

MARCEL AND ALBERTINE:  
PROUST ON LOVE

Translated and adapted by  
Colin Duckworth  
from  
Marcel Proust's novel

*A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU*  
(IN SEARCH OF LOST (and wasted) TIME)

First performed at  
The Stork Hotel Theatre  
Melbourne  
March-April 2007

COPYRIGHT©COLIN DUCKWORTH 2007  
Registered with the Australian Writers' Guild  
No: 10209

CHARACTERS

M: MARCEL  
A: ALBERTINE

MARCEL is a youngish man. Dark hair, moustache. Looks Proust-like. His narrations are done as a man in his 40s, but in early scenes he is in his twenties.

ALBERTINE is in early scenes about 18-20, but matures rapidly by the end (about 22). She is very pretty, with long dark hair.

The time is about 1912. It is important to keep to this period because of the sexual/moral strictures in place at that time for young people. (All that fuss about a kiss!)

The action takes place mainly in

- Marcel's bedroom in his parents' apartment in Paris; and
- a room at the Grand Hôtel in Balbec, a fashionable resort on the Normandy coast.

*Except where specified by the Author of this script no music is to be played while an actor is speaking. The music to be played is specified in the script. This must be César Franck's Violin Sonata in A major.*

*N.B. MONOLOGUE MODE: When a character is speaking a monologue, the other does **not** hear or react to it. This will be obvious to most directors, but not, in this writer's experience, to all!*

*The Author's instructions as to the staging of the Work shall be followed in every detail unless he has agreed in writing to changes. The integrity of the Author's work shall be preserved at all times.*

*Music: for the "Vinteuil Sonata", there are three contenders: Saint-Saens' Violin Sonata No. 1 in D minor Op. 75; César Franck's Violin Sonata in A major; and Gabriel Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1 in A major Op. 13. The Author of this script has chosen the César Franck.*

Performance enquiries to  
colinrd@ozemail.com.au

MARCEL AND ALBERTINE  
ACT ONE

SCENE 1

*Darkness.*

*Sound: the Vinteuil theme, gradually drowned by sound of a horse approaching at a gallop. At its height, the galloping stops abruptly. Lights.*

*We see M, alone, sitting up on the bed, writing. Shirt, trousers, silk dressing gown. Beside the bed, quite close, is a chair, and a small table with a column-type telephone (French if possible). A bellpull hangs down within easy reach of the bed.*

*Slowly, as he talks, A becomes visible. She may be behind a gauze screen which slowly lights up, flickering and uncertain at first. Ghostly, like Hamlet's father.*

M: The first time she came to visit me in Paris, she took me by surprise. I wasn't expecting her, you see, and I hadn't seen her for a long time. So, when Françoise suddenly opened the door of my room and ushered her in, I was startled. Who was this bosomy girl who smiled at me but said nothing? I suppose that every time we see someone again with whom our relations have changed, it's as if two periods of our lives are forced into co-existence. The moment I saw her there, even before my conscious memory had established her identity, I was transported to another place, another time, as I had been when I tasted the little madeleine cake dipped in tea.

However, it wasn't only that with Albertine. When we were on holiday in Normandy I saw her every day, but each time she took me by surprise because she was so changeable. Never the same. Vaporous, like mist. This time, however, I scarcely recognised her. It wasn't just that her face had changed again; at last, she *had* a face.

SCENE 2

*A comes through the gauze and materialises. She stands by M's bed.*

M: *Albertine?* Oh, you must forgive me, I was writing, I was miles away.  
*He struggles to get up.*

A: Don't get up, Marcel. I'll sit here. *(She sits on the bedside chair.)*

M: This is a pleasant surprise. I should have thought you'd still be in Balbec.

A: I left early this year, and I came straight back to Paris for once.

M: And what have you been up to? Doing?

A: Oh... nothing very much.

*M scrutinises her.*

M: I'm not sure I believe that.

A *(off-handedly, looking away)*: Oh? And why is that?

M: There's something different about you. Some new experience, perhaps? No? Well, at your age one changes very quickly. I know nothing of what you get up to in between your rare visits. I don't even know the crowd you mix with in Paris. *(A does not answer.)* Anyway, it's none of my business... I suppose.

A: No, it isn't, is it? And what about you? I suppose you have mistresses by the dozen?

M: I'll just say this: it is more reasonable to devote one's life to women than to postage stamps.

A: You mean, collect them, like paintings?

M: Yes, but a varied collection. I mean switch, shuffle, diversify, as all sensible collectors do.

A: Swap around?

M: If you like. Don't you agree?

A: There you go, Marcel, fishing again.

*Pause. A looks at her watch.*

A: Goodness, is that the time? I must be going.

*She gets up. M looks at her tenderly.*

M: Please don't go yet. Sit down, stay a little longer.

*She sits rather unwillingly.*

M: I remember the very first time I saw you.

A: Do you really?

M: You were wheeling your bicycle along the esplanade at Balbec. A dark girl with shining, laughing eyes, and chubby cheeks...

A: Chubby!

M: ...creamy and violet-tinted like glossy roses. And you had a round knitted cap on.

A: We called it a "polo".

M: I can still picture the way you walked, with your hips swinging *very* provocatively, and you were shouting rude slang words at the top of your voice.

A (*mocking*): Wasn't I *terrible*!

M: It wasn't just you — I thought the whole band of you girls were bold, fast, frivolous, immoral, and utterly fascinating. You swept along the front like a luminous comet, scattering outraged old codgers left and right. I was in love with all of you to begin with, because you didn't have any names or individuality. I was sure I could never be admitted to membership of such an exclusive clan. You were unattainable. That's why you were so fascinating.

A: You used to stare at us. Then one day I decided to return your stare.

M: The first of many. You were very bold! The girl you were then so often exchanged long looks with me, on the street corner and the beach, that I began to believe she might fall in love with me. But I haven't seen that Albertine again since.

A: We found it *so* amusing, the way you gawped at us with such longing.

M: Gawped!

A: All right then, gazed. And you began to dress differently, with new suits and new hats and ties. But you never had the courage to approach us.

M: My grandmother kept me on a very tight leash. She warned me about wild girls like you. I only found out your name by accident, when I was talking to Elstir.

A: The painter?

M: His house was at the other end of Balbec, some distance from the Grand Hotel and the esplanade. I'd been dragged there by my grandmother, I didn't want to go because it meant I'd miss a chance of seeing you.

A: You mean the gang, or me? Or Andrée?

M: I've always been very fond of Andrée. She's sweet, refined, kind, intellectual. Warm-hearted too.

A: I know you had a soft spot for her. Maybe you still have? She once told me you were indifferent to me.

M: Yes, I led her to think that I preferred her.

A: To make me jealous?

M: Jealousy has its uses, but my intention was to make you take some notice of me. To raise my prestige with you. I hope I didn't create friction between you and Andrée.

A: Friction? (*suppresses a giggle*) Oh, I see what you mean. On the contrary, we are still very... fond of one another.

M: Oh good. You see, I really thought it would put you off me if you knew how I felt about you. But all that happened later. When I went to Elstir's that day we still hadn't met.

A: Only our eyes had.

M: Your bright eyes...

A: ... and your sad ones.

M: I was talking to Elstir by the window of his studio when I saw you on your bicycle, cap pulled down over your eyes, streaming down the country lane which became a miraculous channel of sweet promise.

A: Yes, I remember I slowed down to shake hands with him, but I didn't stop because I was late. So you were there too? I didn't see you.

M: Really? We were close enough for me to see that you have a beauty spot on your chin. Elstir told me your name was Albertine Simonet, and I secretly hoped he would invite you and me round some time. He told me what the other girls' names were as well: Gisèle...

A: Cruel, common, and boring.

M: Rosamonde...

A: Good fun for a northerner.

M: Andrée...

*Beat.*

A: You're not going to go through them all, are you? There were thirteen of us!

M: You all went to see Elstir nearly every day, he said, but he never offered to introduce me despite my obvious eagerness to know you, and that convinced me that you didn't like me at all. That I wasn't your type. Either that or...

A: Or what?

M: Well, I began to wonder if you were keeping me at a distance because you had B.O. or something.

A (*is not amused*): Really? And do I?

M: No, of course not. You smell of roses.

A: Good. If you want my opinion, it's silly to wear your heart on your sleeve. If someone attracts me I pretend to ignore them. That way no one knows about it. (*Looks at her watch again.*) Now I really must go, Marcel, if I'm going to be in time for dinner. (*She does not rise this time.*)

M: Yes, I have to get ready for my dinner as well. Françoise is preparing it and she doesn't like her routine to be upset. In fact, I'm surprised she let you stay this long in my room as my parents are away.

A: She's a bit of an old trout, isn't she? Like my aunt.

*They laugh.*

M: Yes. But I'm very fond of Françoise. (*Pause.*) Shall I tell you a secret?

A: Yes, what?

M: I'm not at all ticklish. You could tickle me for an hour and I wouldn't feel a thing.

A: Go on!

M: It's true.

A: Do you want me to try?

M: If you want to. But it'd be easier if you lay down properly.

*She lies down beside him.*

A: Like this?

M: A bit closer.

*She half lies on him.*

A: Sure I'm not squashing you?

*He fondles her as she lies on top of him, and she makes appreciative noises, but they do not kiss. Then they both look front, startled.*

A (*gets up quickly*): Oh! (*She moves centre stage.*)

### SCENE 3

*Marcel stays in bed, writing. Spotlight on A.*

A: Our intimate little scene had been rudely interrupted by Françoise who burst in, carrying a lamp. I just made it back to my chair in time. I bet she was looking through the keyhole, silly cow. Then she had the nerve to hold the lamp over the bed to inspect where I'd been. Marcel said rather fatuously, "Lighting up time already? How bright the lamp is!" Françoise said, "Do you want me to lower the wick?" — I thought that was a *very* ambiguous thing to say. (*She sits in the chair again.*)

*Spot on M.*

M (*half musing, half writing*): The young woman who had just been lying down beside me seemed to have acquired more intelligence, maturity and qualities of novelty — as well as a deliciously developed body — since our last ill-starred encounter. I can't be sure that it was the desire for Balbec or for her that seized hold of me during her visit. Or perhaps my desire to possess her was just a lazy, cowardly, and incomplete form of possessing Balbec again. If someone had simply told me she was back in Paris, I should have conjured up an image of her like an ethereal rose in bloom swaying beside the sea. But seeing her motionless — *and accessible* — beside me, she often seemed a poor specimen of a rose. I wanted to close my eyes to the flaws of her petals, and believe myself breathing in the pure air of the Normandy beach. But I was nowhere near the end of my discoveries about Albertine!

### SCENE 4

*Light on the bed again. A sits on the bed where she had sat before.*

A (*moves and sits on the bed again*): Are we going to let a servant push us around, Marcel?

M: Of course not. Françoise knows her place really.

A: I'm glad to hear it.

M: Do you know what I'm afraid of? If we continue to behave like this, I may not be able to stop myself kissing you properly.

A (*seductively*): That *would* be a lucky misfortune, wouldn't it, Marcel?

M: If you really are going to allow me to kiss you, I'd prefer to postpone it to a time of my own choosing. Only you mustn't forget you've given me permission! I'd like a voucher for one kiss, please.

A: Do I have to sign it?

M: If I cashed it in right away, might I have another one?

A: You are a scream with your vouchers. Perhaps I'll do you some more from time to time.

*She lies beside or across him, and M slowly (and visibly) approaches his mouth to hers, keeping his eyes open. They indulge in a long passionate kiss, in which A is more zealous than M. M suddenly*

*breaks it off. A wants to continue kissing but M holds her down out of reach and launches immediately into speech, letting A subside into a motionless swoon. The effect is meant to be comical!*

M: In the brief journey of my lips towards hers, I saw ten Albertines, yes, this one girl became a many-headed goddess, each head giving way to another with prodigiously rapid changes of perspective.

Alas, when it comes to kissing, our nostrils and eyes are badly situated and our lips ill-designed. All of a sudden, my eyes ceased to see, and my nose was so crushed I could no longer smell the rose perfume emanating from her.

From these detestable signs, I gathered that I was at last kissing Albertine, with our respective positions completely the opposite of the Balbec fiasco. This time she was on top, in control of our pleasure, and able to fend off any offensive move on my part. (*He looks down at her face, and returns to the present.*) I wonder if that is why her expression is so voluptuous? To what do I owe her sudden willingness to grant me so easily what she had refused in Balbec with such horror? Such eagerness and warmth instead of indifference... Goodness me, I hope she's not falling in love with me! I have other irons in the fire. Doesn't she realise physical pleasure doesn't imply love? But there has certainly been some modification in her life which she doesn't want to tell me about!

*Albertine starts to come round.*

M: It really is getting late now, Albertine.

A: It doesn't matter. I have all the time in the world. You have such pretty hair. And beautiful eyes. You're very sweet, Marcel.

M: Thank you. If I'm so sweet, there is one favour you can grant me. (*He rises from the bed, leaving Albertine stretched out on it. She shakes her hair loose and unbuttons her blouse enough to show throat and shoulders.*)

A: Ah! And what is that, Marcel?

M: You can tell me why you kicked up such a fuss in your bedroom in Balbec.

A: *Well...* Incidentally, I'm amazed you even have to ask! ... You remember I had a slight cold, so I persuaded my aunt to leave Balbec by herself, so that I should have to spend one night at the Grand Hotel and catch the train next morning.

*[THIS CUE ONLY: AS IF EARLIER IN BALBEC.]*

*(A picks up telephone. Addressing M in a younger voice.)* I'm going to spend the night in your hotel, and as I have a bit of a cold I'll go to bed before dinner. You could come and sit by my bed and join me, then afterwards we could play any game you like. Come early so we'll have a good long time together. *(Puts phone down.)*

M: I had little reason, from the way you behaved with the band of girl-friends, to believe you were absolutely chaste. You had been affectionate towards me, and jealous of Andrée, hence when I trotted along there, I was buoyed up, floating on a sea of love and hope.

A: I let my hair hang loose on my shoulders, with a wisp down my forehead. Like any girl, I wanted to look my best, even though I had a cold. As I was a little feverish I took off my shawl.

M: As I ascended in the lift to your room, every movement was in harmony with my heart. The wheels and ropes that pulled the lift up, and the steps I had to climb, were only materialisations of the joy I felt. Suddenly I knew I had been wrong to have doubts: you'd told me to come when you were in bed. That was clear enough for any man. With a sparkle in my eyes I ran to your room.

I entered your bedroom, and glanced through your window. The sea and the rounded breasts of the cliffs were shimmering in the moonlight. There you were, lying in bed, in a nightdress that left your neck and throat entrancingly bare. You had your hair in long ringlets loose on your shoulders, trailing down your cheeks, just the way I liked them. At that moment, death would have seemed trivial. *(Addressing A directly.)*

Your skin seemed rosier than ever — and in a moment I'd savour the perfume and taste of this unknown rose. You smiled at me...

## SCENE 5

*CHANGE IN LIGHTING INDICATES THAT THE SCENE BECOMES A'S BEDROOM AT THE GRAND HOTEL, BALBEC.*

*A still lying in bed.*

A: Marcel! How lovely of you to come.

M: I can't tell you how happy I am to be here. Just the two of us, and you looking so ravishing. (*He approaches the bed quickly, leans over to kiss her lips.*) Oh, Albertine, my darling...

A (*pushes him away*): Marcel! Stop it!

M (*doesn't think she is serious*): I don't care if I catch your cold. I want so much to kiss your beautiful mouth.

A: I said Stop it! Or I shall ring the bell!

*M flings himself on her in a fit of passion. A extends her arm and tugs on the bellpull rope. A bell jangles. M looks up, dazed and bewildered.*

#### SCENE 6

*Back in M's room. M stands. A sits in the chair.*

M: All I wanted that evening was to kiss you. It would have made me so happy! What harm could a kiss do you? I'm sorry I upset you, but I'm hanged if I see what I did wrong.

A: What I find surprising is that you are surprised. I wonder what type of girl you'd been seeing.

M: I'm sorry I annoyed you, but I still can't see that what I did was wrong. My view is that such things are unimportant. Why on earth should a girl refuse to do something that is pleasant? I'm not saying a girl should agree to do anything, or that nothing is immoral. For example, you once mentioned certain goings-on between a young girl and an actress. Now I think that sort of thing is vile, and impossible anyway. *(A doesn't agree, but makes sure M does not see her expression.)* But that's quite different from letting yourself be kissed and... whatever... by a friend — since you say I'm your friend.

A: Of course you are. But I'd had other boy-friends before you, and not one would have dared to do such a thing.

M: And yet you've just let me kiss you passionately!

A: Ah, but I didn't know you as well in Balbec.

M: So much the better. But it really is late. *(She starts to kiss him again but he stops her.)* Don't you believe me?

A: Of course, I always believe you. *(She gets up.)* I know you have such a busy social life with your dukes and princes. When shall I see you again?

M: I never know when I'm going to be free, unfortunately. Can I send the car for you in the evening whenever it becomes possible?

A: Mmm... not practical at the moment, but soon I'll have my own entrance. That'll make me independent of my aunt. Anyhow I'll drop by tomorrow afternoon or the day after. If you can't see me, too bad.

*Marcel goes to kiss her cheek, but she stops him with a smile and playfully taps his cheek. Marcel goes off.*

#### SCENE 7

A: I was determined that my next visit would be as surprising as the first, so I called on him in the morning. When Françoise frostily announced me, he was still shaving, his face covered in stubble and lather. I was delighted to see he didn't seem at all put out by my seeing him in that hideous state, and straight away he invited me to accompany him to the Bois de Boulogne. I affected to hesitate for a moment, as if I did have other plans but was willing to sacrifice them.

M: I was quite indifferent to her seeing me with a black chin. The fact is, I had planned to go to the Bois de Boulogne to order in advance a romantic private dinner the following evening, at the restaurant on the Isle of Swans, preparatory to my first rendezvous with the newly divorced Vicomtesse Alix de Stermaria, with whom I was falling in love. I had been assured by my friend Saint-Loup she would give herself to me, so I asked Albertine to go with me to help choose the menu — women are so much better at these domestic matters.

A: As we drove through the Bois, I said very little. I could see Marcel was preoccupied, no doubt figuring out how he could capture in writing the autumnal mist and the fall of the last windswept leaves.

M: As we drove through the Bois I was glad that Albertine did not keep up her girlish banter, as I was thinking that if the worst came to the worst, if I had misunderstood Saint-Loup's letter or misjudged Madame de Stermaria's willingness to give herself to me at our first meeting, I could always recruit Albertine as a substitute later in the evening, for an hour of purely voluptuous pleasure.

The following evening a thick mist fell, for winter was in the air. I took particular care with my toilet, having sent a carriage which would transport my feudal maiden and her lover to that island in the swirling mists. The doorbell pealed and I rushed to join her in the carriage, but instead found the driver with an envelope in his hand. While the driver grumbled about the fog, I read her card: "I am dreadfully sorry, but something unfortunate has come up which prevents my dining with you this evening. I was so looking forward to it. Best wishes." I was stunned. Soon after, I heard she'd entered into an absurd marriage in Brittany with a young man who was no doubt the cause of her forgetting my invitation. I never saw her again.

*Brief passage from the sonata.*

#### SCENE 8

A (*reading a letter*): “My dear Albertine, here is a ticket for you to see La Berma in Racine’s *Phèdre*. You’ll have the whole box to yourself as I have to go to a reception at the Princesse de Guermantes’s — the kind of party that is of interest only to those who were not there and read about it in next morning’s paper! But I shall leave early because I hope you will pay me a visit after the play, say just before midnight. Kisses, Marcel.” A whole box! What fun! Now, who can I invite?...

M: I did indeed leave early, turning down an invitation to a costume ball and a high-powered dinner. I ran into Dr Cottard, who asked me with a twinkle in his eye how my “buxom filly” Albertine was, and he went on, “The last time I saw her was at the little casino at Incarville. She was dancing with that dashed attractive girl Andrée, positively glued together they were, their breasts rubbing constantly against one another, highly aroused. I know the signs, part of my professional training! Women get great excitement through their breasts, you know.”

These mischievous remarks injected me with a slow poison of which I was to feel the effect later. I escaped from Dr Cottard, who disliked music, thanks to the sound of a violin coming from a nearby room. Despite the hubbub I was drawn by the still indistinct violin melody, slender yet robust, as one’s sense of smell is attracted by the perfume of certain roses in the evening air. As I entered the small salon the multifiform mass of the piano part, rippling like mauve waves in moonlight, revealed to me what the music was: Vinteuil’s violin sonata! As the themes emerged and sank and intermingled with slow and rhythmical undulations, and that ineffable little phrase, fragile and melancholy, appeared and faded away, so many childhood memories surfaced in my mind: Combray, Swann, Odette... Then a wave of sadness overcame me as I recalled how Vinteuil had been killed prematurely by the sadistic way his beloved daughter treated him, and the shock of discovering that she openly engaged in audacious lesbian activities with her musical friend, whom he had nurtured and encouraged.

The pleasure of hearing Vinteuil’s music did not lessen my annoyance at Albertine’s lateness. Not that I was remotely in love with her. I was motivated purely by sensual desire. The thought of Albertine’s bodily charms counteracted my regrets at having to leave so many delightful young girls at the reception.

## SCENE 9

*Marcel is in his room waiting impatiently for Albertine.*

M: I hate it when a girl is late. The play must have ended at 11.30, so where is she? (*He goes to the mirror, picks up his hairbrush, tidies his hair unnecessarily, inspects his chin.*) I’m sorry now I let her see me unkempt so often, with a few days’ stubble.

(*Looks at his watch.*) Half past midnight! She obviously finds it more agreeable to be elsewhere than with me. With people I don’t know — I’m not comfortable with that. Not that I’m jealous, but all the same... Perhaps I should send a cab round home for her? No, it’s too late. How loudly that clock ticks. When we are waiting, sounds make such a rapid journey from the ear to the mind that analyses them; and sends the results to the heart so fast we think we are listening with our heart. What is happening to me? This growing feeling of longing and solitary anguish in the midst of the nocturnal tumult of Paris, and out there somewhere is Albertine. (*The telephone rings. M pounces on it.*)

A (*on telephone*): Marcel? I hope I didn’t wake you up ringing at this late hour?

M: No, not at all. (*Tries to sound indifferent.*) Are you coming round? Don’t bother unless you need desperately to see me.

A: I’m near home. And rather a long way from your place. The fact is I hadn’t read your note properly, I’ve just found it again and was afraid you’d be up waiting for me.

M (*doesn’t believe her*): Is that so? Where are you? I can hear singing and a band playing in the background.

A: I’m close to home, as I said.

M: Well, look, it would be inconvenient for you to come now. I’m dead tired. I don’t see how you could have misunderstood my note. You replied that it would be all right. If you hadn’t understood, what did you mean by that?

A: Yes, I said it was all right, but I couldn’t quite remember what the arrangement was. I can hear you’re angry with me. I’m just sorry I went to see *Phèdre* at all. If I’d known it would cause all this trouble... (*while M is still speaking she puts her hand over the mouthpiece, giggles, and says “Yes, all right darling, I’m coming, it’s Marcel”.*)

M: The play has nothing to do with why I’m angry. I invited you to go and see it.

A: I’m sorry, what did you say? I missed that.

M: I said I’m not angry about your going to see *Phèdre*.

A: So you’re angry with *me*. It’s a pity it’s so late now, otherwise I’d have come round. I’ll call round tomorrow or the day after and you’ll see how contrite I am.



M: Oh no you won't, Albertine. You've made me waste an entire evening so at least leave me in peace for a few days. I shan't be free for two or three weeks. Come straight away. I'll have a cup of coffee to keep me awake.

A: Erm, it's very inconvenient. The trouble is, I'm at a friend's house, and she...

M: I couldn't care less about your friend. Either come or don't come, it's up to you. It was you who suggested coming now, not me.

A: Calm down, Marcel, please. I'll jump into a cab and I'll be there in ten minutes.

*M hangs up. A goes off.*

#### SCENE 10

M: That evening marked the beginning of my realisation that Albertine's life was very remote from mine and that I should always have to make exhausting investigations if I wanted to seize it. It was like a series of camouflaged fortifications. I felt that I should never be able to unravel the tangled skein of truth and deceit. And that it would always be like that, unless I imprisoned her. It was still just a vague apprehension, a feeling of anxiety. But it was a premonition of the prolonged suffering that was to come.

*He goes off.*

*We hear the Vinteuil theme.*

#### SCENE 11

*A enters.*

A: Poor Marcel, he has never even begun to understand me. I don't think Andrée understands me either, for all that we're so intimate. At times, Marcel thinks me frivolous, then he's not sure if the frivolity is only put on like a mask. Most of the time, I'm not sure either.

If only he weren't so inquisitorial. At times he can be very tiresome and inflexible, with all his questions over the slightest issue, and such a memory for any little slip! Take that ridiculous episode when we were back in Balbec the following summer. Marcel's beloved grandmother had died, so we hadn't seen one another for some time, he was grieving so much. He admitted he was still incapable of feeling physical desire, but we were nevertheless having a very pleasant time one afternoon amorously dallying...

#### SCENE 12

*M and A sitting or lying in each other's arms.*

M: You can be such a darling. Your face is somehow more gentle and radiant. During the long hours I've had to spend every day resting in bed at home in Paris, I often longed for you to join me in our usual games.

A: I should have loved to, but I knew you were in deep mourning and I respected that. What was in the packet I brought up for you from the hotel reception?

M: Oh, a new pianola roll.

A: What is it?

M: If I told you, it wouldn't mean anything to you.

A: Well, instruct me, Mr professor of music.

M: His name is Vinteuil. Now are you any the wiser?

A: You really are priceless, Marcel! Listen: when I was in Trieste, I spent the happiest years of my life with a friend, older than me. She was mother and sister to me. Well — isn't this an extraordinary coincidence? — my friend is the best friend of Vinteuil's daughter, and I know her very well too.

M (*stunned; slowly*): Let me get this straight. You know intimately both Mlle Vinteuil and her friend?

A: Oh yes, she's very musical, the friend I mean. We're going to meet in Cherbourg very soon to go on a cruise together. (*She suddenly remembers her assignation, looks at her watch and stands.*) Oh dear, I have to go.

M: Go? Why?

A: I... Because I said I'd call on a lady who is at home at five o'clock every day.

M: Where?

A: In Infreville. I'll drive myself in the trap.

M: I beg you to stay. I still don't feel very well. My asthma is playing the very devil with my breathing today.

A: I'm really sorry about that, but I can't. She'll be cross if I don't go. She's touchy and not very hospitable.

M: How boring. You can simply not go.

A: No, my aunt has taught me to be polite at all times.

M: But you're often impolite!

A: It's not the same thing. She'll get me into trouble with my aunt who is not very happy with me anyway. She insists that I go and see her once.

M: But since she's at home every day at five o'clock...

A (*caught on the hop*): I know she's at home every day... but today I promised to meet some friends at her place so that it won't be so boring.

M: So, Albertine, you prefer this lady and your friends to me. You'd rather leave me all by myself, alone, ill and miserable, than risk making a boring visit!

A: I wouldn't care a damn if it was boring, I'm going for the sake of my friends. They're depending on me for a lift back in the trap.

M: But there are trains back from Infreville until ten o'clock.

A: That is very true...but we might be invited to stay for dinner. She's very hospitable.

M: Well, you simply decline.

A: That *would* make my aunt angry.

M: Anyway, you can stay for dinner and still catch the ten o'clock train.

A: It'd be cutting it fine.

M: I've got an idea. I feel a drive in the fresh air will do me good, so I'll go with you. (*A looks thunderstruck.*) Unless you don't want me to come?

A: Well, no, I mean, I mean, no, h-h-how can you say that? You know I love going out with you, yes I really do, Marcel. I'll tell you what, since we're going out for a drive, let's go the other way, the other side of Balbec is much prettier, and we can have dinner somewhere, won't that be nice?

M: But what about your aunt's friend?

A: She'll just have to be cross.

M: No, you mustn't make people cross.

A: She won't even notice I'm not there. I'll go tomorrow.

M: And your friends?

A: Oh, they've let me down enough times. It's my turn.

M: No, Albertine. I don't want to spoil your rendez-vous. Off you go to your so-called Infreville lady, whoever the person may be.

A: What do you mean by that? I'm not going to meet another *man*, you know.

M: That's not what I meant at all. Albertine... (*he hesitates to say what's on his mind.*)

A (*petulantly*): You just don't want to go out with me.

M: The reason why I'm not going with you is that you don't want me to.

A: But I've...

M: The proof is that you've contradicted yourself half a dozen times without noticing.

A: Well, I don't remember what I said, it's quite possible, the sea air makes my head spin, I'm always muddling names and things. (*She glances at her watch, hoping M won't see.*) Well, that's it, Marcel, I'm going. Really, you are too bad. I change everything so that we can have a nice evening together and you accuse me of lying! I've never seen you so cruel! I shall never see you again. I'll drown myself in the sea!

M: Like Sappho?

A: There you go again, more insults! You're perfectly horrid! Goodbye for ever!

*She goes off, nose in the air. Agitated music from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement of the Franck sonata (Track 2).*

INTERVAL

MARCEL AND ALBERTINE  
ACT TWO

SCENE 13

*Bedroom in Marcel's apartment. Several months have passed (Albertine's change of dress should indicate this). Feminine touches in the room: flowers (preferably roses), and on the wall a reproduction of Manet's "Olympia" ("L'Olympe").*



*Albertine is doing up buttons on her dress putting on her stockings, etc. (it should be clear that she is not undressing). Her shoes are lying on the floor. On her little finger, she wears a ring with a large ruby, with which she always plays when nervous. The bed is unmade and in disorder.*

A: Goodness, I must hurry, Marcel will be back. How time flies when one has been enjoying oneself! *(She sits, touches her breasts and pubis sensually, closes her eyes, and breathes "Oh, Andrée".)*

SCENE 14

*Marcel approaches the front door. Smart pale grey overcoat and hat, silver-topped walking stick. He has a bunch of syringa branches in his hand. He rings the bell. A has only one stocking on.*

A: Oh! Heavens! He's back already! *(She panics.)* Must get dressed, no, don't have time, make the bed, yes, that's more important. *(She quickly flings the bed cover on. M rings again, impatiently. A sings out "Coming!" Runs to let him in, stocking in hand. Breathless.)* I'm so sorry, Marcel, I was... I was just undressing to have a bath. *(M goes to embrace and kiss her, but she recoils.)* Oh! Syringas! But you know I can't abide them! They have such a strong scent.

M: Andrée just told me. Sorry, I forgot.

A *(Pause. Then with feigned indifference)*: Oh, you saw Andrée? *(She starts putting on her stocking and shoes.)*

M *(no trace of suspicion)*: Yes, I met her as I walked up the stairs. I told her I'd forgotten my key and she said you both got back early from your outing — fortunately, since Françoise is out at the market. You took your time letting me in! I was beginning to think you'd fallen asleep. *(He sees she's dressing.)* I thought you said you were going to have a bath?

A: Ah, yes, well, I'll leave it till bedtime now you're back. I know how you like to watch me in the bath. Now, can you please take those syringas away!

M: Yes, of course, I was forgetting.

*M goes off other side to deposit the syringas.*

A: Whew! That's what the English call a 'close shave'!

*(M returns quickly, and A helps him to take off his hat and coat.)*

M: You know, I'm no longer surprised that you are living here with me.

A: Well, I am, at times. It's a very curious situation, living under the same roof with not just you but the two other women in your life — your mother and that medieval peasant. I know they think I'm slovenly and have no sense of time, but I simply have different priorities, like a pet cat. I'm still amazed your mother agreed to the arrangement.

M: It was supposed to be temporary. *(Hastily.)* Not that it's permanent, of course!

A: Of course!

M: Maybe she was too grief-stricken by the death of her mother to object. And maybe she saw how good you are for me.

A: Your asthma is very much better anyway. *(Laughs.)* I suppose I'm therapeutic! I hadn't thought of myself like that before.

M: But is it good for you, Albertine?

A: Better than living with my vulgar aunt!

M: She hasn't objected?

A: I've told her I have a bedroom along the hall from yours, and that your mother is here too. Where is she exactly?

M: In Combray, with Papa. Is that the only reason you like being here? To escape from your aunt?

A: Of course not, silly. Well, since you ask, I am sort of imprisoned here, and yet I feel a lot freer. After all, I can go where I like so long as Andrée chaperones me.

M: Dear Andrée! So trustworthy. It was so good of her to stay in Paris and act as your guide and confidant.

A (*cat-with-cream expression that M doesn't see.*): It was good, wasn't it?

M: All for your protection, of course. Ever since you revealed to me who'd brought you up in Trieste, I've tried to shield you from the risk of such temptation again.

A (*demurely*): Thank you. Let's see, why else do I like being here?... You're incredibly generous, and you have impeccable taste. That Fortuny dressing-gown and the scarves and coats, must have cost, well, a fortune!... And I love trotting along to your room when you call for me to kiss you goodnight — or to console you, or inspire you, I don't know which. All three, perhaps.

M: Preferably.

A: But what about you?

M: Pardon?

A: Why do you want me here? Do you love me?

*Change of tone here.*

M: Well..., you know, physically, you've changed in the months you've been staying here.

A (*Slightly alarmed, puts her hands on her stomach*): Oh? How? You mean I've put on weight?

M: No, not at all. Your eyes, for instance. They're still like smiling blue almonds, but they've become more elongated and liquescent. When you close them it's like curtains being drawn to shut out the sea. And as for your hair — every morning it surprises me, it's so different from the night before. Like a splendid rippling crown of black violets.

*Pause. Albertine senses he is holding something back.*

A: That is beautiful, Marcel, but is that an answer? Do you love me or not?

*M reflects before answering.*

M: Can I be frank with you?

A: Of course. You know I don't like duplicity.

M: I'm no longer in love with you. No... it's not that simple. At times, you bore me, and I regret not choosing Andrée.

A: Oh.

M: No, listen. And yet the possibility of loving you comes back to life when I gaze at you sleeping with such naïve and childlike abandon, one hand resting on your gently moving breasts, so round and firm they don't seem to be part of your body, more like fruit that has ripened there.

A (*moved*): Yes, do go on.

M: At these moments what I feel is a love as pure, immaterial and mysterious as if... as if you were a graceful plant, yes, one of the beauties of nature, calm and deliciously sensuous like a sea breeze in the moonlight. And then... this isn't easy to say ... I feel for a brief while that I am possessing you completely, which I never feel when you're awake, maybe thinking of someone else, or observing me as I live on the surface of myself.

A: So you still don't trust me? You don't love me, but you can still be jealous?

M: Ah, don't get me started about jealousy! Jealousy is like asthma: caused and calmed in many different ways. It's only when I hear you've excited desire in others that I begin to suffer that intermittent and capricious malady known as jealousy.

A: That's one cause, what about calming?

M: I don't think I'd be jealous if you enjoyed yourself with someone else so long as I'd arranged it and it happened under my nose. This would spare me any fear of your lying to me.

A: I wonder if it would? Now, Marcel, enough of this idle chatter. You promised you were going to settle down to work this evening, remember?

M: Yes, I have some ideas I want to work on before they disappear.

*A goes off and M settles down to write. Brief spell of Vinteuil.*

## SCENE 15

*A enters with a copy of Le Figaro, open at an inside page.*

A: Here's today's *Figaro*, I thought you might like to glance at it.

M: No thank you. I'd rather read Dostoevsky. (*He picks up a copy of The Idiot or The Brothers Karamozov.*) He brought a new sort of beauty into the world, of a woman's face, for instance...

A: Why not?

M: ... What?

A: Why don't you want to read *Le Figaro*?

M: If you must know, because I sent the editor an article months ago, and they haven't published it. For weeks I searched for it every day, but not any more.

A: Even so, I think there's something here that will interest you. It's about a place near Combray.

M: All right, later.

A: No, *now* Marcel! I want to finish reading a review of a new Vermeer exhibition.

M: Oh, very well. (*Reads.*) Good heavens! What cheek! They've given it the same title as mine! And this sentence is identical with what I wrote! It's plagiarism! I shall complain! Who wrote this thing? (*He turns the page.*) Oh. It's me. It's my article! Albertine, they've published it at last!

A (*kisses him*): I'm so glad, darling. Tell me about it.

M: What memories this brings back. It's a tidied-up version of a piece I wrote (in a jogging dog-cart, if you please, as I left Martinville!) when I was very young, my very first attempt to capture some mysterious meaning hidden behind the surface. When I'd written it I whooped with joy like a hen that's laid its first egg.

A: It's pretty rare to get juvenilia published in a posh paper like *Le Figaro*. (*She reads.*) "Rising alone and pensive from the flat, open countryside, the two spires of Martinville reached towards the sky. Soon we saw three: a dilatory spire, leaping up boldly from Vieuxvique, had joined them..." I like the way you bring them to life.

M: Ah! Read the last sentence.

A: "They made me think of the three young maidens in a legend, abandoned in solitude with night approaching. As we moved away from them at a gallop, I saw them timidly huddle together until they became a single dark shape, charming and resigned, vanishing as the red sky turned to black."

*Pause.*

M: I can just picture all those people out there, reading it, picking it to shreds, some detesting it, some seeing the same images as I had seen. Monsieur de Guermantes won't understand this sentence, Bloch will love it. Legrandin, Andrée, you, Mr X and Mrs Y, I can't hope to make them all share my thoughts and comprehend the ideal I'm trying to express when I write, because I lack the ability and the talent!

A: But you write for yourself, don't you?

M: Yes, but I want my writing to speak to others. I want to be admired. To please them.

A: Then trust in your own judgement. You've read so much and know so much, and you've taught me everything I know about literature and art and music. I blush to think how ignorant I was before you took me in hand — as it were. Somebody once asked me if I knew Trollope, and I said "No, I don't think I've met the lady!"

M: You poor darling! But there's a difference, you see. (*He gets really enthusiastic and excited.*) For the creative artist, especially for the man of letters who analyses emotions, knowledge counts for much less than feelings and passions. I once gave up the chance to see Elstir so as to see you! A woman whom we need and who makes us suffer draws from us more profound and vital feelings than a genius who only interests us.

A: So, the more I make you suffer, the better it is for you?

M: Perhaps better for the writer, but worse for my asthma.

*They laugh and kiss.*

A: Now, stop being so lazy and wasting your time being a social butterfly flitting round those snobs, the Guermantes, Cambremers, Saint-Euvertes and so on.

M: You omitted the Verdurins. I wonder why?

A: Yes, well, her *salon* attracts some very *artistic* people — musicians, actors and actresses.

M: True. But my flitting, as you call it, is not a waste of time. What I do... I observe those stupid hangers-on at high society receptions, and note how their gestures and inane remarks reveal hidden feelings. They unwittingly obey certain laws that I am trying to understand.

A: Some of them are very intelligent.

M: Intelligence just magnifies stupidity.

A: I'm not intelligent enough to understand that. But when are you going to *create* something out of all this gadding about, Marcel?

M: The materials are slowly forming in here, like a seed underground. (*He taps his head.*) Perhaps the day will come when I can capture and transform the frivolous pleasures, laziness, love and unhappiness that I'm storing up. (*Sighs.*) My only hope is that I'll become so ill, that writing propped up in bed is all I'll be able to do!

*They both stay on stage.*

## SCENE 16

*Lighting change to indicate change to M as narrator.*

M: Albertine's reluctance to mention the Verdurins recreated in my mind, like the vacillating and fleeting images of my childhood magic lantern, scenes of the past weeks and months when she had lied to me. Liars are often caught out by what they *don't* say.

What fascinated me about Albertine — and at the same time distressed me — were the various techniques of mendacity that she had — not *perfected* (since I saw through them) — but had raised to a fine art. When she was lying, her story fell to the ground through inadequacy, omission, improbability, or excess of detail. Truth was something that slipped out occasionally in spite of herself, through her expression or tone of voice. Like when I asked her:

### SCENE 17

*Back to dialogue setting. M turns to A.*

M: Albertine, tell me truthfully, are you happy living with me in my house?

A (*pauses; then with a mixture of nostalgia and irritation*): Yes, of course. I can't think of anywhere I'd be happier.

M (*out front*): One morning I asked her if she knew a certain actress, who was a notorious lesbian.

(*To A*) Have you ever met the actress, Léa. At the Verdurins for example? My friend, the dramatist, Bloch, told me Léa had said some strange things involving you.

A: Léa? No, I don't know her.

M (*out front*): That very evening, I asked her:

(*to A*) Can you swear you have never lied to me?

A (*gazes into space before replying*): Yes... I mean, no. Well, there's something I've kept hidden from you. I once went on a three week trip with Léa. But it was before I really knew you.

M: But you said you didn't know her!

A: Oh, did I? I wasn't thinking. There was absolutely nothing at all improper about her conduct with me. She's not that sort of woman. But she knows that if she did make a pass at me I'd tell her where to get off.

M: So you know about her reputation?

A: In fact, she was more reserved than many of your high society women.

M: You've had some experiences with such high society women, have you?

A: I mean... she was more refined in the language she used.

M: When was the last time you saw her? At the Trocadéro?

A: The Trocadéro? No — don't you remember? On that day you insisted on taking me for a drive just so that I shouldn't meet her at the Trocadéro. The last time I saw her, I think, was when some friends and I went to see her in a play, and we went to her dressing-room after. She changed in front of us without batting an eyelid, most interesting.

M (*out front*): What had happened was that I had indeed made her go to the Trocadéro instead of to the Verdurins, because I knew Mlle Vinteuil would be at the Verdurins. But then I read in *Le Figaro* that this dubious Léa would be performing that day at the Trocadéro, so I had to rescue her from there too. Perhaps there's nothing in it — but why on earth would she go to her dressing-room?

They were my three tormentors, the destroyers of my peace of mind: Léa, Mlle Vinteuil, and her friend. They, and Albertine herself.

*End of flashbacks.*

### SCENE 18

A: You're very pensive. What are you thinking?

M: Oh... nothing. Guess where I've been — to the Verdurins.

A (*dismayed and annoyed*): You went without me? Well, of all the...

M: I didn't know you'd be annoyed.

A: I'm not annoyed at all. Why would I be annoyed? I couldn't care less. (*Pause.*) Wasn't Mlle Vinteuil supposed to be there this evening?

M (*angry*): Yes. Why didn't you tell me you met her the other day!

A: Did I meet her? Let me see... Anyway, I don't see why you're so down on them. You shouldn't listen to tittle-tattle.

M: I don't have to. I saw them at it with my own eyes.

A: *At it?*

M: The window was wide open, and I was just outside. I saw Mlle Vinteuil seduced by her friend, who wanted the window left open for all the world to see. Then she made her spit on her father's photograph.

*A is shocked.*

M: At the Verdurins I learned that what you told me about Mlle Vinteuil was untrue.

A: About my being brought up by her friend?

M (*surprised; this was not what he was going to say*): What?

A: I did tell you a fib about that.

M: But why?

A: Because I felt you were despising me and found me boring. The truth is — I swear this is the truth — one of my school friends knew Mlle Vinteuil's friend, and I thought it would give me a bit of prestige if I said I knew them, since you and the Verdurins were so passionate about his music.

M: You felt inferior at the Verdurins? I'd gladly give you the money to play the grand lady and treat them to dinner at the best restaurant in Paris!

A: I wouldn't spend a penny on that lot! I'd rather you gave me a bit of freedom now and then, so that I can go and get myself bug... (*She breaks off in confusion, highly embarrassed. Blushing, actually!*)

M: What did you say?

A: Nothing. I was half asleep.

M: No you weren't, you were wide awake. You said, "go and get myself bug...". At least have the courage to finish the sentence!

A: No, leave me alone!

M: Why?

A: Because it's frightfully vulgar. I don't even know what it means, I heard it in the street one day, and it just came out.

M: How do you know it's vulgar if you don't know what it means?

A: Because... because it was a vulgar person who said it. Because... Oh, I don't know. (*Her voice fades as she runs out of explanations.*)

*Pause. M shakes his head, not believing her.*

M (*gently, sadly*): My sweet little Albertine, I understand. But do you understand what it means, the fact that I went to the Verdurins secretly without you?

A (*still recovering*): What? Sorry, what are you saying?

M: Six months ago, even three, when I was so fond of you, I'd never have done that to you.

A: You must feel ashamed of me or something. I've never in my life felt so insulted!

M: You're right, something has changed drastically between us. In my heart. Yes, an immense change of heart which I had hoped to keep from you. I think you realise it too. Your desire for independence and my jealousy are incompatible. The life you are leading here is boring for you, so it's better if we part. And since quick separations are the least painful, so as to cut short the great sadness I shall feel, we had better say goodbye tonight. Then you can leave in the morning before I wake up.

A (*stunned, incredulous*): Tomorrow?

M: Yes. We have been happy, but we feel now that we should be unhappy. So we have decided to part tonight.

A: Excuse me, *you* feel we'd be unhappy. *You* have decided I should go immediately. I shall obey because I don't want to cause you more distress.

M: Very well, *I* have decided, but it will make me miserable. Not for long, just a few days. So please don't write. No point in reviving memories. And one more favour, Albertine: never try to see me again. It would hurt me too much. We shall avoid one another. I shan't go to Balbec this summer. (*With genuine feeling and sadness.*) I was genuinely fond of you, not love perhaps, but very great affection, more than you'll ever know.

A: And you think I shan't be miserable? I shall, a thousand times more. I still love you. I don't know where I'll go. Back to my aunt in Touraine, I suppose. (*Looking round the room.*) I can't get it into my head that I'll never see this room again. It's just not possible!

M: It's the only way. You were unhappy here.

A: No, I wasn't! But I shall be now.

M: This will be better for you.

A: For you perhaps, not for me!

(*They both stare into space, devastated. M is wrestling with an idea.*)

M: I'm appalled to think you will be unhappy. You say that you're happier here?

A: Yes.

M: Then would you like us to try and carry on for a few weeks?

A: Oh, yes! That would be lovely! (*She sits on his knee. They kiss affectionately, not passionately.*)

M: You never know, as the weeks go by, we might go on for a long time. Some temporary things become permanent! This evening has been like packing for a long journey and then not going.

A: Well, I'm making the journey to bed, I'm exhausted.

M: You can sleep all day tomorrow. Do you love me a little bit?

A: A hundred times more than before. Good night, dear, dear Marcel. I'll come to your room for a goodnight kiss when I've undressed.

*A goes off.*

#### SCENE 19

*M muses, alone.*

M: All that was play-acting, of course. A sad and wretched full-scale production on my part, a deceitful attempt to understand what was really going on in Albertine's mind. But it wasn't successful, because I spent the night still besieged by doubts. She claimed to be happy living here, but did she really prefer her freedom? Her responses and lies, the words and gestures that implied her dissatisfaction, all went round and round in my head as I tried to work out different hypotheses.

I received a letter from my mother berating me for my indecision about marrying Albertine, and pointing out that I was spoiling her chances of making a good match elsewhere. For months I had gone through conflicting emotions about the idea of making her my wife. At times I convinced myself, "I must marry her", only to conclude that it would be complete madness. Finally, I decided that I am incurably indecisive by nature, therefore the question of whether I marry Albertine or not would simply take time to be resolved.

*A enters.*

A: After that terrible scene I refrained from saying to Marcel, "I know you don't trust me, so I'm going to try to dispel your suspicions". Instead I made sure I was never alone for a moment, making him a witness to whatever I was doing — telephoning Andrée, or the garage, or the stables to go riding. He kept me under constant surveillance, either by himself or by Françoise, who hated me and referred to me disapprovingly as "the Princess". In fact I'm sure she regarded us both as spoilt children.

M: As time went on, I began to fear that Albertine might herself bring about the separation I had threatened her with. Every time I heard a door open, I trembled. One morning I was suddenly scared that she'd not only gone out without telling me, but had left for ever. So I crept along to her room... and found her still in bed, asleep. I realised that this body, lying so still in a semi-circle, contained the human life that meant more to me than anything else. And it was possessed and dominated by me.

A: What I treasured were the afternoons we spent listening to music which I played on the pianola. He said my playing was like a magic lantern projecting pictures and tapestries on to the walls of the room. We talked a lot about art and books — and music, "the language of the soul" as he called it. He had the knack of bringing together so many strands unexpectedly: Dostoevsky and Rembrandt; Stendhal and Thomas Hardy; or the mysterious Vinteuil phrase and a madeleine he had once dipped in tea. I told him it was a great pity he was so lazy because the way he saw literature was much more interesting than the way it had been taught at school.

M: After several months, I felt that life with Albertine was a pain when I was jealous, and boring when I wasn't jealous. All my old fears were slowly reignited by trivial discrepancies. Things came to a head on the first day of Spring, when I discovered, by dint of talking to her acquaintances, she had lied to me about an arrangement she had made with Andrée...

#### SCENE 20

*M and A in dialogue mode.*

M: I have to tell you, I'm being driven out of my mind by reports of your relations with Andrée.

A: *Andrée!* Well! That's rich! And may one know who's been telling you these charming things? Can I speak to these people and ask them what these slanders are based on?

M: My little Albertine, I don't know. They're anonymous letters. But you'd recognise them easily, because they must know you well. For example, one letter claims that that time you returned from Balbec to Paris unexpectedly, it was solely to see Andrée.

A (*furious*): You can tell your anonymous informants that my coming back to Paris was nothing to do with Andrée, and that I think Andrée is deadly boring. I can't stand her. I don't want to go out with her ever again!

M: But how can I tell them as they're anonymous? Oh, my dear, there have been so many lies and half-truths.

A: Such as what, if you please?

M: Such as your denial that your aunt had a friend in Infreville.

A: Well, she didn't! I told you the truth!

M: So who were you so anxious to go and see in Infreville that afternoon?

A: Oh... I can't remember, it was a long time ago, I can't be expected to store away in my little brain every visit I've made.



M: That is so typical of you! Whenever you're caught out you can't remember! You should be a politician. I'll tell you who it was — Mlle Vinteuil and her friend.

A: So if you know, why put me through this torture to try and remember?

M (*exasperated*): That's not the point, Albertine! The point is... Oh, this is getting us nowhere. Your fortifications are too strong.

A: Fortifications?

M: Let's forget it. I am too tired to argue any more. Forgive me for bringing it up.

A (*now calm, but cold*): I forgive you. I'm going to bed. Sleep well.

M: Will you come to my room and kiss me goodnight?

*She shakes her head.*

M: Well, at least kiss me now.

*Reluctantly she allows him to give her a peck on the cheek, but does not kiss him. They both exit in different directions — M to one side, and A to the bed, where she lies down in a foetal position.*

*We hear the Vinteuil sonata.*

## SCENE 21

*Next morning. M is still offstage.*

M (*looking offstage at the invisible Françoise*): WHAT! Why didn't you wake me, Françoise? (*He enters, distraught. He has an unopened letter in his hand.*) Where can she have gone? And she's taken her trunk. Just when I had decided I didn't love her any more, she's taken the initiative! (*Looks at envelope.*) "To my friend." Hrmph. Thanks for that.

*As he opens the envelope, light on Albertine who re-appears, writing at the table by the bed. She reads the letter as she writes it. M to one side, reacting as he reads it.*

A: My friend,

Forgive me for not daring to say to your face the few words that follow, but I'm such a coward, I've always been so afraid when I'm with you, that I didn't have the courage.

M: That's rubbish! You were cheeky as the devil!

A: Life has become impossible between us, anyway you must realise from your outburst that something has changed in our relationship.

M: She's just repeating what I said.

A: If we patched things up, it would be worse in a few days time. So, since we ended our quarrel on a note of reconciliation it's best to part good friends. I beg you, my darling...

M: It's darling now!

A: ... to be good enough to forgive me if I make you slightly unhappy. I shall be immensely unhappy myself. My very dear one, I have no wish to become your enemy. It will be hard enough for me to know that it won't take you long to cease to care or think about me.

M: Shooting my words back at me again.

A: My decision is irrevocable, so I've got Françoise to help me pack my trunk.

M: I bet Françoise enjoyed doing that.

A: Goodbye, I am leaving you the best of myself. — Albertine.

*The light dims on A. She quietly goes off.*

M: This is just a false alarm. She doesn't mean any of it. Just wanted to give me a shock. I must get her back. Ah! I see who's behind this: her scheming aunt, Mme Bontemps! Well, if it's money she's after, she can have all she wants so long as she agrees to send Albertine back to me. I must get her back by this evening.

But what if Albertine doesn't obey her? What if she demands full independence and freedom? Hm. Well, she shall have it — one has to compromise and make sacrifices. It will be painfully hard for me to let her go when and where she pleases to get up to heaven knows what mischief, but it makes me even more sad to feel that she's bored living with me like a slave. Above all, she wants me to be less unbearable to her.

It's all very well to talk about going to get her back, but where is she? With her aunt in Touraine? Or in Amsterdam with someone else? Or still in Paris, in her own apartment? I know, I'll telephone her there. No, let's have a bit more pride than that! if I seem too anxious and beg her to return, she'll think I'm a weak plaything. (*Pause. Another idea!*) Her own concierge — he'll know. I have the number here somewhere. (*He searches, finds it.*)

*Change to narrative mode.*

The concierge confirmed that Albertine had indeed gone to Touraine, so I sent my friend Saint-Loup to see her aunt and sound her out. The very next day I received a letter from Albertine.

*Spot on A.*

A: My dear friend, you sent your friend Saint-Loup to see my aunt. That was very silly of you. My dear one, if you needed me, why not write to me direct? I should have been only too happy to return. Do not resort to such absurd ploys again.

*Spot out on A. A moves to her position at start of play.*

M: I wrote her a very long letter, saying how much I treasured certain memories of our time together, and ending by saying “Goodbye for ever, I am going to ask Andrée to marry me, as she is more likely to be happy with me”. This was intended to have the opposite effect — in the past, whenever I said “I don’t love you” she loved me all the more.

I expected an immediate reply, but there was none. In my mind Albertine once more became the vivacious girl everyone chased after. I decided that if she refused to return, I would go and drag her back. Finally, in abject desperation, swallowing my pride, I sent her a telegram begging her to return on any terms so long as I could embrace her for one minute three times a week. I’d have settled for once a week.

Almost immediately I received a telegram, but it was from her aunt. It read:

“My poor dear friend, our little Albertine is no more. Forgive me for having to tell you such terrible news, as I know you loved her so much. She was thrown from her horse against a tree while out riding. We tried all we could to revive her, but it was no good. I wish I were dead in her place. — Yvonne Bontemps.”

Many times I had told myself she would never return, but not once did I believe it. To think I should never again feel her hand stroking me before I go to sleep. (*He strokes his neck, face and lips, re-living A’s touch.*) At that moment, I longed, aching, for her to be there beside me. (*His rêverie is shattered by the doorbell ringing.*) Françoise! Françoise, the door! She must be out! (*He goes out, and returns, wild-eyed, holding a letter.*) I’m going mad! What is this, a bad joke? (*He sinks into a chair.*) A letter from Albertine? (*Trembling, he feverishly opens the envelope. He remains seated, reading the letter.*)

*A appears as at the start of the play, a dim ghostly presence behind gauze.*

A: My dear friend, I am sure Andrée will accept your offer with joy and that she will be very happy with you, and as your companion will appreciate your admirable influence. I know you have always found her attractive. However, if you have not yet written to Andrée, would you consent to take me back? Would it be too late for me to return to live with you? I shall abide by your decision but I beg you to let me know without delay. If you want me back, I shall take the next train. Yours very affectionately, Albertine.

*We hear A’s pre-recorded voice as the light on her gradually dims until she disappears. M sits until the end with his head in his hands.*

Voice of A: How long will it be before you forget me, Marcel? How will you remember me? As a lover or a liar? Memory can be so cruel, can’t it? How long will you go on suffering from a love that exists no more? Shall I appear to you at night in the moonlight and in your dreams? And in the evening sky we used to gaze at together? Will you see me in your arms every time you make love to another woman? Shall I haunt you every time you hear the music that bound us together? For how long, Marcel, how long... how long...

*Her voice fades into a few bars of the sonata’s “phrase” (Track 1). Fade out. Dim to black.*

THE END