of the gurgling of the bottle of death? What did this man of eternal reproaches, cold as a wolf, expect us to do with his mistress when he abandoned her to the pistol grip of summer? What did he listen to on the cutting edge of the air, like the Indian, on those moonstone evenings when he moved a half-empty glass about on a table of wind? I am not stronger than he is, I have no buttons on my vest, I don't know what the order is, I shall not be the first to enter the city with wooden billows. But may I be given the blood of a white squirrel if I am lying and may the clouds pile up in my hand when I peel an apple: these linen cloths form a lamp, these words drying on the meadow form a lamp that I will not allow to go out for lack of the glass of my arms raised heavenward.

## 26

The woman with breasts of ermine was standing at the entrance of the passage Jouffroy in the light of songs. She readily consented to follow me. I flung the chauffeur the address of Rendezvous, Rendezvous in person, who was an early acquaintance. Neither young nor old, Rendezvous ran a little broken-glass shop near the porte de Neuilly.

"Who are you?"

"One of the stabbing pains of the mortal lyre that vibrates at the edge of capitals. Forgive me the pain that I shall cause you."

She also told me that she had broken her hand on a mirror on which the usual inscriptions were gilded and silvered and blued. I took this hand in mine; raising it to my lips I suddenly noticed that it was transparent and that through it one could see the great garden where the most experienced divine creatures go to live.

The spell ended when we stepped out of the car. Guided by a rain of nettles, we crossed the threshold of Rendezvous's residence, not without pushing the great rabbit skins of the sun aside with horror.

Rendezvous was on his guard, busily repairing a long light-colored latticework. Capuchin nuns had long ago found a way to undo it and hang their indiscreet wrists on the sky. Rendezvous was busy repairing the damage by means of a white vine that may have come from my youth. He was whistling gaily as he did this, and seemed not to attach any more importance to our approach than to the song of a lark. He did little more than fling a vague good evening of blue wine our way, which was reflected by the hour and became lost in the tragic furrows of fears running crosswise.

The form of my thoughts and I took shelter beneath this tarred roof before leaving again. Earthmoving was going on at this late hour, on the fortifications. It was as if someone had tried to bottle us up with glass roses. In the terrible din the fortifications made when they fell now and again, being pushed over by tall cranes made of hair, the only thing there was room for was our extreme discontent.

But hadn't we come there to use our sovereign power to bathe in glass to rid ourselves of all the rocky dreams, the persistent hopes that water could not wash away? That is why Rendezvous looked so haggard; this man fulfilled such a painful function that no leisure-time pursuit could distract him. We took our leave of him in the morn-

ing, with a simple look that meant both that we no longer belonged to life and that if we ever came back from our new state it would be in the guise of sorcerers to touch heaven with our lightning-wand.

From that moment on a profound metamorphosis of the sensible world took place. In New York harbor it was no longer the Statue of Liberty that lighted the world, but Love, which is different. In Alaska the eternal dogs, their ears to the wind, flew away with their sleds. India was shaken by a mercuryquake and right in Paris, along the Seine, passports for that very city were delivered, yes, for Paris *once it had been left*.

It is in the sweet escape called the future, an escape that is always possible, that the stars that until now have bent down over our distress are resorbed.

Thus a man and a woman, all by themselves on a great white highway, drain to the dregs their gradual conviction that they are no more now than a grafted tree.

But the genius that watches over the predicaments of which this story furnishes us more than one example is waiting for me to suddenly become impatient. What does the reader's assent to these things matter, does the reader believe that the leaps of the antelope are calculated on the basis of the desire to escape the sudden sweep of lawns that this animal demonstrates? We woke up side by side that morning. Our bed, of normal dimensions, was the very image of the architecture of a bridge; I mean that a long time had passed. A limpid river rolled its cages of noise above us. A frozen skyscraper, covered with gigantic starfish staggering badly, was heading toward us. An eagle as white as the philosophers' stone soared above New Guinea. She whom I no longer call anything but The-Blind-Woman-of-All-Light or Albinos Gate sighed at this point and called me over to her. We made love for a long time, as cracks are produced in furniture. We made love as the sun beats, as coffins close, as silence calls, and night shines. And at the same time in our eyes that had never opened nothing but our purest fortunes floundered.

Up by the ephemera nothing was produced but very brief sparks that caused us to clench our fists in surprise and pain.

With infinite caution we then prepared to disappear. Having rented a very luxurious furnished apartment, we gave marvelous entertainments there every evening. The entry of Albinos Gate in her gown with an immense train was always sensational. The famous Agates appeared at our illusory receptions; an immense quartz cannon was trained on the garden. Then at a word spoken in a lower tone than the other Albinos Gate was illuminated again, and I spent hours watching the scalars that I was very fond of pass through her head. It became one of my most frequent weaknesses to kiss her so as to see the charming little blue arrows that these fish are flit to the other side of her head.

The day came when I no longer saw her who was my defense and my loss here below.

I have since met a man who had a mirror for flesh; his hair was of the purest Louis XV style and mad refuse shone in his eyes. I saw the splendid bird of sabotage perch on a railway switch and saw the cold obstinacy of blood that is an irresistible look pass into the fixity of wounds that are still eyes.

I am not on earth willingly.

As you take the child by the hand to lead him to the villa, or the woman by the waist to charm her, or the old man by the beard to greet him, quick as lightning I for my part spin my web of false seduction, that strange polygon that attracts approaches. Later, when the bottle of vintage dew explodes and you enter the leaves silently, and the absolute springtime that is readying itself opens its sluice-gates, you will dream of the lover of Albinos Gate who will lie on the wattles of pleasure, asking only to take back from God what God has taken from him.

Albinos Gate is there in the shadow. Step by step she effaces everything that still terrifies me and makes me weep in the splendor of her gongs of fire. I stand watch near Albinos Gate with the determination to allow

only cadavers to come by in both directions. I am not dead yet and sometimes I enjoy the spectacle of love affairs. Men's love affairs have followed me everywhere; whatever I may say about them, I know that they are full of traps like the vases that wolves place on the snow. The loves of men are great peasant mirrors edged in red velvet or, more rarely, in blue velvet. I stay behind these mirrors, near Albinos Gate who opens up inside, always.

## 27

Once there was a turkey on a dike. This turkey had only a few days to bask in the bright sun and he looked at himself with mystery in a Venetian mirror placed on the dike for this purpose. At this point the hand of man, that flower of the fields that you have certainly heard of, intervenes. The turkey who answered to the name of Three-stars, as a joke, didn't know which way his head was screwed on. Everyone knows that the head of a turkey is a prism with seven or eight faces, just as a top hat is a prism with seven or eight reflections.

The top hat swung back and forth on the dike like an enormous mussel singing on a rock. The dike had no reason for existing since the sea had forcefully drawn back that morning. The whole of the port, furthermore, was lighted by an arc light the size of a schoolchild.

The turkey felt he would be lost if he couldn't touch the heart of this passerby. The child saw the top hat, and since he was hungry, he went about emptying it of its contents, which in this particular case was a beautiful jellyfish with a butterfly beak. Can butterflies be said to be similar to lights? Obviously; that is why the funeral procession stopped on the dike. The priest sang in the mussel, the mussel sang in the rock, the rock sang in the sea and the sea sang in the sea.

So the turkey stayed on the dike and since this day has frightened the schoolchild.

## 28

I had just received my thousandth ticket for exceeding the speed limit. No one has forgotten this news item: the car hurtling along at top speed on the road to Saint-Cloud one evening, the car whose passengers were wearing armor. Now I was one of this anachronistic crew that caused the shadow of the trees, the whirling shadow of dust, to come to grips with our shadow of deadly white carrier pigeons. There were leaps over rivers, I remember, whose daring has been equaled only by the solemn entry of cage-men into the lobby of the Hotel Claridge, one beautiful February afternoon. Disaster ensued as promptly as it had the day that the *ray*, since discovered, began to sweep over the frozen plains of Russia, at a time when Napoleon was expecting nothing but infrared light. Leaps over rivers and soaring flight right in the middle of Paris, in a car whose occupants are all clad in the armor of dreams! We went much farther than Saint-Cloud, in the shadow of that equestrian statue that it took certain people all their life to get out of. What centuries-old chestnut tree was it that we tried to drive around? Here a chestnut comes down, pretends to fall, and, stopping a few yards above the ground, remains suspended like a spider.

When they raised their visors, I discovered that two of my companions were ladies with chestnut eyes. Forms had long since been revealed, the form of the umbrella especially, which covers itself with sky, and the form of a boot, which crowds flowers together on a traffic island as they cross one of the streets. Although we were certain not to land, the inhabitants had been given orders to stay at home. The car now passed its hands with rubber gloves over the furniture of bedroom-Paris. (It is a well-known fact that in palaces no one, certainly, would number the rooms, the apartments; this sort of designation, thus, is pure luxury.) But I for my part had gone far beyond

the stage of luxury: I did not want to stop until we reached city 34. It was no use for my companions to object that we risked running out of air before reaching this figure; I listened only to my remorse, that remorse at being alive that I have never missed the opportunity of telling people about in confidence, even women with their visors lowered. It was on the outskirts of city 26 that the miracle happened: a car coming in the opposite direction, which began to write my name backwards in a marvelous flaming signature, had a slight collision with us; the devil knows whether it was going faster than we were. It is at this point, I know, that my explanation will be of a sort to satisfy only the most towering sporting minds of this era: *In time there is neither right nor left*, this is the moral of this journey. The two speeding cars—green and white and red and black—wiped each other out, and since that time, dead or alive, I get my bearings only temporarily, putting a price on myself on big signboards like this one that I nail up on all the trees with the dagger of my heart.

## 29

That year a hunter witnessed a strange phenomenon, previous accounts of which are lost in time and which kept tongues wagging for many months. The day the season opened this man in yellow boots walking out on the plains of Sologne with two large dogs saw above his head a sort of gas-propelled lyre that shed only a dim light, and one of its wings alone was as long as an iris while the other one, which was atrophied but much brighter, looked like a woman's little finger with a marvelous ring on it. A flower then detached itself and came back and fastened itself by the end of its aerial stem to the rhizome of the sky, which was the hunter's eye. Then the finger, approaching him, offered to take him to a place where no other man had ever been. He consented, and was

guided by the left wing of the bird for a long, long time. Its fingernail was made of a light so fine that no eye could quite endure it; it left behind it a spiraling trail of blood like the shell of an adorable murex. The hunter thus got as far as the border of France without turning around and started down a gorge. There was shadow on all sides and the absentmindedness of the finger made him fear for his life. They had gotten past the precipices, since from time to time a flower fell beside him that he did not bother to pick up. The finger then turned around, and it was a terribly attractive pink star. The hunter was a man about twenty years old. His dogs crawled mournfully along beside him.

The gorge kept getting narrower and narrower, when suddenly the star began to speak in a low voice that was more and more audible and finally shouted "Prometheus" or "Promise."\* The echoes took up the word, so that the hunter could not make out whether he was the object of a summons or of an order. He couldn't make himself heard, so to speak, and he was deaf as a post as he tried to question the star: "Unimaginable finger and branch that is greener than the others, answer, what do you want of me, what must I promise you, outside of fire, which you already have?" And as he said these words he aimed his rifle at it and hit it. He could then see the astonishing treasure detach itself from the flaming aigrettes, while a dreadful jangling of bells was heard. But the dogs that had tried to rush forward fell dead, while bushes on each side of the road advanced and retreated. The star then reappeared above his head, whiter than ever, and around it there opened a veritable flower bed of irises, but these were as yellow as those that grow on the water's edge. The man was staggering now because of the threat of the graceful sparrow hawk. He threw his rifle away and, as if he were supposed to make honorable amends, he got rid of his cartridge belt and his game

\*The phonetic pun is lost in translation: in French "Prométhée" (Prometheus) and "Promettez" (Promise) sound almost identical.  
—Tr.

bags. He started on his way, with his hands free. It was then that the star, or the finger, saw fit to chain him to a telegraph pole with a transparent net of algae. He waited. At nightfall, the impassible lover of the ring finger was nothing but a little human foliage seen through the blinds of a bedroom readied for love. The plants around him went on about their business, some manufacturing silk, others in the stables milking the goats of shadow. The rocks whistled. There was no way of keeping one's eyes off the filth in the sky.

The corpse of the lucky man was discovered a few days later by a lodestone of men and women exploring the region. It was almost intact except for its frightfully brilliant head. This head was resting on a pillow which was made up of a multitude of little sky-blue butterflies and which disappeared when someone picked it up. Right next to the body an iris-colored flag was planted, and the fringes of this worn flag batted like great eyelashes.

## 30

The central furnace with blue eyes told me as she glanced up at me with the look of white coordinates on the blackboard, crossing her great hands OX and OY:

"Dancer, you will henceforth dance only for me, and for me only will your white sandals knotted around the instep of your foot with a false weed be undone. It is time to sleep and dance more naked than you are. Drop those veils that still enfold you and give your hand to the pure seasons that you rouse in your dreams, those seasons when the echo is nothing but a great chandelier of fish advancing in the sea, those seasons when love has only one head, which is covered with hoops of the moon, and animals in flames: love, that cubic yard of butterflies."

The door said to me:

"Close me forever on the outside, that needle that the loveliest of your illusions cannot manage to thread be-

cause it is so dark; condemn me, yes, condemn me as one condemns women to sing of their marvelous malady: red-headed women, since by firelight all women are red-headed."

The ceiling said to me:

"Turn turtle, turn turtle and sing, and weep too when the rose window of cathedrals, that rose window that is not as beautiful as mine, asks you to, and I will capture your yellow rays, your extravagantly yellow rays in the plaster. See the pleasure-mill turning in the salon and this piercing bird that flies up at each turn of the wheel, at each turn of the cards. And promise me."

I was about to give the floor to the hollow air that speaks in its hands as one looks when one doesn't want to pretend to be seeing (the air speaks in its hands so as not to pretend to be speaking) but the candle laughed just then and my eyes were only a shadow-theater.

## 31

*The stage shows a system of pedals such that the up-and-down motion is combined with a lateral left-to-right motion, one character corresponding in the beginning to each dead-center point or knot of the machine (two men in the vertical system, two women in the horizontal system).*

*Cast of characters: LUCIE, HELEN, MARC, SATAN. Black curtains, the two women dressed in white, Marc in a black suit, Satan the color of fire.*

*All the action takes place in a perfect cream-colored cube so as immediately to suggest the idea of a giant gyroscope in its case, revolving around its vertical axis with one of its points resting on the edge of a footed glass. Inside the foot is a soldier presenting arms.*

HELEN: The window is open. The flowers smell sweet. Today's champagne, a glass of which is bubbling in my

ear, makes my head swim. The cruelty of the day molds my perfect forms.

SATAN: Can you see the Ile Saint-Louis above these Ladies and Gentlemen? That's where the poet's little room is.

HELEN: Really?

SATAN: Every day he was visited by waterfalls, the purple waterfall that would have liked to sleep and the white waterfall that came through the roof like a sleep-walker.

LUCIE: It was I who was the white waterfall.

MARC: I recognize you in the strength of the pleasures here, although you are only the lace of yourself. You are the ultimate uselessness, the laundress of fish.

HELEN: She is the laundress of fish.

SATAN: Now the hostage of seasons whose name is man is leaning on the reed table, the gaming table. He is the guilty one with gloved hands.

HELEN: Begging your pardon, Sire, the hands were beautiful. If the mirror had been able to speak, if kisses had fallen silent...

LUCIE: The rocks are in the living room, the beautiful rocks in which water sleeps, beneath which men and women bed. The rocks are enormously high: white eagles leave their plumes there and in each plume there is a forest.

MARC: Where am I? Worlds, the possible! How fast the locomotives went: one day the false, one day the true!

SATAN: Was it worth the trouble to leave the place, the trouble of losing one's footing running after corpses and spitting out lamp-bracket lightning? The poet was poor and slow in his dwelling; the poet did not even have a right to the punch that he was very fond of. The purple waterfall carried with it revolvers whose grips were made of little birds.



LUCIE: I can resign myself to the perpetual thaw, Sire; Marc was blond as gypsum.

## SILENCE

LUCIE: It is time to go downstairs, my friends; this was only a gymnastics show, and down below, behind the fifth row of spectators, I see a very pale woman who is giving herself over to prostitution. The strange thing is that this creature has wings.

*Marc lifts himself by his hand; the apparatus runs faster and faster. Because of the speed picked up, Lucie is standing erect inside Marc's extended arm. The motion comes to a stop when Marc and his motionless horse-woman reach the top of the circuit. Night. The curtain comes down. Satan appears in front of the curtain and makes a prolonged bow.*

SATAN: Ladies and Gentlemen, I am the author of the play that we have just had the honor of performing for you. The clockwork is of little importance, the symbols in this new form of theater being no more than a promise. And its transparency is not entirely a question of time. Hell has just been completely restored; during these last few centuries it had value only in a few cases: intellectually it was perfect, but from the viewpoint of moral suffering it left something to be desired. I went to the Opera one day, and there, profiting from the general lack of attention, I first caused several reddish lights to appear on the façade of the building, lights which looked most unpleasant and which, in the opinion of people of taste, still dishonor this monument. Then I made a superb dive into the human conscience, that I have infested with strange chances, formless flowers, and cries of marvels. From this day forward the father was no longer alone with his son; between them the rent in the air allowed a fan with a glowworm resting on it to pass through. In factories I strove to encourage division of labor by every possible means, so that today, in order to manufacture a

*finger nail file*, for example, several teams of workers working night and day are needed, some flat on their bellies, others on a ladder. During this time women workers go out to gather bouquets in the fields and others busy themselves writing letters where the same verb in the same tense and the same formula of tenderness are used over and over again. The play you have just seen is one of these new-model finger nail files, to the manufacture of which everything contributes today, from the ivory of your teeth to the color of the sky, a periwinkle black if I am not mistaken. But I shall soon have the honor of inviting you to less rational spectacles, for I do not despair of making eternity the only ephemeral poetry, do you hear, the only ephemeral poetry! Ha ha ha ha! *(He exits snickering.)*

## 32

I was tan when I met Solange. Everyone sang the praises of the perfect oval of the look in my eye, and my words were the only fan that I could put between faces and myself to hide how disturbing they were to me. The ball was coming to an end at five o'clock in the morning, not without the most fragile gowns being scratched by invisible brambles. O badly fenced properties of Montfermeil where people go looking for lilies of the valley and a princely crown. In the grounds, where there was no longer a single couple who had drawn apart, the icy rays of the false sun of that hour, veritable paths of pearl, had only thieves who had been attracted by the luxury of this life to daze, thieves who began to sing, in voices exactly on pitch, on different steps of the flight of stairs. Snakes, reputed to be impossible to acclimate, sliding in the grass like mandolins, impossible low-cut necklines and geometrical figures of flame-colored paper lighting up among them, that made people afraid when they saw them through the window, for a long time made the



velvet and cork scamps display a sort of miraculous respect.

Overwhelmed with presents and weary of these fine instruments of idleness that I did exercises on one by one in a dreadfully voluptuous room, I then made up my mind to dismiss my maidservants and consult an agency to procure what I needed: an awakening at twilight and a bird from diamond mines that would keep its promise to extract the roots of a minor suffering whose existence I had surmised. I was no sooner in possession of this double treasure than I fainted away.

The next day was a day that I knew was to be devoted to the performing of a very obscure rite in the religion of a tribe on the banks of the Ohio. With the protection of the storm that I intended placing myself under, nothing could touch me except a very bright light that only I could distinguish from a flash of lightning. With my head thrown back and my temples protected by two very thin sheets of sapphire, I still bore within me this void pierced with arrows as I went down the coast that runs along the edge of the drill field. Morning roll call had just been sounded, and the blond young men were counting off. The admirable rain with the smell of gorse that was beginning to fall so upset the day that I felt like applauding. From the shadow of a little grove of trees, a hundred yards or so away, a few of those lace panties that are so marvelous in the theater were still flying up toward the sun, but I had something else in mind beside the release of carrier pigeons.

I know a rainbow that augurs nothing good. When the wind curls up in a corner of the earth like a top and your eyelashes bat until they almost break because you feel an imaginary arm around your waist, try to break into a run. I was under a viaduct, pale at the idea of those hoodlums that are hired to whistle with their fingers on locomotives. Nothing, obviously, was going to happen. I reached the little path that the railroad track leaves only when it enters Paris. Was I one of those poor children that can be seen in winter hanging on to the coal

cars and, if need be, making holes in the sacks? Perhaps. A railroad man, one of those who always have a little red worm set in a lump of dirt in their hand, said hello to me.

No one knows the human heart as I do. A convict who had taken part in the launching of the battleship *Devastation* assured me one day that in the immense cone of light that no one else but him had managed to get out of, one had the privilege of being present at the creation of the world. Similarly, as far back as I can remember, nothing of the love game was hidden from me. I approached the gare d'Est-Ceinture just when the factories were letting out. The nacelles tied down in the yards took off one by one, and all the lady passengers seemed to have lost their minds over a branch of lilac. A marvelous chandelier of semiquavers shone here and there in front of the wall of red and white bricks. The work put off to another day left the night free: hands were going to be able to fill the blue salad bowls. Beneath the twill smock that is yet another mold, the Parisian working woman with the high chignon watches the rain of pleasure falling.

Everyone ought to have the experience of walking about with a scepter in the alleys of the capital as night is falling. The rue Lafayette swings its windows from left to right. It is the hour of political meetings, and above the doors one can make out the inscription in capital letters: "No more bets." For a quarter of an hour I had been at the mercy of those dismal seers who extort a cigarette from you with their violet eyes. I have always been taught that the most important sign of seriousness was talking to yourself. I was, however, less weary than ever. One of the magnetic poles of my route would probably be, I had long known, the neon sign that says *Longines* on the corner of the rue de la Paix and the place de l'Opéra. From that point, for example, I would no longer have any idea of where to go.

Task for task, obligation for obligation, I have the definite feeling that I will not do what I wanted to do. The little lanterns with the coat of arms of Paris that

make cars turn around after a certain hour have always made me regret the absence of pavers. You should have seen them, at least once, their eye on their level of alcohol, keeping otters gloved in chalk from getting the least little bump. The wooden paving blocks whose edges the sun slowly wears down are lighter than prayers. If one of them is lighter than another, in your wallet is a telegram that you haven't read yet. However, was the orange-colored clearing at one of the prettiest bends of the boulevards, surmounted by a lightning rod and covered with a Liberty-print ground swell, there for the circulation of animals more graceful than others? It was child's play for me to climb over the vials of perfume meant to keep me out, without being seen. A police directive, apparently dating from the last century, partly hid the handle of a bow-shaped instrument that I recognized because I had already seen it, incrustated with precious stones, in the window of a gunsmith's shop along one of the covered walkways. This time it was resting on a clump of dried leaves, so that I suspected a trap. In the time it took me to get rid of this idea, I brought to light the two top rungs of a rope ladder. I immediately decided to use the apparatus that thus offered itself, and when nothing was left to emerge from the earth but my head, I took time out to kiss madly from afar two high black boots laced around cream-colored stockings. This was the last memory I was to carry away from a life that had been short, for I don't quite remember if I was on the shady side of twenty.

To understand the movement that drove this dismal elevator, one must call upon some of one's knowledge of astronomy. The two planets farthest from the sun combine their movement around it with this strange back-and-forth movement. The light was that of mineral-water shops. For what audience of haggard children did I perform such perilous exercises? I perceived discontinuous moldings passing through all the colors of the spectrum, mantelpieces of white marble, accordions, and, alternately, hail, ciliate plants, and the lyrebird. Hold off, ship-

wrecks; sigh, ear trumpets to the sound of which I shall one day be received by my brother, that charming mollusk who has the property of being able to fly under water.

Little by little the slowness of the oscillations made me have a presentiment of the approach of the goal. This was the mystery, for I will have said nothing when I say that being subject to such swaying back and forth in the upper air, I might just as well have stopped at Naples or in Borneo. The torrid, glacial, luminous, or dark-and-light zones were ranged in tiers, in squares. When a girl on a farm allows the water of a nearby spring to flow through her bedroom, and her fiancé comes to lean on the curved sill of her window, they too leave, never to meet each other again. Let others believe if they like that they are at the mercy of a convalescence: I whom the whitest equestriennes have feted for my skill at launching their blind chariots on dusty roads shall save no one, and I do not ask anyone to save me. I once laughed at fortunetelling, and on my right shoulder I have a five-leaf clover. As I go on my way I may happen to fall from a precipice or be pursued by stones, but each time, I beg you to believe, it is only a reality.

It is, rather, each step that I take that is a dream, and don't talk to me of those benign-looking tramways in which the conductor hands out raffle tickets. He takes advantage of each of the stops to go have a drink. Then the vehicle, which tends to retire from its rounds after the street sprinkler, sees itself surrounded by the most photogenic of stags. For my part, my convictions have never permitted me to ride in it except at a reduced fare, early in the morning, with workers wearing a knapsack full of partridges slung across their shoulders.

Still, I had come to Paris, and a great flame escorted me, as I have said, with its forty blond feet.

Underground boulevards did not exist yet.

At this moment the female enemy of society went into the building situated at number 1, boulevard des Capucines. But all she did was go in and come out. I had never seen her and yet my eyes filled with tears. She was

discreet as crime and her black dress with little pleats looked by turn brilliant and dull because of the breeze. This was all that was provocative in her pose: as she went off I noticed that her foot kept coming down quite lightly. To her left, to her right, names of perfumes, of pharmaceutical specialties, were endlessly inscribed on the sidewalk in letters of every color. In all cases it's nice to follow women like that who one is sure are not coming to you and are not going anywhere. Just as this woman crossed the threshold of a house on the rue de Hanovre, again for nothing, I went briskly over to meet her, and before she had a chance to recognize me, I imprisoned with my hand the hand of hers that was clutching a revolver so small that the end of the barrel didn't reach as far as the first knuckle of her bent index finger. The unknown woman then had a look of supplication and triumph in her eye. Then, with her eyes closed, she silently took my arm.

Nothing, certainly, is simpler than saying to a woman, to a taxi: "Take care of me." Sensibility is nothing but this vehicle glassed all around in which you have seated yourself; a vulgar cotton lace thrown over the seat does its best to make you forget the ruts in the road. Sometimes the luggage rack is full of trunks and oblong hat boxes like pendants. The whole ends up hurtling into a little lake at the foot of the shrub with its hands joined. Did I not once wait, by force of circumstances, for a reason to live to come to me from these pain-parties? The most wrathful of women are divorcées, who manage so well with their pearl-gray crepe veils. At the seashore I found it the right time to fondle their knees. The whip of the victorias that had disappeared now described only a rain of stars in time, and it must be confessed that these two coldly distinct images were the only ones to be superimposed at the point where I found myself seated. Thus in the light of the footlights a mouth appears to be exactly like an eye, and who does not know that, if only one tilts the prism of love, the bow runs across the legs of the dancers?

When it's Solange . . . For a week we lived in a region more delicate than the impossibility of alighting for certain swallows. On pain of separation we had forbidden each other to speak of the past. The window overlooked a ship lying on the prairie, breathing regularly. In the distance could be seen an immense tiara made of the wealth of ancient cities. The sun lassoed the finest adventures. We lived exquisitely forgettable hours there, in the company of the harlequin from Cayenne. I must add that Solange took off her hat and lighted the straw fire right in the middle of the stairway that led to our bedroom. There was a call button for the realization of each of our desires and there was time for everything. The bedspread was made of news items close at hand:

"The golden ball rolling over the azure bottom of this cage is not connected to any apparent stem, yet it is the ball of a marvelous condenser. We are in a bar on the rue Cujas and it is here that Cécilas Charrier, following the assault on train 5, came to try on the elegantly gloved hand thanks to which he managed to make himself recognized."

"Rosa-Josepha, the Siamese twin sisters, eight days ago got up from the table when a butterfly displaying my colors described a figure eight around their heads. Up to that time the monster, mated with a blusterer, seemed not to have much of an idea of the great destiny that awaited him."

It would soon be September. On a blackboard in the office of the hotel, an equation traced in a child's hand showed only the variables. The ceiling, the mirrored wardrobe, the lamp, the body of my mistress, and the air itself had taken on the resonance of a drum. Sometimes Solange took off between midnight and one o'clock. But I was sure to find her again next morning in her spangled chemise. I still don't know what to think about her sleeping and perhaps all she ever did was wake up at my side. Year-round strawberries flowered once more in the fire-

place beneath the roof of trembling greenery divided among the echoes of the night. Solange always looked as if she had come out of a redoubt. The terrible impersonality of our relationship excluded jealousy to such a point that the great tinted glasses of water of disappearances never grew tepid. It was only later that I understood the extraordinary feebleness of these famous white magic tricks.

Our best times were spent in the bathroom. It was on the same floor as our bedroom. A thick cloud of steam, "thick enough to cut with a knife," spread out over certain parts of it, especially around the toilet, to the point that it was impossible to put one's hands on anything. A great number of cosmetics came, incomprehensibly, to be there. One day about eight o'clock in the morning when I was the first to enter this room that was full of some vague superior malaise, in the hope, I believe, of experiencing the mysterious fate that was beginning to hover above our heads, to my great surprise I heard a great noise of wings followed almost immediately by that of a square of window-glass falling, a square that had the peculiarity of being the color that is called "dawn," while the windowpane, which had remained intact, was, on the contrary, faintly blue. Lying on the massage table was a woman of great beauty whose last convulsion I was happy to witness by chance and who, by the time I had reached her, had ceased to breathe. A burning metamorphosis was taking place around this lifeless body: if the sheet pulled taut at the four corners was growing perceptibly longer and was becoming perfectly transparent, the silver paper that ordinarily covered the walls of the room, on the other hand, was shriveling. It was no longer good for anything but powdering the wigs of two lackeys out of some operetta who were strangely disappearing into the mirror. An ivory file that I picked up on the floor instantly caused a certain number of wax hands to open up around me, remaining suspended in the air until alighting on green cushions. As has been seen, I lacked the means to question the breath of the dead woman. Solange

had not appeared all night, and yet this woman did not look like her, except for the little white shoes whose sole, where the toes went in, had imperceptible scratches like those of dancers. I lacked the slightest sign. It was odd that the young woman had come into the room completely undressed. As I was running my fingers through her freshly cut hair, I suddenly got the impression that the beauty had just shifted her body from left to right, which, along with the position of her right arm behind her back and the hyper-extension of her left hand, could not help but suggest the idea that she was doing the splits.

Having limited myself to noting these few scanty facts, I left without useless precautions. The only decorations, certainly, that I respect in any way are those gold stars sewed to the lining of men's jackets just below the inside pocket. I nonetheless readjusted the red ribbon I was wearing in my buttonhole.

Only one mediocre book has been written about celebrated escapes. What you must know is that beneath all the windows that you may take a notion to jump out of, amiable imps hold out the sad sheet of love by the four cardinal points. My inspection had lasted only a few seconds, and I knew what I wanted to know. The walls of Paris, what is more, had been covered with posters showing a man masked with a black domino, holding in his left hand the key of the fields: this man was myself.