

In Search of Lost Time

By Marcel Proust

In Search of Lost Time is the longest novel ever written (according to Guinness World Records). It has 7 long volumes, totaling 1.2 million words.

It is a modernist novel. The narrator and main character is not named until volume 5 where his name is Marcel. The author draws heavily from his own life, but the book is not an autobiography nor a roman à clef. The main character has similarities with the author but is a fictional character.

The book is realistic, but it is not realism. Parts of the book depict scenes with almost documentary precision. It portrays experiences in a way that feels true to life. Most of the characters would not serve any purpose in a story-based book. That was innovative for the time of the novel.

Literary realism (such as Balzac and Flaubert, which are referenced often in the novel) seek objective narration. In Search of Lost Time does not. It portrays subjectivity and makes deep dives into characters' psychology.

Except for one chapter in volume 1, there is usually no omniscient narrator, though such a narrator appears once in a while, sometimes for just one sentence.

It is not stream of consciousness unless you want to broaden the definition. It presents consciousness in its own way. It is written in a way that we understand what the character feels and why. It doesn't hide faulty or biased reasoning. It's the characters that are thinking, not the author. The thoughts are sometimes from within the moment, sometimes reflecting on a moment, and sometimes reworked by a later, reflecting mind (of the author's). We will see many examples of how memory affects consciousness.

Proust believes that a book says nothing about its creator. A good author can write a book about something completely different from themselves. That idea is part of the modernist movement. They want to focus on consciousness instead of biography. The Hamlet chapter in Ulysses conveys has the same idea. After In Search of Lost Time, Proust wrote essays on that concept.

Some sentences are long. Such sentences start with some premise, idea or observation, then add one or more clauses to make it perfectly clear what the author means before he continues the reasoning, which leads to a conclusion. The sentences are grammatically correct, but they can be difficult to read due to their length and clauses. There are frequently thought-provoking sentences or allegories that you have to stop and think about and read several times.

Before reading In Search of Lost Time, I thought that its length was due to lengthy descriptions written just to impress, like maybe a 30-page description of what the ocean looks like. That is not the case. Things really are happening all the time. Almost every paragraph is important. The reason that the book is long is simply that the story is long and that there is a lot to say.

Because of flashbacks and the structure in general, the novel is not always chronological. For example, in the first chapter, Swann is introduced as a family friend, but in the second chapter, we see a flashback to the first time Marcel saw Swann, and the chapter after that is about Swann's life before Marcel was even born. It is logical when you read it, though. This summary is written in the order I think is most logical. It's not always the order in which events happen in the book.

Sometimes, new information appears about a scene that you already thought was finished (a bit similar to William Faulkner's writing). That is rare, though.

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Petite madeleine

The book starts with a chapter called overture. Marcel writes about things he remembers without much coherence. He seems to make a short summary of everything that is about to come. He mentions Combray, Balbec, Paris and Venice. He casually mentions several characters that will not appear until later volumes.

When he is old (middle-aged), Marcel dips a petite madeleine (a pastry) in tea. That triggers a memory of a past time when he ate the same type of pastry with the same type of tea in Aunt Léonie's bedroom. The memory is so vivid that it's as if he was there again.

Proust invents a new term to explain it: involuntary memory, as opposed to voluntary memory. Everyone can recall *voluntary* memories, like *that smells like my aunt's house*. Most of life is lived with voluntary memory, which is our brain remembering facts. It is intellectualized, conceptual memory. In an involuntary memory, you lose yourself and truly experience the memory. You don't just think about the memory.

"I experienced ... the present moment and at the same time ... a distant moment, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and I was made to doubt whether I was in the one or the other. The truth surely was that the being within me which had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal, and this being made its appearance only when, through one of these identifications of the present with the past, it was likely to find itself in the one and only medium in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say: outside time."

They joy of involuntary memory feels eternal, as if your past is alive again. We experience two different points in time simultaneously, so we have stepped outside time. Alternatively, we exist both in the past and in the present.

The term involuntary memory has since become an accepted psychological term. The effect has been dubbed the Proust effect. Specific sensory cues unexpectedly trigger intense, vivid and emotional autobiographical memories that are nostalgic, detailed and bring back past feelings of comfort and joy.

Involuntary memories cannot be recreated at will. They seem to appear at random.

"It is a labor in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we [die]."

"their essential character was that I was not free to choose them, that such as they were, they were given to me."

"We possess all our memories, but not the faculty of recalling them".

Involuntary memories are so rare that Marcel experiences them only a few times in this life. All will be listed in this summary. Note once again that the involuntary memory triggered by the petite madeleine happens in the future, close to the end of the final volume, although it is described early in the first volume. The middle-aged Marcel gets an involuntary memory of his young self. And it's only that specific memory that is relived; Marcel eating a petite madeleine at his aunt's house. Many readers seem to misinterpret that. They believe that eating the petite madeleine gives Marcel a whole bunch of memories. That is not supported by the text. The book only says that it gives him one particular memory, the one from his aunt's bedroom.

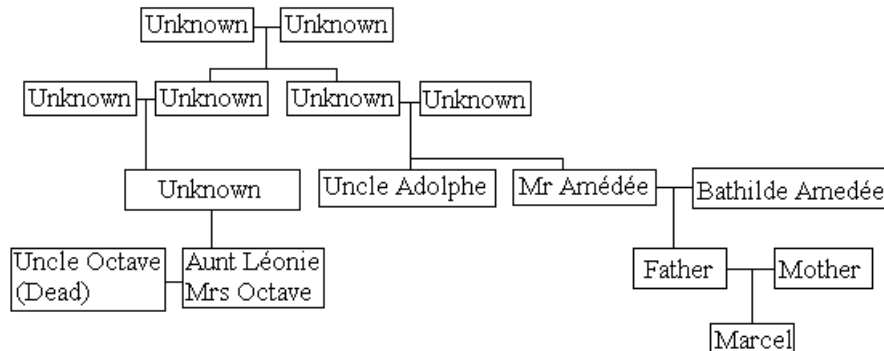
Proust makes a simile about a Celtic tribal idea that ancestors (memories) temporarily come back to life when you touch their gravestones (find a memory trigger).

"there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognized them the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and return to share our life."

Combray

After the overture, Marcel tells of his memories in Combray where he ate the first petite madeleine in 1883 when he was 5 years old. Combray is a fictional village modelled after real-world Illiers (which was later renamed Illiers-Combray in honor of Proust).

Marcel's family is middle class, which means quite rich in that time. They have a house and a servant (Francoise). They live in Paris, but they also have a summer house in Combray which they visit often. Marcel's grandparents live in Combray.



Marcel's memories from Combray are from 1883 (age 5) to 1892 (age 14).

Marcel describes at length his bedtime routine when he was 5 years old. Every evening, he wants his mother to kiss him goodnight. He feels like he is stealing her attention, but he needs it. He knows that he is manipulating her (a recurring theme) to do what he wants. He gives examples of memories where his bedtime routine was interrupted and how that affected him psychologically. If his mother can't kiss him goodnight, he is devastated. Father tells mother that Marcel needs to grow out of that need, but when he sees how sad Marcel is, he thinks it's okay that the mother sleeps in the room once more. Marcel feels on the one hand satisfied in that he possesses his mother, but on the other hand guilty that this is not really what she wants.

To comfort Marcel when he is alone in his room, they give him a magic lantern that projects pictures on the walls, usually pictures from Geneviève de Brabant, a medieval story. The images make the objects in the room that were previously familiar look different. As the lantern turns, the objects look different too, as if the light is changing the world. Marcel feels like it is overwhelming.

Marcel enjoys reading. He reads plays and fantasizes about which plays he wants to go to. Both examples he gives (Oedipus Rex and François le Champi) are about difficult mother-son relations, which is fitting for the book's early theme. Marcel mentions some famous plays and actors. He enjoys regular books too.

Théodore is a grocer's boy and cantor in Combray. He will reappear here and there in the story.

Francoise

Francoise is the servant. She is a cook and a maid. She is trustworthy, assertive and confident, even dominant. She is simple-minded and uneducated. She tends to use words that don't exist.

"we're allied to them"

"Do you want me to extinguish it?"

"sorted all Monsieur's paperies for him"

"all those people are nothing but copiators"

Her reactions feel natural but simplistic.

She has a moral code. She believes that family is sacred. Outsiders are less important. She is extremely loyal and compassionate toward her own people, but indifferent or even cruel toward others (for example, shutting the door in front of them). She sees suffering as unavoidable, something you must simply endure.

There is a certain contradiction in the code. She may condemn cruelty yet commit it without seeing any problem. Her code is situational, based on relationships, not abstract principles. She is a model of human morality in miniature. In the real world, people don't follow abstract ethics. People think and judge based on attachments and emotions.

The kitchen-maid is pregnant. Francoise considers it shameful. Marcel compares it to a drawing by Giotto, depicting a figure of charity, because they look similar. It's an example of how art can change perception. The

reality of the situation is not like the painting. Everyone judges the maid, even pity her, but no one does anything for her. Françoise admits that the maid's situation is unfortunate, but it's natural and must be endured.

Aunt Léonie

Aunt Léonie does not live with the family. She lives in a house in Combray. Aunt Léonie self-pities and wants others to take care of her. She deliberately plans how to get pity from others. She talks loudly to herself about it when she thinks no one hears. She is portrayed as insufferable, but Marcel is young and likes her anyway because he has good memories with her.

She has a maid, Eulalie, who comes every Sunday and feeds her hypochondria by listening to self-pity. She feeds Aunt Léonie's self-pity.

The section about Aunt Léonie is itself long as some novels. Proust really dwells on the subject. He describes how she lies in her bed, her interactions with Eulalie, what Françoise thinks about it, and so on.

Being an invalid in all of Marcel's memories, Aunt Léonie dies at the end of that section. Marcel inherits her fortune. He will never have to work a day in his life.

Uncle Adolphe

He used to live with Marcel's family in his own room in the ground floor, but he is now estranged due to an unfortunate event.

In a flashback, Marcel walks in on Uncle Adolphe when he is with a prostitute, a "lady in pink". Marcel doesn't realize that she is a prostitute, so he treats her like a proper lady, which is cringy to Adolphe and the prostitute. Adolphe tells Marcel to not tell anyone about the girl, but Marcel tells his parents. It leads to a quarrel. Adolphe leaves Combray and never returns.

The family locks up Adolphe's study (Marcel calls it Adolphe's sanctum). After that, Marcel instead reads in the garden. He hides books under a chestnut tree.

Adolphe plays no further part in the novel. We learn in volume 3 that he has died.

Church

Marcel describes a church in Combray. It is visible from everywhere in town. The church is very much about art. It is described as a giant work of art. It is embedded in a network of context. It's not just a church. It has historical layers (Gothic additions, restorations), Marcel's personal memories, and its cultural meaning (religion, art, identity). He notes that the windows look different at different hours of the day. Like the magic lantern, light transforms perception.

Swann

Swann is a middle-class family friend. He lives in Paris, but his country house (Tansonville) is in Combray. At the start of the novel, Swann has recently become rich and is actually part of the upper class, but Marcel's family don't know that, so they still treat him crudely.

Swann is married to Odette. Marcel's family doesn't like Odette because they think she is cheating on Swann with Swann's friend Charlus. Therefore, Marcel is not allowed to visit Swann.

Swann and Odette have a daughter, Gilberte, who is Marcel's age. Because Marcel cannot visit Swann, he can never befriend Gilberte.

Around 1887 (age 9), Marcel's family walks past Swann's house. Marcel sees Gilberte for the first time. He describes her appearance at length (black eyes and fair, reddish hair). He feels a certain longing for her. She at first ignores Marcel and his family, but he notices her "staring out of the corner of her eye in my direction ... and a half-hidden smile". He interprets it as contempt, as if he is not worthy of looking at her. That makes him infatuated with her. Odette, Swann and Charlus appear too. It is the first time Marcel sees those four characters.

Gilberte and Odette fascinate Marcel because they are forbidden.

From his first memory of Gilberte (from when Marcel was young in Combray), Marcel replaces her eyes with blue eyes because that makes her look more beautiful. He becomes a bit obsessed with her, but when he eventually sees her from a closer distance, he realizes that her eyes aren't blue and her appearance is ordinary.

Charlus

Mr de Charlus is a friend of Swann's. He was once married, but his wife died. In spite of once being married, and in spite of being a real manly man, Charlus is gay. Marcel doesn't know that, though. In spite of his aristocratic class, Charlus' personality is informal and crude. His behavior is often erratic, unpredictable and unexplainable.

Bloch

Bloch is Marcel's friend in Paris. He is a Jew, so Marcel's grandfather forbids him from visiting the house.

Bergotte

Bloch, Swann and Marcel's grandparents recommend him to read books by the author Bergotte. Marcel enjoys the books. Bergotte becomes his favorite author.

Bergotte is already friends with Swann, so he spends time with Gilberte, Swann's daughter. Marcel can't meet Bergotte because he can't go to Swann's.

Two paths

There are two walking paths in Combray, each named for the house it passes by. Both lie near beautiful nature. Each path starts is on opposite sides of the summer house.

Swann's Way, also known as Méséglise way (the name of a nearby village), passes by Swann's country house (Tansonville). It is an easy, shorter walk. Marcel describes a path of hawthorn trees on Swann's way. They give him a sudden joy that he can't interpret. Marcel will have several such experiences in his life. The hawthorns makes Marcel feel like there is something else there, something he can't see.

Guermites way leads to the Guermites Castle. The Guermites family is the highest nobility. They live in Paris, but their castle is near Combray. It is a more difficult, longer walk. Marcel never walks it to the end. When Marcel thinks about the Guermites Way, he considers the end of it (the castle) unreachable and the inhabitants as mythical as stained-glass windows. He remembers such a window in a chapel. It portrays Gilbert the Bad, a former Lord of the Guermites family. It is described in an impressionist way. It has different colors from different angles and different times of day. Marcel dreams of the Guermites daughter (Princesse de Laumes). Like the castle, she is unreachable.

The first volume is called Swann's Way. The third volume is called The Guermites Way. They represent different paths of life. Marcel cannot imagine combining the two paths. He sees each path as a different way of thinking.

The most obvious difference between the paths is that they represent different social classes: bourgeois and aristocracy.

Swann's Way represents love while Guermites Way represents social status. Some people marry for love while others marry for social status, the latter which is typical of the Guermites family.

Swann's Way may represent things you experience first-hand, such as the hawthorns. One downside of that is that the experience lacks an interpretation. You perceive without understanding. Guermites Way approaches it from the opposite side: they have ready-made interpretation (titles, nobility, history, social codes) and they force it onto reality. It is an interpretation, and it is understandable, but it is false. They have rigid rules for how you should behave, but the rules are arbitrary. They limit authenticity.

Another moment like the hawthorn is when Marcel sits in a carriage and rides past twin steeples of a church in Martinville, a nearby village. They give him a certain feeling that only art can bring. It makes him want to write to express himself. He wants to become a writer. Young Marcel writes an impressionist description of the scene.

Vinteuil

Mr Vinteuil is a composer. He was once the piano teacher of Marcel's grandmother's sisters.

The book has frequent references to various art forms. It is important for the eventual conclusion. Each art form is represented by a specific artist alongside real-world examples of artists.

Bergotte	Author
Elstir	Impressionist painter
Vinteuil	Composer
Berma	Actress
Morel	Violinist
Norpois	Art of diplomacy

Vinteuil has a daughter, Mlle Vinteuil. Marcel thinks she looks boyish, but Vinteuil is proud of her beauty.

Vinteuil dies early in the novel. His daughter and her female lover mock him (spitting on his image) when Marcel spies on them. Marcel often mentions that event, calling it Montjouvain because that's the name of Vinteuil's house where it happened.

Princesse de Laumes

She is an aristocrat in Combray. Her first name is Oriane. She will become a major character. She is liked by all. She gets along well with Swann because both are a bit pessimistic. She is married to her cousin, Prince de Laumes.

Mr de Norpois

He is a wealthy diplomat colleague of Marcel's father (who is the permanent secretary at the ministry).

Norpois is part of high society, knowledgeable in politics and art. Norpois takes Marcel to a theatre so he can see his favorite actress, Berma, for the first time. The play is called *Phèdre*. Marcel is disappointed with her acting. Once again, reality does not live up to his preconceived ideals. He applauds at the end anyway for some reason.

"my applause sprang not from my actual impression but was connected in some way with my preconceived ideas, with the pleasure that I found in saying to myself: At last, I am listening to Berma."

Norpois thinks Bergotte is nothing special. It is the first time Marcel's aesthetic judgement is greatly challenged. Norpois encourages Marcel's father to let Marcel pursue a writing career, something the father was unwilling to do before.

Swann in Love

We now jump back in time. The first volume is called Swann's Way. The majority of the volume is Swann's love story. It has an omniscient third-person narrator. It takes place in 1877-78, before Marcel was born in 1878.

Verdurins

The Verdurin family is upper class, but not nobility and nowhere near as rich as nobility either. They have a salon. A salon is a particularly large drawing room where many people can meet and mingle. A salon is "the priceless appanage of truly superior women".

The Verdurins are portrayed as dumb and annoying. They consider themselves modern in the sense that they reject titles, nobility and snobbery, but they create their own exclusive circle called the little clan, or the faithful:

- Cottard, a skilled doctor
- Brichot, a snobby professor
- Biche, a painter. He takes this name while a clan member. His real name is Elstir.
- An unnamed pianist
- Odette de Cr cy
- Saniette, paleographer.

The clan members make themselves appear more important than they really are. Mme Verdurin falls for it because she is vain. She likes the attention. It's like a game. She likes that the clan members are loyal and dependent on her for their social life.

Their closed circle works like an aristocracy, which is hypocritical. They constantly compare themselves to real nobility.

Saniette is described as timid. He is shy and has a speech disorder. Others mock him.

In volume 1, it is stated that Forcheville is his brother-in-law. In volume 4, they are instead cousins, which is probably a mistake by the author.

Cottard becomes Marcel's doctor (among several other doctors). Marcel has a life-long health issue that forces him to lie in bed often.

Odette is a social climber. Her ambition is to join the aristocracy, but she doesn't have much to offer. She has no training, for example in music. She knows Swann from the high society of Paris. Swann is rich, so he is a good target. Odette invites him to the Verdurins.

Swann in love

Swann at this point is a bachelor. He seduces women left and right. Marcel's grandfather dislikes Swann because of that behavior.

Swann tends to compare women to paintings. He doesn't really see them as people.

Swann accepts an invitation to the Verdurins. He likes to spend time there, but not as a clan member.

Swann doesn't find Odette attractive.

"she had struck Swann not, certainly, as being devoid of beauty, but as endowed with a kind of beauty which left him indifferent, which aroused in him no desire, which gave him, indeed, a sort of physical repulsion".

However, Odette clearly likes Swann. That makes him intrigued, so they spend more time together. An unnamed "old friend" tells Swann that Odette is difficult to seduce. That does something to Swann's mind. It makes him interested in her.

Swann is naïve about Odette's interest in him. What she finds attractive is his money.

Spending time with Odette becomes a habit that shapes Swann's memory. He realizes that she resembles a figure in a Botticelli painting. He projects that figure onto Odette. He builds up an ideal about who Odette is. Swann falls in love with the Odette that he imagines (not the real Odette).

One enjoyment at the Verdurins is to listen to music played by their pianist. One of the compositions he plays is a sonata by Vinteuil. Swann tells Odette that he loves the sonata. Odette makes the musician play the sonata every time they meet. That makes Swann associate the sonata with Odette. Swann calls that sonata the theme song of their relationship. It is an example of how art can trigger memories.

Swann never realizes that the composer is the Vinteuil he knows personally. He assumes it's some other Vinteuil because the one he knows is a "silly old fool".

One night, Swann goes out looking for Odette, hoping to find her and pretending it's a random meeting. His plan is like looking for a needle in a haystack. He never finds her, but he knows he couldn't have stayed at home either because he would be restless thinking about her.

Odette is at first interested in Swann, perhaps even a little bit in love. She says she is always free and that he can stop by any time of the day. She lies to the Verdurins saying she is not feeling well, but in truth she just wants to spend the day alone with Swann. Swann notices the lie.

For a short time, they have a passionate relationship. The flower cattleya becomes a symbol of their relationship. "Doing a cattleya" comes to mean making love.

Swann has higher social status than the Verdurins and the clan members. He is well connected. Among his friends are Charlus (who is a noble), Princesse de Laumes, Prince of Wales and the President of France. Swann hides his connections to fit in better at the Verdurins. The Verdurins initially like Swann, but they wish he was a clan member instead of an independent visitor. After a while, the Verdurins change their mind about him. The seed to their resentment starts like this.

Mme Verdurin: [Odette] makes out that she can't, that she did in fact have a crush on him at first, but he's always shy with her, and that makes her shy with him.

Mr Verdurin: I beg to differ from you. I don't entirely care for the gentleman. I feel he puts on airs.

"Mme Verdurin's whole body stiffened, and her eyes stared blankly as though she had suddenly been turned into a statue; a device which enabled her to appear not to have caught the sound of that unutterable phrase which seemed to imply that it was possible for people to "put on airs" in their house, in other words consider themselves "superior" to them."

They are right too. Swann is richer, better connected, more intelligent and better educated than all the Verdurins and their little clan. His taste in art is superior to theirs. He is acting the way he does to adapt to them, something he is skilled at. He is lowering himself to their level. He is willing to do that just to see Odette. Odette is not that different from the Verdurins. They are low class and have poor taste. They go to childish theatre performances that Swann finds simplistic, made for the dumb masses.

The Verdurins and their little clan are an allegory for high society as a whole. Throughout the novel, high society is portrayed as shallow and false. It is a time when the aristocracy is in decline. Titles no longer have any power because France is a democracy. Titles still hold sway socially, though.

Swann is not dependent on the Verdurins to see Odette. He sees her independently of them. He changes parts of his personality to better fit their relationship, as if he was an actor in a story. He changes his tastes and his daily routine. He visits her often. Every thought in his life is devoted to thinking about Odette. He thinks about how to make her love him more. For example, he deliberately avoids her at daytime, so they don't spend *too* much time together, although he wants to be with her all the time. One can't help but thinking that the way Swann thinks of Odette is similar to ways that all men have thought about a woman at some point.

This is a typical sentence that captures Swann's state of mind.

"Meanwhile, the concert had begun again, and Swann saw that he could not now go before the end of the new number. He suffered greatly from being shut up among all these people whose stupidity and absurdities wounded him all the more cruelly since, being ignorant of his love, incapable, had they known of it, of taking any interest, or of doing more than smile at it as at some childish joke, or deplore it as an act of insanity, they made it appear to him in the aspect of a subjective state which existed for himself alone, whose reality there was nothing external to confirm; he suffered overwhelmingly, to the point at which even the sound of the instruments made him want to cry, from having to prolong his exile in this place to which Odette would never come, in which no one, nothing was aware of her existence, from which she was entirely absent."

Because Swann loves Odette, his mind tells him that he also loves the Verdurins. They enabled him to meet Odette and court her.

By the time Swann starts being obsessed with Odette, she has mostly lost interest in him. Mr de Forcheville, a new clan member, flirts with Odette openly at the gatherings, causing Swann to become jealous. The Verdurins try to matchmake Odette with Forcheville and keep it hidden from Swann. They try to avoid Swann. Due to jealousy, Swann tries to control Odette. He wants to know where she is going and with whom. He considers separating her from the Verdurins altogether.

One evening, the Verdurins want to drive Odette home, but Swann feels like they are trying to take her from him, so he insists on driving her himself. It's one of the last nails in the coffin between Swann and the Verdurins. The last nail is probably when Swann realizes the Verdurins are arranging a party that is kept secret from him. When Swann realizes that the Verdurins dislike him, he instantly goes from loving them to hating them.

Odette asks Swann not to mention her name in public. Swann agrees to everything Odette asks, including that. She obviously has something to hide, something that other people know but Swann doesn't.

Swann finds several clues (letters, meetings, doorbell rings, secretive behavior) that indicate Odette is unfaithful. He feels jealous, but he does not confront her about it. He spies a bit, for example reading a letter from Odette to Forcheville. In the letter, Odette apologizes to Forcheville that she stood him up the other day when she did not answer the doorbell. She also reminds him that he forgot his cigarette case at her place. Swann wants to interpret the letter as harmless, but he realizes she is cheating on him (although he is kind of in denial about it). Once at her place, he hears a sound from her room and suspects someone is there, but Odette throws a vase and gets angry about his jealousy, so he never finds out. One time when Swann comes over, Odette refuses to open, pretending not to be home. One time when he comes over, he meets Forcheville in Odette's apartment, but he still does not fully accept that she is cheating on him.

Swann believes Odette when she lies, over and over, but there is a certain doubt growing in his mind. He never confronts her because he thinks she will get angry. He recognizes her face when she lies because he has seen her lie before (to the Verdurins).

Swann gives Odette presents and helps her pay off debts. She gets new debts. He is buying her love, and he doesn't mind. His mind is too desperate to keep her.

"If anyone had said to him at the beginning, It's your position that attracts her, or at this stage, It's your money that she's really in love with, he would probably not have believed the suggestion. But even if he had believed it to be true, it might not have caused him any suffering to discover that Odette's love for him was based on a foundation more lasting than the charms or the qualities which she might see in him: namely, self-interest, a self-interest which would postpone for ever the fatal day when she might be tempted to bring their relations to an end."

Swann realizes that Odette is not that attractive anymore (like when he first met her), but he attaches himself to the memory of how she looked when he was at most in love with her. He looks at photos of those days. It's as if Odette is just a figment of his imagination. Nevertheless, he is still obsessed with that figment, so he wants to stay with her, even when he later realizes that she is even "ugly". He is selecting which memories to keep and which to ignore.

Odette joins the Verdurins on a leisure trip to Pierrefonds, a town where people go to have a relaxed vacation. Swann feels like he is forbidden to travel there because Odette is there, but he wants to travel there to spy on her. He makes an excuse to visit an old friend nearby, Marquise de Forestelle. Swann imagines how they would walk past Odette in Pierrefonds, and she would become angry about being spied on. Therefore, Swann cancels the whole plan and stays in Paris. He hopes that Odette will ring his doorbell when she returns to Paris. He reads about Pierrefonds and imagines what Odette does there. The author ends the section saying that Odette has returned early to Paris. She is not even in Pierrefonds anymore. "As a matter of fact, she had not even given him a thought."

Odette has affairs with many men, including Forcheville. Everyone knows Odette is cheating on Swann. Swann is in denial about the cheating, even when others tell him about it.

Because Charlus is gay, Swann sees him as the perfect person to manipulate Odette. Swann asks Charlus to put in a good word for him and to try to make Odette invite Swann over. It fails as she does not want to invite Swann over.

After that, Swann enlists the help of Marcel's uncle Adolphe, but the uncle tries to force himself on Odette when Swann is away. Odette tells Swann about the event. It's not totally clear if it really happened. Swann considers challenging Adolphe to a duel, but in the end all he does is refuse to shake hands with him.

Swann even considers asking Forcheville for advice, but he opts not to.

Odette is a symbol of the tortures of love. She enchants Swann, but she is a vile seductress. Swann tries to structure his feelings for Odette like a railway and a timetable. He tries to compartmentalize his feelings.

Swann sees Odette more and more rarely. He keeps sending her gifts to make her interested in him. She doesn't really want to see him anymore.

Marquise de Saint-Euverte hosts a musical soirée for Swann, Charlus, Marquis de Bréauté, Marquis de Forestelle, and several other minor characters. Swann asks Marquise de Saint-Euverte to visit Odette next day to try to entice her to do something together with the Marquise and Swann. At the party, Princess de Laumes makes an unexpected appearance. As they listen to music, Swann thinks about Vinteuil and what he must have gone through when he wrote the music. He thinks about music's importance to memory and enjoyment. While listening, he realizes that Odette no longer lives him and never will. That is the first step in Swann's return to mental clarity.

Swann gets an anonymous letter that says Odette is the mistress of several men, including Forcheville. It also says that she indulges in lesbian orgies. Swann speculates who could have sent the letter, but he finds a way to discredit each suspicion, hoping it's just a prank. He finds Charlus to be the most likely sender, believing the motive to be a misguided attempt at saving Swann from pain. The letter is the second step in Swann's return to mental clarity.

Swann doesn't have much more to lose, so he confronts Odette about her infidelity. She admits that she was unfaithful, but she is clearly still lying about it, saying it was just two or three times and that she doesn't remember with whom, when or where. The first night Swann and Odette made love, she had already gone on a date with Forcheville that same day (in volume 2, Swann wonders if she even slept with him), and she lied to Swann about it to not upset him. That makes Swann finally change his mind. After a long reflection, Swann makes a huge realization about how he deceived himself. He realizes that after he made up his mind about the ideal of Odette, he formed no new memories of her. She was the Botticelli painting in his mind, but not in reality. When new evidence came into light, he clung to the Odette in his memory. In reality, Odette was not his type. He understands the illusion. He gradually falls out of love.

The chapter ends there. After that, Swann returns to high society without Odette. But we already know that in the future, Swann and Odette are married and have a daughter. How that happens is barely mentioned. Swann no longer loves Odette. Perhaps he continues the relationship out of habit, familiarity and social convenience. In volume 2, we learn that Swann demanded that as a condition for marriage, Odette can only visit the Verdurins once per year.

In volume 7, Odette admits that she fell in love with Swann after he had stopped loving her. But he also had wealth and social status, so it's understandable from her perspective regardless.

Ironically, Swann marries Odette when his passion has died. They have a daughter, Gilberte. Swann is devoted to giving her a good life. He wants to introduce her to high society.

Odette wishes for Swann to give her a salon, so she does. Odette becomes a respected host. People from high society visit the house, including Mme Bontemps and her niece Albertine, who Mme Bontemps often brags about. Bergotte is the center piece of the salon.

A rival salon gets electricity and a telephone. Odette envies them but calls it sour grapes.

Proust's view of love

Swann's story is the first of several that portray the way Proust sees love, desire and memory.

It is impossible to see reality as it really is because the mind is always influenced by desire, illusion, imagination and self-deception.

“there is a vast difference between the real impression which we have had of a thing and the artificial impression of it which we form for ourselves when we attempt by an act of will to imagine it”.

That imagination is heavily influenced by your memory.

“Even the simple act which we describe as 'seeing someone we know' is, to some extent, an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognize and to which we listen.”

But the memories are memories of times where you were also clouded by imagination. Just as you can't see the objective world, you cannot remember the objective world. Every perception and every memory is subjective and influenced by imagination.

Our mind creates its own idea of people, objects and concepts. People are sometimes surprised by others' behavior because their expectations of those people are illusions.

“in all perception there exists a barrier as a result of which there is never absolute contact between reality and our intelligence”.

Therefore, the way we imagine a person does not exist in reality. Swann created an Odette in his mind that was not the real-world equivalent.

She is “existing not outside but within ourselves”.

Swann “had been a lover of phantoms”.

“when we are in love with a woman we simply project into her a state of our own soul, that the important thing is, therefore, not the worth of the woman but the depth of the state”.

“love is nothing more than the association of the face of a girl ... with the heartbeats inseparable from an endless, vain expectation, and from some trick that she has played upon us.”

“we feel that it is not a yard away from us but within us that the beloved creature was”.

“To the Gilberte whom I kept within me. I ought to have reminded myself that the other, the real Gilberte, was perhaps entirely different from mine”.

“would the woman herself, if she were not completed by these occult forces, make us give ourselves so much trouble, when, once she has left us, we are unable to say how she was dressed and realise that we never even looked at her?”

Meaning: Would we care so much about a woman if our love for her didn't come from hidden inner forces rather than from who she actually is?

There is a quote from Proust that floats around:

“It is our imagination that's responsible for love, not the other person”.

Proust probably never wrote exactly that, but it summarizes the concept as clearly as it gets:

The way you feel about them is about you, not them. Your psychological needs influence it greatly. For example, Marcel's goodnight kiss from his mother is a need. That need will persist throughout his life. Marcel has a need to possess people. His mother is the first he wants to possess. All his future love may be a manifestation of that need.

As imagination runs amok, it can lead to obsession. Swann learns to associate pain with love, which is illogical. He has deceived himself to believe that pain is love. Eventually when he hears the sonata, it just gives him feelings of self-pity, which he learns to, in some way, enjoy. The argument is further strengthened by the fact that Swann doesn't really know the real Odette. She is just a painting to him. Odette was a prostitute when he met her.

"This malady which Swann's love had become had so proliferated, was so closely interwoven with all his habits, with all his actions, with his thoughts, his health, his sleep, his life, even with what he hoped for after his death, was so utterly inseparable from him."

There is a funny scene where two characters are obsessed with one girl each, but both of them find the other's girl ugly.

We don't love a person. We are in love with being in love. The person is replaceable.

"In the people whom we love, there is [inherently] a certain dream which we cannot always clearly discern but which we pursue. It was my belief in Bergotte and in Swann which had made me love Gilberte, my belief in Gilbert the Bad which had made me love Mme de Guermantes ... In any case, just because we are furiously pursuing a dream in a succession of individuals, our loves for people cannot fail to be more or less of an aberration."

"In his younger days, a man dreams of possessing the heart of the woman whom he loves; later, the feeling that he possesses the heart of a woman may be enough to make him fall in love with her."

"sadly that this love of ours, in so far as it is love for one particular creature, is not perhaps a very real thing, since if the association of pleasant or unpleasant trains of thought can attach it for a time to a woman so as to make us believe that it has been inspired by her, in a necessary sequence of effect to cause, yet when we detach ourselves, deliberately or unconsciously, from those associations, this love, as though it were indeed a spontaneous thing and sprang from ourselves alone, will revive in order to bestow itself on another woman."

"there are people indeed ... for whom all the things that have a fixed value, assessable by others, fortune, success, high positions, do not count; what they must have, is phantoms. They sacrifice all the rest, leave no stone unturned, make everything else subservient to the capture of some phantom. But this soon fades away; then they run after another, prepared to return later on to the first."

You don't love the other person. You love how you feel when you think about them. Proust calls the concept amour-propre (there is no translation, so "self-love" has become the English term in spite of already having a different meaning).

"my love was not so much a love for her as a love in myself"

"When I saw them, when I heard their voices, I could find nothing in them which resembled my love and could account for it"

You desire to appear good, strong, and so on, both to others and to yourself (partly due to vanity). Your illusion of the other person can make you feel some of those feelings of self-value.

All points so far indicate that love and desire come from memory. Swann tries to remember what Odette was like before she started cheating on him. When evidence of the contrary appears, Swann goes back to memories instead of accepting the truth. He changes his memory only to the extent that it incorporates the new information rather than questioning the whole memory.

You can only love what you don't have. Once you have something, there is no tension around it. It becomes a habit that you take for granted. When you take something for granted, passion for that thing is lost.

"We love only what we do not wholly possess".

"like a sea-shell to which one ceases to pay any attention when it is always there on one's chest of drawers, and once one has parted with it, either by giving it away or by losing it, one begins to think about again".

A good example is how an insomniac must love sleep, or a starving person must love food. Love is desire for something you don't have. If you are not an insomniac, you may value sleep less and perhaps even find it annoying to have to sleep. If food is unlimited and always ready, you may stop thinking about survival.

For the same reason, we are bound to be disappointed when we get what we want. For example, imagine a dream vacation. The vacation is perfect before it happens. When you eventually go, reality sets in. The train is delayed and boring. You have to stand in a queue. The hotel room is smaller than in the pictures. It rains outside.

An example we have already seen is when Marcel wants his mother to kiss him goodnight. When he finally gets what he wants, he feels sad and guilty.

The idea is not so simple as to claim that you fall out of love when you get the girl. Rather, love is driven by jealousy, unpredictability, pain and anxiety. Once love is a certainty, those things disappear, and therefore so does the passion. Love is “reciprocal torture”.

“When the fulfillment desire comes within our reach, we will desire it no longer.”

“Live with a woman altogether and you will soon cease to see any of the things that made you love her; though I must add that these two sundered elements can be reunited by jealousy. “

“Afraid of losing her, we forget all the others. Sure of keeping her, we compare her with those others whom at once we prefer to her.”

Logically, jealousy should not be a requirement for love, but for Proust, psychologically, intense, obsessive love almost always involves jealousy.

“Jealousy, which prolongs the course of love, is not capable of containing many more ingredients than the other products of the imagination.”

Jealousy is not a side effect of love. It is the other way around. Jealousy the driving force. When love is secure and calm, jealousy fades, so the love becomes dull or disappears due to psychology. Jealousy is caused by uncertainty. You don't know if you really possess the girl, so your mind gets obsessed with possessing her.

It may have to do with the effort required to get things. Somehow, our brains associate effort with reward.

“I was inclined to overrate the simplest pleasures because of the difficulties that sprang up in the way of my attaining them”.

Things we get for free do not motivate us.

“if prostitutes themselves (provided that we know them to be prostitutes) attract us so little, it is not because they are less beautiful than other women, it is because they are ready and waiting; the very object that we are seeking to attain, they offer us already ... they are not conquests.”

When Swann finally gets to marry Odette, he no longer has passion for her.

Those points combined make love dangerous. When you realize that someone is out of reach, you love them even more, and you become obsessed. Once you get them, you realize that your ideal of them was a false, preconceived imagination. Reality sets in, so you no longer desire them. But if you have them without fully possessing them, such as if they seem to not really want you back, or they appear to have secrets, then you can still love them because they are not fully possessed. They are out of reach. Thus, jealousy causes love.

Psychology either undermines our chances for happiness, or it changes our hearts so that even if we do attain what we seek, we are disappointed and unhappy.

“we continue to struggle and hope for a little longer. But happiness can never be achieved. If we succeed in overcoming the force of circumstances,”

That refers to the external battleground, such as getting the girl, getting a new job, completing a task. Once we achieve that external thing, desire for that thing ends.

“nature at once shifts the battleground, placing it within ourselves, and effects a gradual change in our hearts until they desire something other than what they are about to possess...”

We want to be happy, but it seems we must first be satisfied. But once we get what we want, we are not really satisfied.

“It is then at the last moment that the possession of our happiness is wrested from us, or rather it is that very possession which nature, with diabolical cunning, uses to destroy our happiness. Having failed in everything related to the sphere of life and action, it is a final impossibility, the psychological impossibility of happiness, that nature creates.”

Proust's view of desire is similar to Schopenhauer's ideas in his book “The World as Will and Representation”. We desire something. That desire makes us miserable. That motivates us to seek out that which we desire. If we get it, we are satisfied, but not happy. We may feel empty or bored, or a new desire replaces the old. We always want something more. We are never satisfied.

“we do not succeed in changing things in accordance with our desires, but gradually our desires change.”

The things that make you feel happy from requited love should also make you anxious because you can lose them. Your emotional state becomes dependent on the other person.

“And yet I ought to have been tormented by what, on the contrary, reassured me, by what I mistook for happiness.”

Therefore, love makes you fragile. As long as things are going well, you may be ignorant of that fragility.

“What makes us so happy is the presence in our heart of an unstable element which we are perpetually arranging to keep in position, and of which we cease almost to be aware so long as it is not displaced.”

Happy love does not remove that fragility. It just hides it. Even if love makes you happy, it is always provisional.

“there is in love a permanent strain of suffering which happiness neutralizes, makes conditional only, procrastinates, but which may at any moment become what it would long since have been had we not obtained what we were seeking, sheer agony.”

Brothel visit

Bloch takes Marcel (“while still a schoolboy”) to a brothel (“disorderly house”). They meet a prostitute that Marcel calls “Rachel when from the lord”. It is the name of an aria about a fallen woman that her father decides to save from execution.

Marcel recognizes his Aunt Léonie’s furniture in the brothel. He remembers that years earlier, he “tasted for the first time the sweets of love” on that sofa with a girl cousin.

Place names

The young Marcel reflects on place names, such as Balbec, Venice and Pisa. They create dreams, expectations and fantasies, which give them an idealistic image that is richer than reality. Marcel fantasizes about places he has not visited. He looks at railway timetables as if they offer portals to different worlds.

“Even from the simplest, the most realistic point of view, the countries which we long for occupy, at any given moment, a far larger place in our actual life than the country in which we happen to be.”

The quote is not just about countries. Almost every point in the previous section above love also describes almost every idea in this section.

For Proust, place-names are not just geography. They are containers of imagination before experience. We see a structure that repeats throughout the novel:

- The name invokes a fantasy, an ideal.
- The encounter with the object itself contradicts, complicates and often disappoints the preconceived ideal.
- The name no longer means what it did before. Some sort of transformation or reinterpretation occurs.

It’s not only about place names. It is about people and ideas too.

Francoise is obsessed with treasures like the Cathedrals of Milan and Rheims (which she will never see).

“Françoise, if I spoke to her about a church in Milan, a town which she would probably never visit, or about the cathedral of Rheims - or even merely that of Arras! - which she would not be able to see since they had been more or less destroyed, spoke enviously of the rich who can afford to visit such treasures or else exclaimed with nostalgic regret: “Ah! how lovely it must have been!” although, after all these years that she had lived in Paris, she had never had the curiosity to go and see Notre-Dame. For Notre-Dame is part of Paris and Paris was the town in which the daily life of Françoise took its course, the town, in consequence, in which it was difficult for our old servant ... to situate the objects of her dreams.”

Marcel dreams of traveling to explore the places he romanticizes. His family plans a trip to Florence, but just then, perhaps due to overexcitement, Marcel falls ill. The doctor says he cannot travel for a long time, nor can he go to the theatre. For a year, all Marcel can do outside the house is take walks in Champs-Élysées, always with Francoise because Marcel is still no more than 10 at that point.

The first involuntary memory happens when Marcel is 10-12 years old. A smell in a public lavatory in Champs-Élysées triggers involuntary memories of his uncle’s room in Combray. Even unpleasant triggers can cause involuntary memories.

“The old, damp walls at the entrance, where I stood waiting for Françoise, emitted a chill and fusty smell ... had just awakened in me, pervaded me with a pleasure not at all of the same character as other pleasures, which leave one more unstable than before, incapable of retaining them, of possessing them, but, on the contrary, with a consistent pleasure on which I could lean for support, delicious, soothing, rich with a truth that was lasting, unexplained and certain.”

“On my way home, I perceived, I suddenly recollected the impression, concealed from me until then, towards which, without letting me distinguish or recognise it, the cold, almost sooty smell of the trellised pavilion had borne me. It was that of my uncle Adolphe's little sitting-room at Combray, which had indeed exhaled the same odour of humidity. But I could not understand, and I postponed the attempt to discover why the recollection of so trivial an impression had given me so keen a happiness.”

It raises curiosity in Marcel. He wants to understand what just happened.

“I should have liked, as long ago in my walks along the Guermantes way, to endeavour to penetrate the charm of this impression which had seized hold of me, and, remaining there motionless, to interrogate this antiquated emanation which invited me not to enjoy the pleasure which it was offering me only as a bonus, but to descend into the underlying reality which it had not yet disclosed to me.”

Gilberte

The events in this section take place around 1892 (age 14) to 1895 (age 17).¹

It is not clear exactly how much time passes between each event.

The Swanns live on Champs-Élysées. When Marcel sees Gilberte in a public park on Champs-Élysées, he reflects on her name. He goes there often to play with her. They also take walks together, though still under adult supervision. Nevertheless, to Marcel it feels real. He falls in love with her and is sad when she can't play with him, for example because the weather is bad, or she has plans with her family. Marcel is obsessed with Gilberte, but he knows that she has no romantic interest in him. She comes from an upper class world. Marcel dreams of receiving a love letter from Gilberte. He imagines the exact words in his head, leading to this funny moment:

“Every evening I would beguile myself by imagining this letter, believing that I was actually reading it, reciting each of its sentences in turn. Suddenly I would stop in alarm. I had realised that if I was to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not, in any case, be this letter, since it was I myself who had just composed it.”

Marcel sees Odette in a public park. She is at this point known as Mme Swann. Marcel finds her beautiful. He doesn't know about her shameful past. He sees her with men other than Swann. Marcel reflects on the name Swann.

“Swann had become to me pre-eminently her father, and no longer the Combray Swann; since the ideas to which I now connected his name were different from the ideas in the system of which it was formerly comprised, ideas which I no longer utilized when I had occasion to think of him, he had become a new, another person.”

In a flash forward, many years later, when Marcel is an adult, he returns to the park (Bois de Boulogne) and sees that his romanticized idea of it was an illusion.

“The reality that I had known no longer existed. It sufficed that Mme Swann did not appear, in the same attire and at the same moment, for the whole avenue to be altered. The places we have known do not belong only to the world of space on which we map them for our own convenience. They were only a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; the memory of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years.”

Those are the final lines of volume 1.

Marcel and Gilberte wrestle playfully, which leads to Marcel having his first orgasm.

“a few drops of sweat wrung from me by the effort, my pleasure express itself in a form which I could not even pause for a moment to analyze ... Gilberte said good-naturedly: You know, if you like, we might go on wrestling a bit longer.”

We later learn that Gilbert was into boys already in Combray. It is likely that she knew what happened.

Swann and Odette don't want Marcel to visit their house because he could learn about the true nature of their relationship which is passionless and adulterous. Even Swann has a lover at this point. That makes Gilberte even more unobtainable. Marcel writes Swann a letter wishing to be Gilberte's friend, but he is ignored². Bloch and Cottard speak well of Marcel to Odette. Gilberte speaks well of Françoise, who she has met several times when they played in the park. After all that social maneuvering, Gilberte's parents allow Marcel to visit.

When Gilberte eventually starts inviting Marcel to the house, he indeed becomes witness to their secrets. Marcel and Gilberte aren't a couple, though. Other than the wrestling scene, there is no indication that they ever do anything romantic, not even a kiss.

Marcel notes that Swann and Odette are a mismatch of minds.

Swann makes social experiments. He introduces people from social classes to each other. He places people (including Marcel) in unfamiliar environments. He watches how they behave. It's as if Swann sees society as something artificial, almost like a laboratory.

Swann finally introduces Marcel to Bergotte. As usual, Bergotte does not live up to Marcel's preconceived ideas. The reason is simply that Bergotte looks like a human. Marcel's ideal was absurd. He also notes that Bergotte does not speak as beautifully as he writes. Nevertheless, they become friends. Bergotte encourages

¹ It can be deduced from the text “After ten years” in volume 5.

² “In vain had I written to him”

Marcel to write, saying he has talent and that he should disregard his self-doubt. "You are ill, but one cannot pity you for you have the joys of the mind".

Marcel reflects on authors and on Bergotte's style in particular. Bergotte tells Marcel that Swann "married a whore". Gilberte tells Marcel that Bergotte said he finds Marcel intelligent. Marcel tells his parents about it. That makes them abandon their initial suspicions of Bergotte.

Marcel brings flowers to Mme Swann (Odette). They get along well, eventually even better than Marcel and Gilberte. He sees Gilberte more and more rarely. He continues to visit Odette instead, who is a mother figure, kind and supportive.

In Marcel's mind, he has some sort of relationship with Gilberte, but he is deceiving himself.

"On several occasions I felt that Gilberte was anxious to put off my visits. It is true that when I was at all anxious to see her I had only to get myself invited by her parents".

Marcel realizes that Gilberte finds his behavior annoying.

"her father asked me to the house almost against her will".

She knows he is in love with her, but she has no interest in him. It makes her uncomfortable. She avoids him and treats him coldly. Their interactions are stale and cringy. They argue about it. They are children and can't communicate their feelings well, and they don't understand each other.

Marcel says she is not being nice.

"It is you that are not being nice".

"But how am I not being nice? Tell me; I will do anything you want."

"No; that wouldn't be any good. I can't explain."

She cannot explain, and Marcel cannot understand her.

"Besides, what good would it have done if I had spoken to Gilberte; she would not have understood me.

We imagine always when we speak that it is our own ears, our own mind that are listening. My words would have come to her only in a distorted form".

Marcel leaves resolving not to see Gilberte anymore.

"I was determined not to see her again, unless after a formal request for an explanation or a full confession of love on her part, neither of which was in the least degree likely to come".

However, he dwells on the subject of Gilberte and love for a good while longer, "a slow and painful suicide of that part of me which was Gilberte's lover".

Unrequited love is difficult. You desire two things at once: either for the love to be requited or to fall out of love.

"when we no longer love, that forgetfulness, that even a vague memory do not cause us so much suffering as an ill-starred love. It was of such forgetfulness that in anticipation I preferred, without acknowledging it to myself, the reposeful tranquillity."

We don't want to understand desire. We just want it fulfilled. Attempts at analysis is just a coping mechanism.

"like desire, regret seeks not to be analysed but to be satisfied."

At the start of love, one does not ask oneself what that feeling is. We only focus on the next meeting.

"When one begins to love, one spends one's time, not in getting to know what one's love really is, but in making it possible to meet next day."

We feel like we want to *do* something with the feeling.

"When one abandons love one seeks not to know one's grief".

When we suffer, we stage our suffering. We choose words, tone and dramatize in order to produce an effect from other people.

"but to offer to her who is causing it that expression of it which seems to one the most moving."

But in the end, we only do all that to satisfy ourselves.

"One says the things which one feels the need of saying, and which the other will not understand. One speaks for oneself alone."

In love, we pursue satisfaction, which typically means being with the other person.

"one can endure her absence only when one promises oneself that it shall not be for long and thinks of the day on which one shall see her again".

Marcel keeps making plans to win her back. He thinks of all sort of things. He sells a Chinese vase he inherited from Aunt Léonie in order to buy flowers and presents for Gilberte every day. He plans to pretend like he no longer loves her.

"by a course of action indefinitely repeated, I should have proved to her that I had no appetite for seeing her, perhaps she would discover once again an appetite for seeing me."

He writes her a letter, saying "I shall probably not see you again". The letter "expressed not what I should have liked to believe but what was probably going to happen."

His plans are never put in motion. After selling the vase, he takes a cab ride in Champs-Élysées and sees Gilberte walking next to some young man. Marcel imagines Gilberte “wrestling” in her linen-room with the young man. That is the final straw for him. He realizes that Gilberte will never love him. He finally decides to go through the painful process of forgetting Gilberte. Therefore, he lets the final letter stand.

“But I was still a long way from such a death of the past. I was still in love with her, even though I believed that I detested her. Whenever anyone told me that I was looking well, or was nicely dressed, I wished that she could have been there to see me.”

“If this goes on for a year or two, I shall no longer love her.”

The money from the vase instead go to buying prostitutes.

Marcel meets Mme Swann in the park. She seems to understand what is going on. She tries to comfort him and hopes that he will not avoid her too. Marcel is 16 or 17 years at that point.

Marcel goes to the Arc de Triomphe solely to see Mme Swann taking a stroll in public. There is something about it that makes him feel good. He describes Mme Swann’s new drawing room. It has a Far East theme, for example with dragons. It is part of the place-name theme. She has a new hair style and dress style. Marcel still considers her elegant and looks up to her. There are also guelder-roses that Marcel finds interesting.

Years later, Marcel learns that during all that time, Gilberte was seeing another boy that she spent more time with than Marcel, and her relationship to that man was romantic unlike the one with Marcel. Gilberte’s servant knew about it but always told Marcel that there was no one. The servant fetched the man whenever Gilberte was alone.

“this made me ask myself retrospectively whether in my love for Gilberte there had not been an element of amour-propre”.

He felt like Gilberte chose him when they spent time together. That made him feel good (chosen). It fed directly into his amour-propre. But that too was an illusion. She never chose him.

His memories make him feel pain, even though his love for her is gone.

“Gilberte was almost dead in me but not entirely”.

He doesn’t miss her. He doesn’t want her back. But pain is felt as love.

Balbec

Swann tells Marcel about the seaside town of Balbec (modelled after the real-world city of Cabourg). That makes Marcel want to go there. When Marcel is 17 years old (1897), he visits Balbec for a few summer months. His grandmother and Françoise also go. It is believed that sea air is good for your health, something Marcel might need in his condition.

Up until then, Marcel has lived a rather isolated and strict life. In Balbec, that opens up. He experiences new freedom. Marcel can exert himself like most people, but only for a few hours a day. He needs to rest more than others. He describes lying in bed or being tucked in by his grandmother.

Marcel sees the trip as an opportunity to forget Gilberte.

Mr Legrandin is a typical snob that appears here and there in high society. He has an outspoken hatred of high society. He finds it superficial. He resents social climbing. He prefers a more authentic life with art, nature and sincerity. He is an “extremely distinguished engineer”. He speaks in a poetic way, often mentioning the sky. In preparation for going to Balbec, Marcel’s grandmother sees it as important that they must not tell Legrandin about the trip because then he will tell his sister, Mme de Cambremer, who lives in Balbec, that they are coming. Grandmother wants to avoid Mme de Cambremer because she is annoying and would intrude on their vacation. Marcel’s father meets Legrandin on a stroll. They talk about Balbec. Legrandin says it’s beautiful. The father asks if Legrandin knows any relatives there, hoping that Marcel and his mother and grandmother could be introduced to them. Legrandin speaks in circles to avoid answering. As the father pushes the issue, Legrandin says Balbec is not worth visiting until you’re 50 (contradicting his initial remark). The reason he avoids the subject is that he doesn’t want to introduce the family to anyone. He wants to keep social circles separate because he is a tactical snob. Marcel’s mother sees through it: “Legrandin was so afraid of having to give us a letter of introduction because he didn’t think us smart enough”.

Marcel describes the train journey to Balbec (place names, sunset, nature). He drinks alcohol to not get motion sickness, by order of the doctor. He describes the town, the ocean in the morning, tourists, and the hotel.

Because the family is rich, they stay at a hotel (Grand Hotel) throughout the whole stay. Because the hotel is small, everyone observes each other. The hotel is also an attraction for non-guests. There is a drawing room, a restaurant and a pool.

Most of these hotel guests will reappear later in the novel.

- Aimé, the headwaiter
- Mr de Stermaria
 - His wife
 - His daughter
- Mme de Cambremer
 - Mr de Cambremer
- Unnamed lift-boy

Ironically, they meet Mme de Cambremer in Balbec anyway. They sometimes spend time with her at the hotel. Mme de Cambremer is an aristocrat, but she is dull, obsessed with conventionality, and always tries to say the right thing to the point that she seems lifeless.

Marcel is impressed by the lift, which is a rather new invention.

Once Marcel experiences Balbec in real life, the town loses its mystical qualities. He had seen pictures and dreamed of it. In particular, he had seen pictures of the Virgin of Balbec, a statue in a church. Seeing the statue in real life is a disappointment.

“the immortal work of art so long desired, whom I found transformed, as was the church itself, into a little old woman in stone whose height I could measure and whose wrinkles I could count.”

Mme Villeparisis is a lady of high society. Marcel’s grandmother knows her from before, so they renew their friendship in Balbec. It turns out Mme Villeparisis is an aunt of Duc de Guermantes. She is therefore a remote Guermantes herself, but low within that hierarchy.

In Balbec, Marcel’s carriage drives past three trees on a street called Hudimesnil. Seeing the trees gives him a sudden, intense emotion similar to when he saw the twin spires in Martinville, “but this time it remained incomplete.” It is also similar to the hawthorns in Combray.

After a while in Balbec, Marcel's grandmother starts to avoid him. He doesn't understand why and is sad about it. The truth is that she is ill and doesn't want to alarm him.

In Balbec, Marcel meets Comte de Nassau. The Comte is the heir of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg. The Grand Duke has no sons, so he gains the approval of his chamber to name the Comte, his nephew, as his heir. The Comte visits Balbec to see his aunt, Princesse de Luxembourg.

Attracted to every woman

Another family in the area is de Luxembourg. They are nobility at the pinnacle of aristocratic life. Marcel finds their daughter, Princesse de Luxembourg, an ideal of beauty. She appears here and there. She always greets Marcel, as is courteous, but they never talk more than that. Marcel nevertheless finds it worth to mention every time she passes by.

Marcel sees Mlle de Stermaria, the daughter of the family. He is attracted to her and thinks about the attraction between men and women. You don't just desire a person. You become obsessed with everything that surrounds the person.

"it seemed to me that I should not really have possessed her save there, when I should have traversed those regions which enveloped her in so many memories - a veil which my desire sought to tear apart, one of those veils which nature interposes between woman and her pursuers (with the same intention as when, for all of us, she places the act of reproduction between ourselves and our keenest pleasure, and for insects, places before the nectar the pollen which they must carry away with them) in order that, tricked by the illusion of possessing her thus more completely, they may be forced to occupy first the scenes among which she lives".

You desire their whole world: their past, their memories, everything that makes her who she is. You want to walk where she walked, see what she has seen, access her memories. That imagination is stronger than the physical attraction.

"and which, of more service to their imagination than sensual pleasure can be, yet would not without that pleasure have had the power to attract them."

Love and desire are driven by imagination rather than the person itself. Insects want nectar but end up carrying pollen.

At this point, Marcel is attracted to every girl he sees.

Imagine a prisoner who "learned suddenly that peaches, apricots and grapes are not simply part of the decoration of the country scene but delicious and easily assimilated food. "Even if his [prison guard] does not allow him to pluck those tempting fruits, still the world seems to him a better place and existence in it more clement."

"For a desire seems to us more attractive, we repose on it with more confidence, when we know that outside ourselves there is a reality which conforms to it, even if, for us, it is not to be realised."

Before that, to Marcel, women were people. Now, they are objects of desire, and not only physically.

"As to the pretty girls who went past, from the day on which I had first known that their cheeks could be kissed, I had become curious about their souls. And the universe had appeared to me more interesting."

Once your eyes open up to attraction to women, the world is charged. Every passing girl is a story, a fantasy, a possibility. Desire doesn't just want satisfaction. It transforms how we see the world. It creates curiosity and imagination. The imagination is pleasurable in spite of the frustration of being unable to get all the women. Furthermore, that means that desire is not based on reality. It's based on memory, imagination and emotions. We construct reasons for desire after the fact when the desire is already there. People bend their reasoning to what they need to believe. Therefore, much of love is displaced, misdirected or misunderstood.

Marcel sees a milk-girl and finds her attractive. When he gets a letter, he fantasizes that the milk-girl sends it.

"I had no doubt that the letter was from the milk-girl. Alas, it was only from Bergotte..."

Ironically, he is disappointed to receive a letter from his idol.

He walks past a fisher-girl that slightly glances at him. He is attracted to her and hopes that she will remember him. He feels like he will possess her mind if she thinks of him.

Marcel makes an insight about beauty.

"Then, if our imagination is set going by the desire for what we may not possess"

When you can't have something, your imagination becomes active, but that imagination is not constrained by reality.

"its flight is not limited by a reality completely perceived"

The less you see, the more you imagine.

“in these casual encounters in which the charms of the passing stranger are generally in direct ratio to the swiftness of our passage.”

Therefore, Marcel wonders if beauty really exists or if it just exists in our imagination.

“that beauty of which we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether it is, in this world, anything more than the complementary part that is added to a fragmentary and fugitive stranger by our imagination over-stimulated by regret.”

We do not discover beauty. We create it with our desire and fantasies before we have actually taken a proper look.

“Had I been free to stop, to get down from the carriage and to speak to the girl whom we were passing, should I perhaps have been disillusioned by some fault in her complexion which from the carriage I had not distinguished?”

We saw that idea in Swann. He did not find Odette beautiful at first, but his imagination ran amok. By the time they got married, he found her ugly.

Saint-Loup

Marcel and his grandmother meet the elegant and respected Robert de Saint-Loup. Mme de Villeparisis describes Saint-Loup as her nephew, but she is actually his great aunt, not his aunt.

He is a soldier. He becomes a life-long friend.

Saint-Loup often goes to a casino in the neighboring village.

Francoise finds Saint-Loup good, natural and trustworthy.

Saint-Loup tells of his mistress who is an actress. He does not yet reveal that it is Rachel the prostitute. He tells of a time when his aunt invited the actress to their house to recite speeches from a play. She was terrible. “Next day Saint-Loup's aunt had been universally censured for having allowed so grotesque an actress to appear in her drawing-room.”

Charlus is Saint-Loup's uncle. Furthermore, both are part of the Guermantes family.

Bloch with his family are also visiting Balbec. Marcel describes Bloch's poor manners. He speaks to adults as if he was their equal. He name drops writers and artists while clearly being wrong about them. He talks too much and too loudly, not reading the room. He makes bold, too honest remarks that upset people. Bloch wants to impress others, but he annoys them. Knowledge of art and literature is not enough to function socially. Francoise tells Marcel that she has a bad feeling about Bloch.

When Bloch's father visits, he exhibits the same behavior. It shows how just a slight mismatch in tone, timing or manner can be out of place due to social culture. Also, “Bloch's sisters, at once overdressed and half naked, with their languishing, bold, blatant, sluttish air did not create the best impression ... And one of their cousins, who was only fifteen, scandalized the Casino by her unconcealed admiration for Mlle. Léa ... whose tastes were understood to lead her not exactly in the direction of the gentlemen.”

Marcel prefers Saint-Loup over Bloch. He spends less time with Bloch.

Marcel and Saint-Loup play with a stereoscope (a device that looks like glasses). It distorts the image. Marcel sees it as vivid and almost real. The device (symbolizing human eyes) does not create false reality alone. The brain contributes too by interpreting and filling in blanks, an “internal stereoscope”.

Several times, with Saint-Loup and others, Marcel goes to a fashionable seaside restaurant, Rivebelle. He observes a mix of aristocrats, bourgeois and various people. The atmosphere is animated, slightly chaotic, and less strict than salons in Paris. Society can work differently when displaced to a different location. Hierarchies loosen. Classes mingle. Identities can adjust from what they are at home. It's almost theatrical. Some of the people are “demi-monde”, meaning on the fringe of respectable society. For example, actresses. Saint-Loup treats everyone the same, with warmth, attention, courtesy and without pretention. He doesn't try to make himself look good because he doesn't feel the need to (unlike Bloch).

At a grander scale, it may symbolize that society is not as rigid as it seems. The way high society works in Paris might just be arbitrary. Belonging to a certain group or class doesn't necessarily mean that you behave in a certain way. People are individuals.

Jews in Balbec

In Balbec, Marcel finds a “colony” of Jewish tourists. They stick to themselves.

Bloch gives antisemitic sentiments, in spite of being himself a Jew.

Marcel and Saint-Loup meet Nissim Bernard. He is a Jew in Parisian high society. He is an example of the complex and sensitive presence of Jews in high society. He pays the rent for a villa that Bloch’s uncle rents.

Elstir

He is a famous impressionist painter that often dines at the restaurant in Rivebelle. Marcel describes his painting style.

“Elstir tried to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed.”

Elstir already knows that reality is filtered through your own imagination, and he uses that to see the world in a way that’s unique to him.

“Elstir was unable to look at a flower without first transplanting it to that inner garden in which we are obliged always to remain. He had shown in this watercolor the appearance of the roses which he had seen, and which, but for him, no one would ever have known; so that one might say that they were a new variety with which this painter, like a skillful horticulturist, had enriched the rose family.”

That’s what makes his paintings touch people.

Marcel’s grandmother is an admirer of Elstir. She is happy to hear that Marcel met him.

Marcel visits Elstir’s studio. Elstir gives Marcel a portrait of Odette. They discuss art. Elstir teaches Marcel to discern things that would otherwise pass unnoticed. Marcel describes a dining hall to exemplify.

Little band

Marcel sees a “little band” of “five or six” girls walk by the sea. They behave a bit rebelliously. They do parkour on every obstacle they see. One jumps over a man on the beach, brushing his cap with her feet. They “stopped for a moment in the middle of the road, with no thought whether they were impeding the passage of other people”.

Marcel describes the girls at length. He wonders who they are. A lady mentions the name Simonet near the girls.

Here is an example of an impressionist description, which Proust engages in often. It shows how perception is filtered by attraction.

“I could blame only the compulsion of a law of nature - which if it applied to these girls would apply to all - and not the imperfection of the object. For it was that which I should have chosen above all others, feeling quite certain, with a botanist’s satisfaction, that it was not possible to find collected anywhere rarer specimens than these young flowers who were interrupting at this moment before my eyes the line of the sea with their slender hedge”.

Marcel does not really see the girls as people. He classifies them like a botanist and describes them like a painter. The vessel analogy indicates that the painting is in motion.

Marcel sees the little band more times. He tries to find a pattern in when they are out and where they usually appear. His imagination runs amok and he is attracted to all of them.

Marcel finds “the dark one with the plump cheeks who was wheeling a bicycle” attractive.

“I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what there was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire; a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be realised”.

He still barely sees the little band as individuals. He is not even sure of the bicycle girl is still among them because his first memory of her is not the same as she appears now. Every time he sees her, she is different from what he remembered.

He seeks information about the little band. Aimé, the headwaiter at the hotel, tells Marcel that he has met the bicycle girl and that she has a “bad style”.

When Marcel visits Elstir’s workshop, the bicycle girl walks by and shakes hands with Elstir.

Elstir tells him that the bicycle girl's name is Albertine. Elstir gives Marcel the names of all the girls in the little band.

- Albertine Simonet
- Andrée
- Rosemonde
- Gisèle

Elstir invites Marcel to a small gathering at his studio so he can introduce him to Albertine. Once there, Marcel assumes a social identity.

“On entering any social gathering, when one is young, one loses consciousness of one's old self, one becomes a different man, every drawing-room being a fresh universe”.

Because he plays that role, he forgets why he came. He sees Albertine there but does not even notice her until Elstir introduces him.

Thus, Marcel gets acquainted with the little band and starts to spend time with them. They are energetic and like to play games. There is also Octave, a boy involved with several of the girls. He is a sportsman, specifically a golfer, and the son of an industrialist. He says, “I'm a wash-out”, so Marcel remembers him as such. Everyone flirts a bit with everyone, especially within the games they play. For example, Andrée and Marcel hide in a “fairy wood”.

Marcel describes how it feels to squeeze Albertine's hand, which is part of a tag game.

Albertine dislikes Bloch for the same reasons explained earlier. They never invite him to play. Saint-Loup can't join either because he is an aristocrat and soldier, already part of adult society.

Albertine is an orphan who grew up with her aunt, Mme Bontemps. In spite of Mme Bontemps' tendency to brag about Albertine, Mme Bontemps “had admired nothing about her niece “. She brought her up with little supervision (“leading so uncontrolled a life”).

Albertine is not what Marcel had imagined before he met her. That makes him surprised.

“On my return to the hotel, I was able to visualize the memory which I had brought away with me. I realised the consummate adroitness with which the sleight of hand had been performed, and how I had talked for a moment or two with a person who, thanks to the skill of the conjurer, without actually embodying anything of that other person whom I had for so long been following as she paced beside the sea.”

It seems like even 17-year old Marcel starts to understand that his preconceived ideas do not match reality. He absorbs the new things he learns about Albertine into his preconceived ideas.

“we are obliged to correct the straying line”.

An example is that in his memory of Albertine, she had a mole on her cheek, but when he sees her again, the mole is clearly on her upper lip. That might indicate that the whole memory was false, but the only thing Marcel changes about the memory is the mole.

“Albertine was built up afresh before my eyes.”

“at Balbec, Albertine had often appeared to me different”.

“I had always been surprised when she came in sight, so variable was her appearance from day to day”.

Swann did the same thing with Odette. She was not the Botticelli woman, but when evidence accumulated, he kept the framework and adjusted details instead of throwing the whole framework into the bin.

Marcel notices minor details in her, such as a nasal sound. “It was peculiar to herself, and delighted me... there could be no one in the world so desirable.” He describes at length Albertine's face. He makes plans of what to say to her when they meet. He plans to spend more time with Andrée to make himself seem more worthy (but not to make Albertine jealous). He plans to make friends with Mme Bontemps to get to Albertine.

This scene is hard to explain or interpret. Albertine writes “I love you” and then rescinds it.

one day, Albertine had suddenly asked: "Who has a pencil?" Andrée had provided one, Rosemonde the paper; Albertine had warned them: "Now, young ladies, you are not to look at what I write." After carefully tracing each letter, supporting the paper on her knee, she had passed it to me with: "Take care no one sees." Whereupon I had unfolded it and read her message, which was: "I love you."

Original French: “Je vous aime bien”.

"But we mustn't sit here scribbling nonsense," she cried, turning impetuously, with a sudden gravity of demeanor, to Andrée and Rosemonde.

It is perhaps a curious girl doing something just to see what happens.

Marcel later tells Albertine that he likes her hair. She eventually shows clear signs of interest in him.

"I'm wearing my hair now the way you like - look at my ringlet. They all laugh at me and nobody knows who I'm doing it for. My aunt will laugh at me too. But I shan't tell her why, either."

Albertine has a certain inclination to please others.

"So much did she enjoy giving pleasure that she had come to employ a particular kind of falsehood... this form of insincerity consists in not being able to confine the pleasure arising out of a single act of politeness to a single person ... For instance, if Albertine's aunt wished her niece to accompany her to a party which was not very lively, Albertine might have found it sufficient to extract from the incident the moral profit of having given pleasure to her aunt. But being courteously welcomed by her host and hostess, she thought it better to say to them that she had been wanting to see them for so long that she had finally seized this opportunity and begged her aunt to take her to their party."

Proust calls it multiple utilization of a single action. You both give someone what they want, and you might as well please a second person while you're at it.

When Albertine visits a lady to ask for a favor, she actually begins to feel the friendship she pretends to give, so she backs out of asking for the favor. The message is perhaps that when one action serves multiple purposes, those purposes can conflict with each other. We will see many more examples of that from Albertine. It may explain the "I love you" note incident. She probably didn't know why she wrote it.

When Mme Bontemps visits Balbec, she will spend a night at Grand Hotel, so Albertine stays there too. During the day, Albertine says the following to Marcel:

"I shall be sleeping at your hotel to-night, and in fact as I've got rather a chill, I shall be going to bed before dinner. You can come and sit by my bed and watch me eat, if you like, and afterwards we'll play at anything you choose ... we can spend the evening together ... My aunt will know nothing about that ... Come early, so that we can have a nice long time together".

Her intention is to hang out and perhaps do some innocent flirting, not at all to get physical. But Marcel is deceived by his own desire and his illusion of Albertine.

"she had told me to come when she was in bed. It was as clear as daylight."

When Marcel enters, he finds her in her bed. He immediately goes for the kiss.

"Stop that, or I'll ring the bell!" (referring to the bell that calls for a servant)

But Marcel thinks "it was not for no purpose that a girl made a young man come to her room in secret" and tries to kiss her anyway, overcome with desire. Albertine gets angry and rings the bell. She is not as unchaste as Marcel thought. She probably doesn't really know herself why she invited him.

The rejection makes Marcel even more infatuated with her. He speculates about what happened. Maybe she thought his illness was contagious.

The next day, Albertine explains that she is sorry about not pleasing Marcel. She gives him a little gold pencil case instead to please him. He does feel pleased by the case, but they talk it out anyway.

Marcel:

"It would have made me so happy; what possible harm could it have done you? I was simply astounded at your refusing to let me do it."

Albertine:

"What astounds me," she retorted, "is that you should have thought it astounding. Funny sort of girls you must know if my behavior surprises you."

Marcel:

"I am extremely sorry if I annoyed you, but even now I cannot say that I think I was in the wrong. What I feel is that all that sort of thing is of no importance, really, and I can't understand a girl who could so easily give pleasure not consenting to do so."

Albertine:

"but I've had other friends before now, I've known lots of young men who were every bit as friendly, I can assure you. Well, not one of them would ever have dared to do such a thing. They know they'd get their ears boxed if they tried it on. Besides, they never dreamed of doing so. We would shake hands in a straightforward, friendly sort of way, like good pals, but there was never a word said about kissing, and yet we weren't any less friends for that. Why, if it's my friendship you're after, you've nothing to complain of; I must be jolly fond of you to forgive you. But I'm sure you don't care two hoots about me, really. Own up now, it's Andrée you're in love with. Besides, you're quite right; she's ever so much nicer than I am, and absolutely ravishing! Oh, you men!"

They remain friends. Marcel returns to Paris.

Reflection on friendship

Marcel reflects on friendship. To him, friendship creates a pleasant illusion that we feel valued and understood, but it distracts us from our inner lives.

“friendship is a dispensation from [the duty to live for yourself], an abdication of self. Even conversation, which is the mode of expression of friendship, is a superficial digression which gives us no new acquisition.”

“Ideas are goddesses who deign at times to make themselves visible to a solitary mortal, at a turning in the road, even in his bedroom while he sleeps, when they, standing framed in the doorway, bring him the annunciation of their tidings. But as soon as a companion joins him, they vanish. In the society of his fellows, no man has ever beheld them.”

Marcel experiences friendship as something negative. He is happiest when he is alone.

“I felt when I was with him, when I was talking to him - and no doubt it would have been the same with anyone else - none of that happiness which it was possible for me to experience when I was by myself.”

With other people, we try to be liked, interesting and understood. It distracts you from “a goal of truth”. While with a friend, “we must remain exposed on the surface of our consciousness, instead of pursuing our voyage of discovery into the depths”. It’s not just that we are acting. We are deceiving ourselves too.

“I was lying to myself, I was interrupting the process of growth in that direction in which I could indeed really be enlarged and made happy, when I congratulated myself on being liked, admired, by so good, so clever, so rare a creature as Saint-Loup... In the life which a friend like this provided for me, I seemed to myself to be comfortably preserved from solitude, nobly desirous of sacrificing myself for him, in fact quite incapable of realizing myself. Among the girls, on the other hand, if the pleasure which I enjoyed was selfish, at least it was not based on the lie which seeks to make us believe that we are not irremediably alone, and which, when we talk to another person, prevents us from admitting that it is no longer we who speak,”

Your inner voice gets replaced by a social version of yourself.

“that we are fashioning ourselves in the likeness of strangers and not of our own ego, which is quite different from them.”

For that reason, Marcel believes he cannot have friends, but Saint-Loup can.

“Saint-Loup was absolutely sincere and disinterested, and it was this intense moral purity which, not being able to find entire satisfaction in a selfish sentiment such as love, nor on the other hand meeting in him the impossibility (which existed in me, for instance) of finding its spiritual nourishment elsewhere than in himself, rendered him truly capable (just as I was incapable) of friendship.”

The idea is not limited to male friendship. Marcel feels the same way when he is with girls. After spending time with Albertine, he thinks:

“back at the hotel, and in my room alone, I had become myself again. Pleasure in this respect is like photography. What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative, which we develop later, when we are back at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner dark-room, the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people.”

In spite of that, we see many times where Marcel seeks out and welcomes both friendship and other social interactions.

“But whatever might be my opinion of friendship, to mention only the pleasure that it procured me, of a quality so mediocre as to be like something halfway between physical exhaustion and mental boredom, there is no brew so deadly that it cannot at certain moments, become precious and invigorating by giving us just the stimulus that was necessary, the warmth that we cannot generate in ourselves.”

Friendship feels deep in the moment, but it may not endure. Yet, that doesn’t invalidate it.

“forsaking everything else to dine in comfortable surroundings ... with a friend who is going to stir our dormant life with all his energy, his affection, to communicate to us an emotional pleasure, very different from anything that we could derive from our own efforts or from social distractions; we are going to exist solely for him, to utter vows of friendship which ... will perhaps not be kept on tomorrow but which I need have no scruple in taking before Saint-Loup since [he also understands that].”

The Dreyfus Affair

The Dreyfus affair was a political scandal. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French artillery officer, who was Jewish, was wrongfully convicted of treason for communicating French military secrets to the German embassy in Paris. He spent 5 years in hard labor. The head of counterespionage, Picquart, then found the real culprit, Major Esterhazy. High-ranking military officials covered up the new evidence and Esterhazy was cleared after a two-day trial. There is no doubt that Esterhazy was a German spy. He retired from the military and fled to UK.

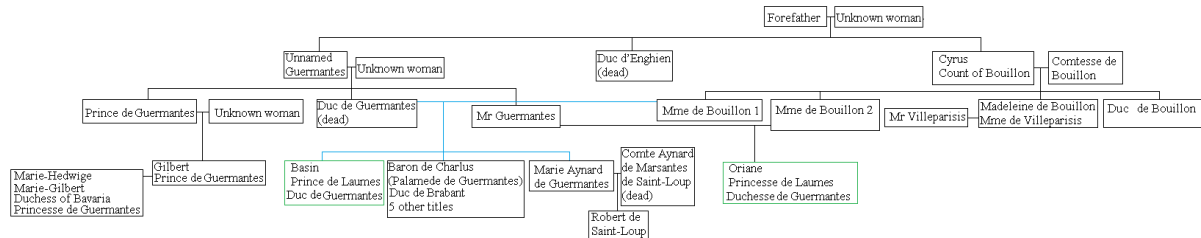
Émile Zola wrote an open letter, J'accuse, asking the government to reopen the case. Some supported Dreyfus while others condemned him. It led to a divide in French society, politics and media. A new trial was held, but Dreyfus was again convicted and ordered to serve a 10-year sentence. However, he was exonerated after 7 years and reinstated as major during World War I.

The case is one of the most notable examples of antisemitism and miscarriage of justice.

Guermantès

When the father of Prince de Laumes died, his title passed to his son. Therefore, the former Prince de Laumes is now Duc de Guermantes and his wife, Princesse de Laumes, is Duchesse de Guermantes. The two of them live in an impressive building called Hôtel de Guermantes. It is not a hotel that takes guests. It is a *hôtel particulier*, a grand urban mansion.

Guermantes family tree



The two green characters (Basin and Oriane) are the duke and duchess. It is a cousin marriage. They have no children. The family tree shows that the extended family is much wider.

More relatives are mentioned, but their relationships are not stated and they aren't important. One important takeaway is that the family is full of intermarriage to keep titles in control. Proust makes fun of it. For example, he mentions how many Maries there are and how they must be differentiated through second names.

Saint-Loop's mother is the widow of Aynard de Saint-Loup. That's why Robert does not share her last name.

Aynard was added to her name to differentiate her from the other Maries.

Sons and daughters of dukes hold the title prince and princess, respectively.

Charlus' titles:

- Duc de Brabant
- Damoiseau de Montargis
- Prince d'Oléron, de Carency, de Viareggio and des Dunes.

Around 1897 (age 19), Marcel's family moves to a new apartment (still in Paris) that is in the same building as the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes.

Marcel admires Duchesse de Guermantes as if she was a big celebrity. The 3rd volume (The Guermantes Way) is about their aristocratic world. Marcel wants to climb in social status, so he wants to visit their house where the pinnacle of high society meets. After the release of volume 3, someone criticized Proust for writing a snobbish novel, but they clearly misunderstood. Proust wrote in a letter:

"The Guermantes Way is the exact opposite of a snobbish book".

The critic clearly misunderstood. Marcel will realize that high society is a vain and hollow world. People act in front of each other instead of being themselves. Their way of life causes self-deception.

"what an absolute vacuum of true taste the judgment of people in society is based, so arbitrary that the smallest trifle can make it rush to the wildest absurdities, on the way to which it is stopped, held up by no genuinely felt impression."

Characters in high society are obsessed with status and approval. They go to great lengths to invite the right guests and hang out with the right people.

"whenever the Princesse de Parme invited Mme. de Guermantes to her own parties, she had to rack her brains to be sure that there was no one else on her list whose presence might offend the Duchess and make her refuse to come again."

"whether on account of their origin, or because they do not care about dinner parties and receptions at which we never see them, and suppose this, erroneously, to be due to their not having been invited, or because they never speak of their social connections, but only of literature and art, or because people conceal the fact that they go to their houses, or they, to avoid impoliteness to yet other people, conceal the fact that they open their doors to these, in short for a thousand reasons which, added together, make of one or other of them in certain people's eyes, the sort of woman whom one does not know".

Odette is an example of such a woman.

The author portrays high society with sarcasm similar to Jane Austen.

"the Duchess was bored by other women, if their princely rank did not render them specially interesting".

“Aristotle tells us in the second chapter of... ventured M. Pierre ... but so timidly that no one paid any attention.”

The whole section about high society is satire, but it is realistic. Proust himself did climb to high society and experienced it first-hand. The people there care about many worldly things. The realistic part of it is how people construct identities (others and their own) in such an environment. They deceive themselves and misread others. Social language is portrayed as nonsense. Some people are their titles and are referred to as such, but as people they aren't special. The system is hierarchical and socially sensitive. People are preoccupied with whom they are seen with and who is popular.

“[the salon visitors] were, to a strange extent, either ready to be pleased with another person or anxious to make that person pleased with them”.

Although it is satire, Proust manages to show why their world is seductive, both from the outside and from the inside.

Proust speaks of a “family genie” that makes people behave as expected by their class and lineage. It's like an invisible force that guides people's social behavior, moral views, body language and values. It's as if people can't choose their own behavior while they are part of a structure. The Guermantes family members seem to share the same instincts, reactions and attitudes without consciously choosing them. They are aristocracy first, individuals second.

The Guermantes family is the pinnacle of nobility. There are no higher titles, especially since there is no longer a king. The king was removed in the French revolution, then briefly restored but removed once and for all in 1870. France is a democracy at this point. Nobles no longer have any political power.

“the social kaleidoscope was in the act of turning “.

That makes the whole concept of titles somewhat meaningless, but people still cling to them. They still carry social, symbolic and cultural power. High society revolves around the aristocracy.

The Guermantes' hotel is in Faubourg Saint-Germain, the most prestigious upper class area in Paris. Marcel considers the Guermantes' doormat the border between his world and Faubourg. He romanticizes the world beyond that mat. He dreams of entering their apartment and fantasizes about what it's like.

“doubtless I should never be permitted to set my feet among them”.

“the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes had appeared to me to be a paradise into which I should never enter.”

Now that Marcel lives a floor above the Guermantes, he gets insight into their world, mostly from stories from Françoise who has errands in their apartment. Step by step, the illusion of a “fairy” is dismantled. On the inside, their house is a regular house. They are an ordinary family. They have only been nobles since the 17th century, not since the dawn of time. Duchesse de Guermantes is an ordinary woman, not a fairy.

“every historic house, in town or country, has its lady or its fairy ... the fairy must perish if we come in contact with the real person to whom her name corresponds, for that person the name then begins to reflect, and she has in her nothing of the fairy; the fairy may revive if we remove ourself from the person, but if we remain in her presence the fairy definitely dies and with her the name”.

Aristocratic refinement is just bad taste.

“As for the tapestries, they were by Boucher, bought in the nineteenth century by a Guermantes with a taste for the arts, and hung, interspersed with a number of sporting pictures of no merit which he himself had painted, in a hideous drawing-room”.

Françoise befriends a tailor called Jupien. He is Odette's cousin. He gets a workshop in the basement of the Guermantes building. Françoise and Jupien seem to flirt a bit at first. He helps her cope with the move to the new apartment. Jupien flatters Françoise, making her believe that the family she serves has high status. Eventually, Françoise acclimatizes and no longer needs Jupien.

Marcel goes to the opera. He compares it to an aquarium where the aristocrats are fish. People observe each other as much as the play. Nobles have boxes from where they watch. Marcel sits in the stalls (the cheap seats on the ground floor). He looks up at Duchesse de Guermantes' box (symbolizing that he wants to climb in social status). She waves at him with a glove.

Berma performs. This time, Marcel is deeply impressed by her because his expectations are lower, even indifferent.

“[Last time] I had found no pleasure in listening to Berma ... But then I was thinking only of mastering the secret of Berma's acting, I was preoccupied with that alone”.

“the talent of Berma, which had evaded me when I sought so greedily to seize its essential quality, now, after these years of oblivion, in this hour of indifference, imposed itself, with all the force of a thing directly seen, on my admiration.”

True aesthetic perception cannot be forced. You must watch the art without deciding beforehand whether you will like it and without caring about what others think. When Marcel had no desires or illusions, he could truly appreciate the performance. That idea stretches beyond art.

“it is the really beautiful works that, if we listen to them with sincerity, must disappoint us most keenly, because in the storehouse of our ideas there is none that corresponds to an individual impression.”

“I realised then that the work of the playwright was for the actress no more than the material, the nature of which was comparatively unimportant, for the creation of her masterpiece of interpretation, just as the great painter whom I had met at Balbec, Elstir, had found the inspiration for two pictures of equal merit in a school building without any character and a cathedral which was in itself a work of art”.

The author dwells on the subject for a while, giving the same message in more ways.

Mme de Cambremer (who they met in Balbec) also visits the opera. She is second-rate aristocracy. She is not inside the Guermantes circle, but she is obsessed with entering it.

“Inclusion in the visiting lists of these two great ladies was nevertheless the goal towards which she had been marching for the last ten years with untiring patience. She had calculated that she might reach it, possibly, in five years more ... [but] she was afraid that she might not live so long.”

She watches the Duchess obsessively.

“Mme. de Cambremer was trying to make out how exactly the cousins were dressed”.

“as painstaking as it must have been costly, to imitate the clothes and style of the Duchesse de Guermantes only made Mme. de Cambremer look like some provincial schoolgirl”.

The Princesse de Parme has a similar “crush” on the Duchess.

“in vain might she commit to memory Oriane's witty sayings, copy her gowns, serve at her own tea parties the same strawberry tarts”.

Marcel looks at the Duchess every day when she walks in the street. He goes to places where she will pass just to look at her. He falls in love with her, or rather the illusion of her.

“in my dreams, I probably altered it completely, for whenever I saw Mme. de Guermantes I realised the difference - never twice, as it happened, the same - between what I had imagined and what I saw ... I should not even have been able to say what Mme. de Guermantes was like ... every day, in the picture which she presented as a whole, the face was different, as were the dress and the hat.”

Francoise reveals indirectly that the Duchess is aware of the stalking and finds it annoying. Marcel stops stalking, but he remains obsessed. He tries to think of a way he can meet her.

During his morning walks, Marcel sees a tall woman who definitely flirts with him. He is so in love with Mme Guermantes that he disregards it. In a later volume, we learn that the woman is Princesse d'Orvillers. It is an example of a person who builds an illusion of Marcel the way he does with others. Her illusion is crushed when she later meets him, primarily because he is friendly with her rivals.

“I was never again, when I met her, to receive from her one of those overtures with which she had seemed to be offering herself. There is a special kind of look, apparently of recognition, which a young man receives from certain women - and from certain men - only until the day on which they have made his acquaintance and have learned that he is the friend of people with whom they too are intimate.”

She later marries the Prince of Nassau.

Visit from Morel

Charles Morel, the son of Uncle Adolphe's valet, visits Marcel. His errand is to hand over a collection of photographs that Uncle Adolphe left behind when he died. The photos reveal a secret, sensual side of Adolphe. The photographs depict actresses, courtesans and women from a hidden social life. One of the photos is of Odette, called Mlle Sacripant, taken by Elstir. We saw another photo of her with that name also in volume 2, also by Elstir. Marcel asks Morel about the photo. From the answer, Marcel realizes that the lady in pink was Odette.

"so far apart, so different were they [the lady in pink and Odette] in my memory"

Marcel finally understands what everyone was saying: Odette was a prostitute when she met Swann.

Morel himself is an ambitious social climber. He says it outright. He tries to appear refined and superior, but his behavior gives away a lack of refinement.

"[He] brought me the photographs without once addressing me as Monsieur, treating me as an inferior".

Doncières

Marcel visits Saint-Loup, who is a non-commissioned officer, at his military base. Marcel discretely and indirectly, though fully intentionally, asks Saint-Loup to introduce him to Duchesse de Guermantes. In spite of Saint-Loup's eventual request, Duchesse de Guermantes never invites Marcel. The author never describes that, but since she never invites him, it is understood. The Duchess carefully curates her circle. She only invites high aristocrats and select intellectuals. Marcel is too unknown.

With other officers (such as Prince Captain de Borodino), they discuss the Dreyfus affair and military strategy. If you read between the lines, it seems like the military functions like an aristocracy. There is a hierarchy. Some are commissioned, some not. Some commissioned officers, like Saint-Loup and Borodino, are nobles outside the military. War is discussed as if it was art.

Saint-Loup has a house in Doncières, a town near the military base. Marcel spends several nights at a hotel in Doncières. The first night, Borodino allows him to sleep in the barracks. Marcel reflects on sleep and dreams. When we dream, consciousness and identity disappear, creating a discontinuity in the self.

"One is no longer a person... there has been a real interruption".

"sleep bore him so far away from the world inhabited by memory and thought"

"in the chariot of sleep, we descend into depths in which memory can no longer overtake it, and on the brink of which the mind has been obliged to retrace its steps."

When we wake up, somehow the self is restored.

"we emerge... without a thought ... void of content."

"memory, flooding back, restores ... consciousness or personality".

"we awake in a dawn, not knowing who we are, being nobody, newly born, ready for anything, our brain being emptied of that past which was previously our life".

Are we only ourselves when there is a continuity of memories and context? When we wake up, the continuity continues because our memories of the self are restored. Continuity of being is traced to the memory. But why are we restored as ourselves and not as someone else?

"How then... does one recover one's own self rather than any other? ... The resurrection at our awakening... must after all be similar to what occurs when we recapture a name... that we had forgotten."

We sometimes have memories of dreams, but we do not consider them real experiences.

"The pleasures that we enjoy in sleep, we do not include them in the list of the pleasures that we have felt in the course of our existence ... We have had pleasure, in another life, which is not ours".

"perhaps there is only one after all, not that the time of the waking man has any validity for the sleeper, but perhaps because the other life, the life in which he sleeps, is not - in its profounder part - included in the category of time".

Then follows an interesting reflection on memory.

"Poets make out that we recapture for a moment the self that we were long ago when we enter some house or garden in which we used to live in our youth. But these are most hazardous pilgrimages, which end as often in disappointment as in success. The fixed places, contemporary with different years, it is in ourselves that we should rather seek to find them. This is where the advantage comes in, to a certain extent, of great exhaustion followed by a good night's rest ... There is no need to travel in order to see it again; we must dig down inwardly to discover it. What once covered the earth is no longer upon it but beneath; a mere excursion does not suffice for a visit to the dead city, excavation is necessary also. But we shall see how certain impressions, fugitive and fortuitous, carry us back even more effectively to the

past, with a more delicate precision, with a flight more light-winged, more immaterial, more headlong, more unerring, more immortal than these organic dislocations.”

Marcel asks Saint-Loup if he can call him “tu”. Thenceforth, Marcel often refers to Saint-Loup as Robert.

Saint-Loup is troubled by thoughts of his mistress who he has not seen in a while. They quarreled last time they met. He fears that someone else will take her. He refuses to write to her because he thinks that would appear desperate. Eventually, she sends a letter to him and asks for forgiveness. That means she is no longer unobtainable, which as usual in this book leads to reduced desire. “As soon as he realised that a definite rupture had been avoided, he saw all the disadvantages of a reconciliation”. Certainty of getting her back gives him freedom to act. Uncertainty compelled desire. Borodino would not grant leave anyway, so all pondering about what to do was meaningless.

At Doncières, Saint-Loup arranges so that Marcel can speak on the telephone with his grandmother. The moment deeply affects Marcel. He has never heard her voice on its own before. He hears how old and fragile she has gotten. She encourages Marcel to stay away longer for his own good. The call then breaks off, which scares Marcel. He gets homesickness and gets a sadness in the realization that he will lose his grandmother sooner or later. He returns to Paris soon after and finds his grandmother in poor health.

When Saint-Loup eventually goes on leave, he visits Paris. He brings his mistress. Marcel is surprised to see that it is Rachel. To console Marcel about Duchesse de Guermantes’ rejection, Saint-Loup takes him to a brothel. Saint-Loup is highly jealous of Rachel. He is obsessed. Marcel notes that love is highly subjective.

“It was not [Rachel] who seemed to me a small matter - it was the power of the human imagination, the illusion on which were based the pains of love”.

“when Robert and I were both looking at her we did not both see her from the same side of the mystery”.

Saint-Loup gives Rachel enormous amounts of money. He has spent over 1 million francs so far, which is over 100 times the annual salary of a skilled worker. Rachel uses the money to get what she needs to pursue an acting career.

Saint-Loup and Rachel quarrel about a necklace he bought her. She accuses him of trying to “keep a hold on her with money”.

“But it always happens, even in quarrels between a good man and a worthless woman, and when the right is all on one side, that some trifle crops up which enables the woman to appear not to have been in the wrong on one point. And as she ignores all the other points, the moment the man begins to feel the need of her company, or is demoralized by separation from her, his weakness will make his conscience more exacting, he will remember the absurd reproaches that have been flung at him and will ask himself whether they have not some foundation in fact.”

He apologizes about the necklace. He decides to spend his next leave with her, ditching his mother (Marie Aynard). His mother is angry about it. Marcel talks to her and gives her a better understanding.

Marcel, Saint-Loup and Rachel go to lunch. Rachel mocks actresses to make herself look better. She praises Berna as a relic of the past who is no longer relevant. Rachel flirts with another man. Saint-Loup is visibly jealous and gets angry. Rachel counters that we should be allowed to look at attractive people: “If we were expected to love all the people we find attractive, life would be pretty ghastly”. Robert leaves in anger, but soon after they are kissing and drinking champagne together. They never mention the quarrel again.

Outside the restaurant, Charlus waits in a carriage because he is spying on them. He is checking that Saint-Loup, his relative, is behaving. Saint-Loup hides to not be seen with his mistress.

Aimé, the headwaiter from Balbec, works at the restaurant at that time, probably because Balbec is off-season.

Off stage, Saint-Loup’s mother convinces him to break up with Rachel. But they don’t really break up. They remain secret lovers.

Prince de Foix

Prince de Foix is a young aristocrat with extreme snobbery and social arrogance. He ignores and insults people of lower rank, even those that have helped him.

Many of his friends are trying to marry wealthy heiresses.

“as the fat dowries which they coveted numbered at the most four or five, several of them would be silently training their batteries on the same damsel”.

He is closed-minded.

“He was, in fact, in the habit of always comparing what he heard or read with an already familiar canon, and felt his admiration aroused if he could detect no difference”.

Proust portrays it as a silly game.

“Historians... ought to substitute [the will of kings for] the psychology of the person of no importance”.

He was once part of an group known as the “four gigolos”, one of which was Saint-Loop.

In Paris, the prince hangs out a bit with Saint-Loop and Marcel at a restaurant. Marcel finds himself in a predicament: the room is crowded. “Either my table would have to be moved again, or I must change my seat if he was to get to his”. Saint-Loop solves the problem by doing parkour over a couch, “like a horse in a steeplechase”. Everyone is impressed. He then gives Marcel a shawl, so he stays warm. Marcel reflects on how nice it was of Saint-Loop to go out of his way for Marcel’s sake.

Aimé, the headwaiter from Grand Hotel, still works at the restaurant.

Villeparisis' salon

Mme Villeparisis, the woman they met in Balbec, is a friend of Marcel's grandmother. Because of that relationship, she invites Marcel to spend time at her salon. He goes there frequently.

Whenever a new person arrives, an usher announces them to everyone.

Marcel describes the aristocratic world of the salon. Visitors include, among many others:

- Legrandin
- Norpois
- Charlus
- Bloch, now a rising dramatist
- Duchesse de Guermantes
- Duc de Guermantes
- Mr Pierre, a pretentious historian
- Madame de Marsantes (Marie Aynard, Saint-Loup's mother)
- Saint-Loup
- Odette
- Professor Cottard
- Comte d'Argencourt, second cousin to Mme Villeparisis. He appears here and there in conversations, but we don't know much about him.
- Prince von Faffenheim, a shrewd diplomat
- Duc de Châtellerauld
- Several unnamed people

Guests come and go informally. It is a mix of high nobility (such as the Duchess), social climbers and intellectuals. Marcel learns how high society works. Status tensions are obvious. People gossip and judge. They listen to music and watch plays. They talk about all sort of things, such as the Dreyfus case, Jews (many are antisemites) and politics.

“the Dreyfus case was shortly to relegate the Jews to the lowest rung of the social ladder.”

Legrandin knows the game of high society. He flatters Mme de Villeparisis, obviously exaggerating. He references writers and artists so much that he looks like an outsider trying too hard. His behavior is a contrast to the way he was introduced in volume 1. He is a hypocrite.

Marcel accidentally insults Legrandin by greeting him as follows:

“Well, sir, I am almost excused for coming to a tea-party when I find you here too”.

Indirectly, it means “you are the kind of person who attends these salons, so if you are here, I am justified in being here too”. It also calls out Legrandin's earlier outspokenness against high society.

“What happens is that since we are determined always to keep our feelings to ourselves, we have never given any thought to the manner in which we should express them. And suddenly there is within us a strange and obscene animal making its voice heard [Legrandin shows anger]”.

Marcel tries to introduce Charlus to Bloch. Charlus refuses to shake hands with Bloch and ignores him.

Bloch confronts Norpois about the Dreyfus affair (Norpois is a diplomat). Norpois diplomatically avoids the subject. The others think that Bloch talks too much about the Dreyfus case, so they banish him from the salon.

Duchesse de Guermantes knows nothing about the Dreyfus affair and does not wish to discuss it. All other Guermantes are anti-Dreyfus.

Odette is anti-Dreyfus to avoid anyone doubting her stance, since her husband, Swann, is a Jew.

“Mme. Swann had won by this attitude the privilege of membership in several of the women's leagues that were beginning to be formed in antisemitic society and had succeeded in making friends with various members of the aristocracy”.

Duchesse de Guermantes, in spite of her friendship with Swann, has always refused to be introduced to Odette. When Odette comes, the Duchess leaves and does not bow when she greets Odette. That makes almost everyone ignore Odette during her visit.

“this arose from the peculiar nature of the Duchess, who held that she was not 'bound to' do things, and laid down with despotic force what had been decided by her social 'free will,' which was extremely arbitrary.”

Saint-Loup also avoids Odette. “She's an ex-whore. Her husband's a Jew, and she comes here to pose as a Nationalist.” Marcel never tells Saint-Loup that his girlfriend is also a whore.

Odette tells Marcel that Norpois said to Princesse de Guermantes that Marcel is a “hypocritical little flatterer”. Marcel has no idea why. Just as other people are in our imagination, so are we in theirs.

“how immeasurably less do we suppose that some tiny word, which we ourselves have forgotten, or else a word never uttered by us but formed on its course by the imperfect refraction of a different word, can be transported without ever halting for any obstacle to infinite distances - in the present instance to the Princesse de Guermantes ... What we actually recall of our conduct remains unknown to our nearest neighbor ... the image that other people form of our actions and behavior is no more like that which we form of them ourselves”.

Marcel sometimes sees Norpois in the street. Each time, he trash talks Marcel to his companions.

The Duchess later reveals to Marcel that Norpois, although he appears authoritative and pompous, is malicious and prone to slander behind your back. But he also has a good side, even to the people he mocks. Even after those events, he has spoken well about Marcel to the Duchess and considered offering him a government post. Even after hearing that, Marcel feels betrayed and humiliated by Norpois.

Charlus likes Odette and is also a close friend of Swann's. He has a strategy at parties:

“At every social gathering at which he appeared, contemptuous towards the men, courted by the women, he promptly attached himself to the most elegantly dressed of the latter... These tête-à-têtes, generally with some royal lady, secured for M. de Charlus various privileges which he cherished. For instance, one consequence of them was that his hostesses, at theatricals or recitals, allowed the Baron alone to have a front seat in a row of ladies, while the rest of the men jostled one another at the back of the room. Furthermore, completely absorbed, it seemed, in telling amusing stories to the enraptured lady at the top of his voice, M. de Charlus was dispensed from the necessity of going to shake hands with any of the others, was set free from all social duties.”

Charlus sees everything that's going on in the room, but he pretends not to see. Nevertheless, his behavior carries sway. When Marcel approaches, he acts cold, so Odette also acts cold. They ignore Marcel.

Charlus asks Marcel if he can walk him home. Marcel is happy to be joined by Charlus. Mme de Villeparisis is vexed and anxious when she hears it. She advises Marcel to leave alone before Charlus notices. She senses something dangerous about Charlus. She wants to protect Marcel's reputation. Marcel ignores her advice. When they leave, Charlus gives advice to Marcel. He warns him to spend time in high society, fearing it will corrupt his mind. He is likely projecting his own failure on Marcel: In his youth he was “entirely absorbed in the artistic pursuits from which he had so effectively restrained himself in later life “. He advises Marcel to choose his friends carefully and to only have mistresses, not real girlfriends. He thinks Marcel should ditch Saint-Loup and instead spend more time with Charlus every day so he can guide Marcel. He says “terrible, almost insane words” about the Bloch family.

Mr d'Argencourt stops by and looks worried and distrustful, perhaps for the same reasons as Mme de Villeparisis. Charlus says d'Argencourt is “well born but ill bred”. He then continues to talk about Bloch. “He asked if my friend was young, good looking and so forth”. He also makes an antisemite remark.

At the end of the scene, Charlus leaves in a cab (which means horse and wagon in this time). He dismisses the driver's competence and takes control of the cab himself and drives off (symbolic for the whole conversation).

A digression follows of a time when Mme de Villeparisis loaned 3000 francs from Charlus. A month later, he was annoyed with her for some unspecified trivial reason, so he demanded the money back. Mme de Villeparisis sent back 2993.25 franc. He confronted her about it, but she explained that the bank charges 6.75 francs for the telegram payment. At the time, Charlus said “you were quite right”, but over time his mind wandered around the subject, and he wrote her an angry letter and spoke ill of her.

Memory is shaped by emotion, not facts. People don't understand their own motives, and their behavior exposes what they won't admit. Human relationships are shifting, often based on misinterpretations rather than facts. The story shows that Charlus suffers from pride and emotional issues.

Proust mentions the “Mérimée and Meilhac and Halévy” type of mind, referring to those three artists (for example, Meilhac and Halévy wrote the libretto to Carmen). They share a recognizable style that is witty, elegant, anti-sentimental, detached and slightly ironic. They “reject everything to do with fine language and the expression of lofty thoughts”. Duchesse de Guermantes invites such intellectuals, but she never talks about their works.

“she made it a sort of point of good breeding when she was with a poet or a musician to talk only of the food that they were eating or the game of cards to which they would afterwards sit down.”

“Mme de Guermantes having asked him if he would like to be invited with this or that famous poet, devoured by curiosity he arrived at the appointed hour. The Duchess would talk to the poet about the weather.”

Those unfamiliar with the Duchess find that behavior mysterious. She likely does it because she does not want to be a fangirl, as that would be beneath her class. The highest status expresses itself by not needing to show interest, admiration or effort.

Duc de Guermantes tends to talk about his title in a banal way (there are no quotes, it's just stated). According to Proust, it's natural.

“it was perhaps not so much the rules of good taste as the laws of imagination that prompted him thus to diminish it”.

When you have something (in this case, a title), that thing feels ordinary, even diminished, but to others it may seem fantastic.

“the general laws which govern perspective in imagination apply just as much to dukes as to ordinary mortals... And not only the laws of imagination, but those of speech...”

There is no causality between taste and title.

One of them demands that we should express ourselves like others of our mental category and not of our caste”.

“A duke may write novels worthy of a grocer ... titles and pedigrees being of no help to him there, and the writings of a plebeian may deserve the epithet aristocratic.”

It is yet another aspect of the phenomenon described in the section about love.

Marcel notices small gestures from the Duchess towards him. He interprets it as a slight amiability. She speaks to him, acknowledges him (especially his taste and relations with artists), and briefly includes him in conversations. Marcel overinterprets it. The Duchess is really just making a small effort at no expense to herself. It's not an attempt at friendship on her part.

Marcel's mother³ cures him of his infatuation. She puts her hand on his forehead like a hypnotist and says, “You really must stop hanging about trying to meet Mme. de Guermantes. All the neighbors are talking about you. Besides, look how ill your grandmother is, you really have something more serious to think about than waylaying a woman who only laughs at you”. It works. Marcel realizes that the Duchess is really nothing special.

Rumors spread that Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes are getting a divorce. They are not really divorcing, but their marriage is failing. The Duc takes many lovers. The Duchess' love life, if there is any, is never revealed⁴.

At the Villeparisis salon, the Duchess once sits down next to Marcel.

"No, don't move; you don't mind if I sit down beside you for a moment? she asked, gracefully gathering in her immense skirt which otherwise would have covered the entire sofa”.

Other people wonder if she is flirting with him.

“I had better grounds than anyone to be aware of its falsehood.”

Just then, Mme de Villeparisis appears and invites Marcel and the Duchess to dinner on Friday. Marcel declines because he is booked with Stermaria. He also can't make it on Saturday because his mother is visiting. The Duchess then finally invites Marcel to her house. Reasons:

- She senses that Marcel is no longer infatuated with her, so their relationship won't be uncomfortable anymore.
- “Both Mme. de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup had testified to [my merits].”
- “Doubtless she might not have believed them if she had not at the same time observed that they could never manage to secure me when they wanted me, and therefore that I attached no importance to worldly things, which seemed to the Duchess a sign that the stranger was to be numbered among what she called nice people.”
- “I did not run after her relatives, although apparently run after myself by them”.
- The fact that her marriage is failed may also influence it.
- Maybe Swann (the Duchess' friend) mentioned Marcel at some point.
- The Duchess may judge Marcel to be a completely different person from the ones they usually host. Maybe the parties have grown stale.

³ the text from Project Gutenberg misses words in this passage

⁴ Volume 7: “the Duchess had never spoken to me of love”

Diplomatic negotiation

Prince von Faffenheim (the German foreign minister) and Norpois have a slow strategic negotiation disguised as a polite conversation. Diplomacy is coded language. It lasts several meetings. The prince wants to be elected into a prestigious French science academy. Norpois has influence over how people vote. The prince tries to offer Norpois public recognition in the form of articles, Order of St Andrew, and public praise. Even though Norpois says “I should like nothing better”, the prince understands that he has not reached an agreement because Norpois has offered nothing in return. “The negotiations have not advanced one step. That’s not what he wanted.”

Silence on a key point (the votes) means no, which the skilled prince understands. “I have not yet laid my hand on the right key”. The prince realizes that the key is to offer Norpois access and prestige to high society, which is something he really wants. Thus, his response is: “I should ask all my friends to vote for you”. In that world, only actionable promises count.

Albertine visits Paris

Against his will (he wants to be with Rachel), Saint-Loup is stationed in Morocco. By chance, he meets Mme de Stermaria and sets up a date between her and Marcel. He writes that Stermaria might be willing to put out. It’s not the Stermaria that Marcel watched with attraction in Balbec. This is her mother who was previously married, but they divorced just three months into the marriage. Marcel sends her a letter. “A message was brought back that I should hear from her in writing the same evening, about eight o’clock”.

Before that time, Albertine unexpectedly arrives. She visits Paris sometimes. She has visited Marcel several times⁵ before briefly during her “holiday movements”. Marcel notices that her body and intellect have matured, but he no longer has any romantic feelings for her. That makes him willing to risk it for the biscuit. Just as she is about to leave, he tells her he can’t be tickled. She reciprocates his proposition and ends up on top of him in his bed. Just then, Françoise enters the room. When she leaves them, they kiss and cuddle.

Marcel realizes that the real Albertine is not as he first thought.

“I recalled the original Albertine standing between me and the beach, almost painted upon a background of sea, having for me no more real existence than those figures seen on the stage, when one knows not whether one is looking at the actress herself who is supposed to appear ... Then the real woman had detached herself from the luminous mass, had come towards me, with the sole result that I had been able to see that she had nothing in real life of that amorous facility which one supposed to be stamped upon her in the magic pictures”.

He asks Albertine what she remembers of the times he first saw her. He describes the situation where Gisèle jumped over a man on the beach. Albertine has no memory of any of the things Marcel remembers so vividly from his own point of view. She does remember the bed incident, though.

“that time at Balbec I didn’t know you properly. For all I knew, you might have meant mischief”.

Ironically, now in Paris, she allows him to get physical when his motivation is purely physical, while she denied him in Balbec when his motivation was romantic. His intention is still not romantic. He notes that Albertine seems to associate physical intimacy with love, which he does not think must go hand in hand. Françoise is clearly dismissive of Albertine. She is suspicious of Albertine, who is an outsider.

Mme Stermaria confirms the date for three days later. Marcel looks forward to it so much that he barely thinks of anything else. He wants it to be perfect, so he takes Albertine on a date that serves as a rehearsal for the date with Mme Stermaria (unbeknownst to Albertine). On the day of the date, Mme Stermaria sends a letter that where she cancels the date.

“her answer led me to suppose that whereas, hour by hour, since Sunday, I had been living for this dinner alone, she had presumably never given it a second thought”.

Marcel later learns that Mme Stermaria made a sudden love match with another man that very day, which is why she cancelled the date.

Feeling like Mme Stermaria is unavailable, Marcel slightly starts falling in love with her, but this time he stops himself.

⁵ “several years in Paris, the long expanse of which was dotted”

Death of Grandmother

Marcel takes his grandmother to the hospital where they use a thermometer, an invention that Marcel finds impressive. They bring her fever down. The doctor then gives a diagnosis also of Marcel's illness. He says he's fine, just hypersensitive and introverted. His symptoms come from imagination, anxiety and emotional intensity, "mania". Previous doctors treated Marcel like an invalid doomed to illness, ordinating rest and isolation. Dr du Boulbon treats him as potentially powerful, ordinating engagement with life and intellectualism. It shifts Marcel's personality somewhat.

The grandmother has a stroke. Marcel thinks it is just a slight stroke, but the doctor says, "your grandmother is doomed". The doctor's name is just E.

The grandmother's health deteriorates. Marcel describes the process in detail, such as the symptoms.

Bergotte visits Marcel's house. He is also ill.

Dr Cottard comes and does leech therapy on the grandmother. Cottard has a tendency to pseudoscience.

Comte de Nassau, who Marcel met in Balbec, has since gained the title of Grand Duke. He sends many letters of support during grandmother's illness.

When grandmother lies on her deathbed, Duc de Guermantes comes over and forces himself into the house to give his condolences, disregarding how inappropriate it is to disturb the grieving family.

"it was so plain to him that the honor was hers [Marcel's mother's] that he could not help smiling at her even while he was composing a grave face".

Everyone ignores him.

Saint-Loup arrives at the same time to give his condolences.

The grandmother's sisters do not come. They just send a telegram from Combray.

Francoise in her simple mind cannot express her great sorrow.

"all that she could do was to repeat: It makes me feel all queer, in the same tone in which she would say, when she had taken too large a plateful of cabbage broth: It's like a load on my stomach".

Marcel's mother is overcome with sorrow for a long time afterwards.

"since my grandmother's death, whenever Mamma allowed herself to laugh, the incipient laugh would be cut short and would end in an almost heartbroken expression of sorrow, whether from remorse at having been able for an instant to forget, or else from the recrudescence which this brief moment of oblivion had given to her cruel obsession."

Death can come any time, but to that, people are in denial.

"the hour of death is uncertain, but when we say this we think of that hour as situated in a vague and remote expanse of time; it does not occur to us that it ... may occur this very afternoon... One insists on one's daily outing so that in a month's time one will have had the necessary ration of fresh air; one has hesitated over which coat to take, which cabman to call; one is in the cab, the whole day lies before one, short because one must be back home early, as a friend is coming to see one; one hopes that it will be as fine again tomorrow; and one has no suspicion that death, which has been advancing within one on another plane, has chosen precisely this particular day to make its appearance, in a few minutes' time."

High society

The time of the novel is called Belle Époque. It is characterized by technological advancement, artistic innovation and great luxury for the upper class.

Dinner party

Marcel describes at length his first visit to the Guermantes' salon. It is a dinner party.

The party is not interesting to read about, nor is it entertaining, and I don't think it's supposed to be. It barely has any of Proust's signature insights or reasonings. It is perhaps show, don't tell. Proust wrote in a letter:

"by natural logic after having confronted the poetry of the place named Balbec with the triviality of the real Balbec, I had to proceed in the same manner for the proper name Guermantes."

Although this is only Marcel's first visit, many of the events are written as if they happen repeatedly, or they refer to similar events in the future. That is because Marcel will return to the house frequently. He becomes friends with Oriane.

"conversations with the Duchess resembled the discoveries that we make in the library of a country house, out of date, incomplete, incapable of forming a mind, lacking in almost everything that we value, but offering us now and then some curious scrap of information, or even a quotation from a fine passage which we did not know and as to which we are glad to remember."

She does not live up to his lofty ideals, but he likes her anyway because of her good sides. She has good humor, good taste in art, and is well-spoken. At her place, Marcel meets people from high society. They gossip about who is courting who, and so on.

The Guermantes salon has a different culture than the Villeparisis salon. Villeparisis is semi-open. You come and go. Guermantes is highly exclusive. Only the elite can come. It's not drop-in. People come at a specific time and move from the salon to the dining hall all together. The Duchess has absolute social authority. She places people at the table.

Villeparisis is slightly formal and intellectual. Guermantes is less formal, effortless (because everyone is considered worthy), and there is a tendency to irony. They do not discuss intellectual matters.

"For a Guermantes (even were he a fool) to be intelligent meant to have a sharp tongue, to be capable of saying cutting things, to 'get away with it'; but it meant also the capacity to hold one's own equally in painting, music, architecture, to speak English".

"what the Duchesse de Guermantes valued above everything else was not intellect; it was, according to her, that superior, more exquisite form of the human intellect exalted to a verbal variety of talent - wit."

"she had created an enormous sensation at a party at the Princesse de Ligne's, first of all by remaining seated when all the ladies had risen to their feet as General Mercier entered the room, and then by getting up and asking for her carriage in a loud voice when a nationalist orator had begun to address the gathering, thereby showing that she did not consider that society was meant for talking politics".

Examples of guests:

- Princesse de Parme. Marcel finds her simple and uninteresting. She was at the opera earlier. She is Italian but moves in French aristocracy. The aristocracy is pan-European. She has royal blood.
- "The Elstirs", in other words, the artists that frequent the Guermantes' salon.
- Unnamed daughter of Prince de Parme (also a royal)
- Flower-maidens is what Marcel calls women at the salon whose names he does not know. They are beautiful and nice.
- Comte Hannibal de Bréauté-Consalvi
- Duc de Châtellerauld. He visits for the first time.
- Prince d'Agrigente (he will appear here and there)
- Mme de Grouchy. She arrives late.
- Mame (Marquise) de Souvré

Marcel notices that they have paintings from Elstir.

They have a tradition, even a ritual, of drinking orangeade in the garden.

It turns out that the duke has several mistresses, but he is a social ally of the Duchess. They seem to be on friendly terms in spite of their failed marriage.

“a bad husband to the Duchess in so far as he kept mistresses, but her most tried and trusty friend in everything that concerned the good order of her drawing-room”.

Duchesse de Guermantes dislikes the mistresses.

The Courvoisier family are cousins of Guermantes. They are not as rich. They are seen as rivals. They have different views of certain things, such as what constitutes intelligence. They perhaps exist in the book solely as a double to further describe the Guermantes.

People at the party gossip about Saint-Loup's stationing in Morocco. They see his relationship with Rachel as comedy, thinking him pretensions. For Saint-Loup, it's a much bigger deal. It's just like how Swann felt when people saw his relationship with Odette as a joke.

Charlus decides to give away a huge estate, Brézé, to Mme de Marsantes. It's not really clear why. Duchesse de Guermantes jokes that Charlus is Teaser Augustus because she thinks he is giving away the estate to tease Mme de Marsantes rather than to please her. It is an example of “Orianne's latest”, an established term for her wits. Characters dwell on the bad word play. She is also skilled at “mimicry”, to reproduce the way other people speak in a witty way.

Princesse de Parme praises Empire style, a decorative style from early 1800's. It's a rather unique taste of hers, especially since it is no longer fashionable. It seems like history turned into a spectacle. A noble house called Iénas has a big, impressive collection. The Duchess says, “I must tell you that I've always adored the Empire style, even when it wasn't in fashion”. However, at Mme de Saint-Euverte's party, she previously denounced it.

A Turkish ambassadress (daughter of an Ottoman ambassador) is allowed to come after dinner. She displays a wide variety of knowledge, but much of what she says is wrong. She may be somewhat skilled intellectually, certainly more than the other guests, but she is too socially incompetent to fit in. She is a social climber that has failed to assimilate into the aristocracy. In particular, when she says cousins, she means vague, distant friends, but the Duke takes it as a literal meaning which is normal in his world.

Mr Grouchy says he wishes to deliver 12 pheasants to the Duchess tomorrow. To appear generous, the Duchess says her servant, Poullein, will fetch the pheasants, even though Poullein has the next day off. Grouchy thinks it can wait until the day after tomorrow, but the Duchess insists that Poullein takes the next day off instead. Marcel knows from a prior conversation with Poullein that Poullein has plans to see his sweetheart on his day off and that she is not available the day after that. For Poullein, the whole thing is a tragedy, but the Duchess appears kind.

Marcel's role in the gatherings is that of an intellectual. He is ahead of everyone else in knowledge, and he adapts socially to fit in. He doesn't boast, correct others or argue. That is never stated explicitly, but it appears to be the case. He almost never speaks, though. We don't see him contribute to conversations. He is there like a spectator. He explains that he eventually learns and masters the social codes. For example, at one point the Duke de Guermantes greets him from 50 yards away looking as inviting as one can be, but Marcel just bows and walks in the other direction, which is apparently, although counterintuitive, the correct course of action in that situation with that person. The duke praises Marcel to his wife, as if the pupil has become the master.

After one visit to the Guermantes, Marcel reflects on the value of their type of social interaction. He admits that it gives a temporary high, but it doesn't live up to true, personal experiences like the spires of Martinville or the three trees in Balbec. Talking to others tends to involve gossip and anecdotes. There is also a certain satisfaction in meeting people that you believe are important. The problem is that the experience is inauthentic. You are living through other people without experiencing the things yourself. The satisfaction is only temporary and can only be sustained if you keep doing it.

“We can at pleasure abandon ourselves to one or other of two forces of which one rises in ourselves, emanates from our deepest impressions, the other comes to us from without. The first carries with it naturally a joy, the joy that springs from the life of the creator. The other current, that which endeavors to introduce into us the movement by which persons external to ourselves are stirred, is not accompanied by pleasure; but we can add a pleasure to it, by the shock of reaction, in an intoxication so feigned that it turns swiftly into boredom, into melancholy”.

“When all was said, the stories I had heard at Mme de Guermantes's, very different in this respect from what I had felt in the case of the hawthorns, or when I tasted a madeleine, remained alien to me. Entering

me for a moment and possessing me only physically, it was as though, being of a social, not an individual nature, they were impatient to escape.”

That may be why “men of fashion” end up nervous and empty.

I recognize the phenomenon. At parties, people often talk about what they did, who they met, where they went, but it’s just stories, not real experiences.

In a digression, a footman (a male servant with good appearance and polished manners) called Périgot sends a letter to his cousin. He uses clichés (“life is but a dark valley”), melodrama and other language that sounds impressive, but it’s misused and out of place. The tone swings wildly. He quotes famous authors, but the quotes are incorrect or mixed up. It is comedy, but also sad because he genuinely wants to be knowledgeable and loves literature. He seeks recognition through bragging. The way he writes is similar to how language deceives within high society.

In another digression, a noble called Amanien d’Osmond is dying. It is treated as an inconvenience to the aristocracy. They can’t go to dinner parties because they must mourn. Mourning is treated like a theater performance, like many other aristocratic activities. High society transforms everything, even death, into a matter of ritual, etiquette, hierarchy and popularity. Duke de Guermantes doesn’t care and goes to a dinner party anyway. Osmond dies soon after. The Guermantes then go to a costume ball (depicted in volume 4), saying “He is dead! No, no, they exaggerate!”

In summary, Marcel finds the party boring and he thinks everyone present should agree.

“Was it really for the sake of dinners such as this that all these people dressed themselves up and refused to allow the penetration of middle-class women into their so exclusive drawing-rooms - for dinners such as this? The same, had I been absent? The suspicion flashed across my mind for a moment, but it was too absurd. Plain commonsense enabled me to brush it aside. And then, if I had adopted it, what would have been left of the name Guermantes, already so degraded since Combray?”

Volume 3 has a running joke about the Queen of Sweden. At Mrs Villeparisis’ salon, Basin has himself announced as if the Queen of Sweden will visit. Mrs Villeparisis pretends like it would be nothing out of the ordinary. A rumor spreads that her salon is frequented by the Queen of Sweden. Marcel jokes that not even the Queen of Sweden is invited to the Guermantes due to how exclusive it is. At the end of the volume, Basin and Oriane raise the stakes to the King of Sweden. Oriane makes the point that even their family is, in the big whole, is not that well-known because there is always royalty.

“if somebody were to say in the street: ‘Hallo, there’s the King of Sweden,’ everyone would at once rush to see him as far as the Place de la Concorde, and if he said: ‘There’s M. de Guermantes,’ nobody would know who it was.”

Proust’s view of love and desire can be applied to high society. When high society seems unreachable, people desire to join it (due to psychology). Once they join it, they become jealous because they are afraid of losing their social status. That creates a tension that motivates them to continue to go to salons, in spite of being bored there. Going there to maintain what they acquired becomes a habit. It works similarly to love for a woman.

Visiting Charlus

In the afternoon after the dinner party, Charlus invites Marcel to visit him. Marcel arrives hoping to tell Charlus about all the cool things he’s seen at Guermantes. Charlus keeps Marcel waiting for almost an hour before he greets him. Then he makes him stand which is a habit of Charlus to make guests ask for a chair, which makes him feel powerful. Charlus acts arrogant and says Marcel has somehow failed him. He previously sent Marcel a book with forget-me-not (the flower) symbolism. The idea seems to be that he offered Marcel his friendship. Marcel didn’t get the message, so he never responded. That made Charlus feel rejected. He scolds Marcel. Marcel gets angry too and stomps on Charlus’ hat before storming out. Charlus has a servant fetch Marcel back to try to make amends. Charlus then acts friendly again.

“I had conceived and planned for you certain infinitely seductive things, which I had taken good care not to tell you. You have preferred to refuse without knowing what they were; that is your affair. But, as I tell you, one can always write.”

“Another person will perhaps someday offer you his affection, as I have done. Let the present example serve for your instruction. Do not neglect it. Affection is always precious.”

He says this will be their last meeting, yet he offers Marcel to stay, offers him a drink, and invites him to visit in the future. The whole scene is confusing.

The 4th volume is called Sodom and Gomorra because it is about homosexuality. According to Proust, Sodom is male homosexuality, Gomorra female.

After the first dinner at Guermantes, The Duke and Duchess go to Cannes on vacation for two months. Marcel receives a letter that invites him to a party at the Princesse de Guermantes, a cousin of the Duchess. Marcel is uncertain if the invitation is real because it's incomplete, arrived rather late and may not even be meant for him.

Marcel looks forward to the return of the Duke and Duchess. He finds a vantage point high up to watch them when their carriage arrives. From there, he sees Charlus and Jupien in the courtyard. They go into Jupien's shop (he is a tailor) and have sex. Marcel reflects on homosexuality. He calls homosexuals invertés. Marcel realizes that Charlus' strange behavior was a deliberate grooming strategy. Charlus tried to seduce Marcel. Marcel starts seeing signs of homosexuality everywhere. He describes male homosexuals as women trapped in male bodies.

Swann visits Guermantes

On the morning of the party that Marcel may or may not be invited to, he learns that the Duke and Duchess have returned, so he goes to see them. They are so busy that he never gets to ask them whether the invitation is real. They are waiting for Swann to arrive to show a coin collection and also preparing for three parties in the same day: a dinner at Mme de Saint-Euverte, a soirée at Princesse de Guermantes (the one that Marcel may or may not be invited to), and then a costume ball.

Swann visits. He is in bad physical shape. They discuss the Dreyfus affair. Swann is a devoted Dreyfus supporter. He now judges people primarily by their stance on Dreyfus. He has broken socially with every opponent, which means most of the aristocracy. He can visit the Guermantes because they are long-time friends, despite their stance on Dreyfus. Oriane is anti-Dreyfus at this point, but she believes he is innocent.

Swann shows the duke a coin collection. Swann is writing a scholarly work on it. The Duchess is not interested, but she asks to see the coins just to be polite. The coins are from the Order of Malta. The Duke has a relative who is in the Order of Malta. He brags about it, but the conversation shows that he knows little about it while Swann knows much. Swann gives the duke a big photo of all the coins, but the duke just sees it (intellectualism) as clutter.

The Duke shows a painting, but he speaks of it only in terms of who painted it, not the painting itself. He says it was sold to him as a Philippe de Champaigne, but he thinks it was really painted by Velázquez, who is more famous. Swann and Marcel know that he is probably wrong regardless, but they don't want to insult the duke, so they agree.

The duke doesn't enjoy Elstir's paintings, but Swann and Marcel know that it represents true artistic innovation. The aristocracy treats art the same way it treats people. It values not the object (or person) itself, but what surrounds it. Names, lineage and prestige matter more than true experience or understanding.

At the end of Swann's visit, the Duke and Duchess invite him to go to Italy with them in a few months. Swann says he can't because he will be dead by then. The doctor has given him just months to live.

The Duke and Duchess are in a hurry to get going, so they get on the carriage instead of talking more to Swann.

"Placed for the first time in her life between two duties as incompatible as getting into her carriage to go out to dinner and showing compassion for a man who was about to die, she could find nothing in the code of conventions that indicated the right line to follow; not knowing which to choose, she felt obliged to pretend not to believe that the latter alternative need be seriously considered, in order to comply with the first, which at the moment demanded less effort, and thought that the best way of settling the conflict would be to deny that any existed."

So, she tells Swann that she does not believe him. Just then, the Duke notices that Oriane is wearing black shoes with a red dress. They must deal with that immediately. As soon as the red shoes are fetched, they leave on the carriage. The Duke tells Swann to ignore the doctors. "You're as sound as a bell. You'll bury us all!"

That scene is the last in volume 3. It mirrors the Guermantes' world. They are obsessed with appearance. They obsess with trivial concerns. They follow rigid codes of behavior without questioning why. They have difficulties to make their own decisions when things fall outside preestablished codes. They have difficulties to have authentic human interaction.

Soirée

After visiting the Duke and Duchess, Marcel follows his invitation, which leads to the mansion of Gilbert and Marie (see the family tree). Gilbert is Prince de Guermantes. Marie is Duchess of Bavaria (she is a German). Since their marriage, her full title is Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière. As we can see in the family tree, they are of even nobler blood than the duke and duchess. Their mansion is in Faubourg, but it is grander and more isolated.

The Princesse is also called Marie-Hedwig because that is her second name, but more often Marie-Gilbert because that is her husband's name. They are hosting a dinner and soirée. It is normal for the dinner to be exclusive, and then for a wider list of guests to arrive for the following soirée. Marcel arrives for that.

At this point in the story, Marcel has only been to one Guermantes gathering, the dinner at the salon in Faubourg. This soirée is the second party he visits. The author describes the soirée at length. Like the previous dinner party, some things are described as reoccurring or specific future events because Marcel will spend more time in high society in the future.

A few days before the soirée, Duc de Châtellerauld goes to a park and pretends to be an Englishman who speaks no French. Under that guise, he seduces a male usher. The same usher appears at the party, so he learns the true identity of the anonymous man, which is embarrassing for the Duc. The usher is excited about it, so he announces the Duc extra loud, and does the same for Marcel who is next in line, which would be embarrassing if it turns out Marcel is not invited. Luckily, it turns out that Marcel was invited. The Princess (Marie-Gilbert) greets him, as is the duty of the hostess.

The party is portrayed in a similar manner to the musical *Cats*. One cat (guest) at a time gets a solo number (a story spotlight). Then they remain in the background for the rest of the musical (soirée).

Marcel wants anyone to introduce him the prince (Gilbert), but to introduce someone, you must know both persons well enough for it not to be intrusive. Therefore, it's difficult for Marcel to find someone to introduce him.

Marcel avoids Charlus because Charlus has an idea that "There is no admission to those houses save through me" (he is a Guermantes). He has excommunicated certain people from high society. The princess (Marie-Gilbert) adheres to his blacklist because she doesn't want to anger him. Learning of the blacklist, all Guermantes avoid quarreling with each other (not just with Charlus) to avoid excommunication.

Professor E is there. He knows no one at the party, so he talks with Marcel.

Charlus positions himself in a bottleneck where no one can pass without greeting him. He merrily and loudly greets everyone who passes by name. "This created a continuous barking sound, interspersed with benevolent suggestions or inquiries". He pretends that he is the character Mangrove from a Wagner opera who guards a castle. The scene shows that Charlus is a good actor in the social theatre, but does he really need to treat it as a theatre?

Mme de Souvré speaks to Marcel because they met previously at the dinner. Marcel asks her to introduce him to the prince. Marcel notes that Mme de Souvré has a strategy where she appears to be helpful without ever using any influence. She waits until the prince looks away and then slightly shoves Marcel in the prince's direction, and then she tries to take credit for it when in fact she did nothing. "Such is the cowardice of people in society."

Marcel sees a woman he knows, as he has gone to several "brilliant gatherings" at her place. It takes a while before he recalls her name: Mme d'Arpajon. She ignores Marcel's request completely. She looks angry and does not respond.

Marcel desperately tries Charlus, but he puts it the wrong way and makes it sound like he doesn't need Charlus' help, so no help is given.

Mr de Bréauté, who Marcel met at the Villeparisis salon, agrees immediately, in spite of having relatively low influence.

The meeting with the prince is courteous but nothing special.

Swann arrives. The prince walks away with Swann. The prince admits to Swann that he is pro-Dreyfus. They discuss the Dreyfus affair.

Duc de Guermantes converts to Dreyfusism.

Mme d'Arpajon gets a soaking from a fountain designed by the artist Hubert Robert. Grand Duke Vladimir laughs about it and says "Bravo, old girl!". Someone says, "I think His Imperial Highness said something to you". Mme d'Arpajon says "No! It was to Mme. de Souvré!" (insinuating Mme de Souvré is the one who was called old).

The Turkish ambassadress is there, still socially incompetent.

Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes arrive. Marcel describes how her eyes change in each new situation at the party. She says she is the one who invited Marcel.

Some male diplomats walk by the mansion and say hello to Charlus. They are his lovers. Charlus also exchanges looks with a diplomat, Vaugoubert. Charlus is also interested in two beautiful men who are sons of Duc de Guermantes' newest mistress, Mme de Surgis-le-Duc. Swann stares at her breasts.

Swann invites Marcel to visit and meet Gilberte.

"I was no longer in love with Gilberte. She was for me like a dead person for whom one has long mourned, then forgetfulness has come, and if she were to be resuscitated, she could no longer find any place in a life which has ceased to be fashioned for her. I had no desire now to see her, not even that desire to show her that I did not wish to see her".

Swann tells Marcel of his experience with jealousy and its torment. Marcel says he's never felt jealousy.

Mme de Saint-Euverte tries to invite people to her own party the next day. Several Guermantes denounce that behavior.

Marcel's description of Mme Vaugoubert is that she "was really a man", judging from her behavior.

Mme d'Amoncourt is a social climber. She was also at the Guermantes dinner. She is very beautiful, so admirers have given her gifts. She gives gifts to aristocrats (probably including Oriane), bribing herself into high society. She is never mentioned again.

Mme de Chaussepierre is a person that Oriane does not recognize. She says it out loud, which is rude. Basin reminds her who it is.

That story continues two volumes later. The Duke is a member of the Jockey, a club that originated with horse racing in 1834 but has since become an exclusive aristocratic gentleman's club. Mr de Chaussepierre is elected president of the Jockey ahead of the Duke. The Duke finds it insulting and is forever angry about it. He blames his friendship with Swann and his marriage because he figures the people of the Jockey believe that Swann and Oriane are Dreyfusards. For that reason, the moment someone mentions Dreyfus, the duke since says "out and out" (and supposedly leaves the room).

"if ... the name Dreyfus cropped up, 'out and out' would at once follow automatically. The Duke could not, anyhow, bear to hear any mention of the case, "which has been responsible," he would say, "for so many disasters" albeit he was really conscious of one and one only; his own failure to become president of the Jockey."

Years later, Marcel asks Oriane if she remembers the soirée. At that point, due to the Jockey incident, she at least knows who the Chaussepierre couple are. As for the soirée, she remembers that she wore a red dress, but she has forgotten that Mme de Chaussepierre was at the party.

Duchesse de Lambresac greets people in an outdated manner, a slight smile and a bow like a bishop, exactly like Marcel's grandmother did.

Marcel at first mistakes Duke de Bouillon for a businessman from Combray

Both events are signs that nobles are regular people, nothing special.

Mme de Citri: A social nihilist. "She found everyone idiotic".

Saint-Loup arrives. He gossips about Charlus womanizing (which does not exist) and about some chambermaids that go to brothels. He plans to take Marcel to good brothels. He gives Marcel the names of some women that might be promiscuous.

Through reactions, facial expressions and a rumor, Marcel deduces that Marie-Gilbert has a secret passion for Charlus, but she is too strict to act on it. Through looks and expressed emotions, most of her surroundings deduce her feelings. She discretely asks Marcel questions about Charlus. She eventually reaches a breaking point where she writes Charlus a letter declaring her love. Charlus receives the letter. He keeps shaving his beard (acting indifferent) and responds that he can't come due to illness. He is about to go out and meet a working-class bus conductor, arranged by Jupien.

The Princess sends another letter. Charlus once again rejects her. She drinks poison and almost dies. She withdraws from society for years.

Maybe the message is that love is just an illusion. Charlus is not the man the Princess thinks he is.

Marcel leaves the party alongside Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes. Mme de Gallardon waits for her carriage at the same time beneath the giant front door stairs. She pretends not to see the Duchess because "some gentlemen" tease her, presumable for being envious of the Duchess. She gives them a slandering speech about the Duchess.

As they leave, a guest arrives late. It is Princesse d'Orvillers, the woman who once threw flirting look at Marcel. She was once blacklisted by the prince (Gilbert). Since she was allowed back, she always comes late as a tactic to seem important.

"On our homeward drive, in the confined space of the coupé, those red shoes were of necessity very close to mine, and Mme de Guermantes, fearing that she might actually have touched me, said to the Duke: This young man is going to be obliged to say to me, like the person in some cartoon or other: Madame, tell me at once that you love me, but don't tread on my feet like that."

During the carriage ride, the Duke offers Marcel to introduce him to a noble of his choice. Marcel wants to be introduced to Mme Putbus because Saint-Loop told him that there is a promiscuous chambermaid there whose name we are never told⁶. She is Théodore's sister. Oriane rejects the idea to introduce Marcel to Mme Putbus because she hates Putbus. She tells Marcel to never mention Putbus to any of the people she introduced him to.

The Guermantes go to the 1 o' clock (past midnight) costume ball. They invite Marcel too, but he already has plans to meet Albertine at that hour at his apartment (for "kisses and caresses"). He waits impatiently for her to come and worries.

"the prospect of having to forego a simple bodily pleasure caused me an intense mental suffering."

"This terrible need of a person, at Combray I had learned to know it in the case of my mother".

She calls on the telephone and says (probably lying) that she did not get his invitation. But she even sent a response. She says (probably lying) that she forgot what she responded to. Marcel plays mind games and convinces her to come over after all.

In the following weeks, or perhaps months, Marcel goes to a variety of nobles to which he is now frequently invited. Mme Morency, Oriane's aunt, has a feud with Oriane. They insult each other in all sorts of ways behind each other's backs, including to Marcel. When Marcel visits Mme Morency, he gets another strong memory moment (though not an involuntary memory) when he sees a statue in her garden that reminds him of a statue in Combray.

For the next year, Marcel continues to associate with the aristocracy.

⁶ One translation gives the chambermaid the name Abigail, but that is an allusion to a play, not her actual name. The name Abigail is synonymous with "chambermaid".

Balbec 2

In 1900 (age 22)⁷, Marcel visits Balbec for another summer, once again with his mother. While it is recommended by the doctor, the main reason he goes involves the Verdurins. Mme Verdurin has inherited and climbed higher in the social hierarchy. They rent a country house (La Raspelière) from the Cambremers. The country house is a short train ride from Balbec. They have invited several people to visit, and they will likely make a temporary visit to Balbec as well. Marcel is originally not interested in visiting them, but then he learns that Mme Putbus will come and bring her chambermaid. So, the main reason he goes to Balbec is that he hopes to seduce the chambermaid.

There is also a matter of nostalgia.

“I thought of the visual images that had made me decide to return to Balbec. They were very different from those of the earlier time ... they were to prove deceitful nevertheless ... The images selected by memory are as arbitrary, as narrow, as intangible as those which imagination had formed and reality has destroyed. There is no reason why, existing outside ourselves, a real place should conform to the pictures in our memory rather than to those in our dreams. And besides, a fresh reality will perhaps make us forget, detest even, the desires that led us forth upon our journey.”

Marcel notes that he is “supplied with friends and resources” in Balbec at this point.

At the hotel, Marcel has a cardiac issue, so he bends down to remove his boots. Just then he gets what Proust calls “heart’s intermissions”. The emotional realization of a loss is delayed after the initial event. One year after grandmother’s death, he finally fully realizes that she is gone.

“we do not realise until long after the event, because, in order to feel them, we need first to understand them; griefs such as so many people feel, from which the grief that was torturing me at this moment differed only in assuming the form of unconscious memory.”

He gets vivid memories of her. It is an involuntary memory.

“I now recaptured the living reality in a complete and involuntary recollection The self that I then was, that had disappeared for so long, was once again so close to me that I seemed still to hear the words that had just been spoken, although they were now no more than a phantasm, as a man who is half awake thinks he can still make out, close by, the sound of his receding dream.”

He mourns her. Therefore, his mood during the first weeks in Balbec is melancholic.

“grief had destroyed in me the possibility of desire as completely as a high fever takes away one’s appetite”.

Marcel remembers a time when he found his grandmother vain for having her picture taken by Saint-Loup. He realizes that she had the photograph taken for him to remember her. He regrets muttering a few impatient words to her. Francoise later tells him that the grandmother had two fits of illness that day before the photograph was taken, but “you must never let my grandson know”.

Marcel also understands why she avoided him towards the end. She did not want to make him sad by showing her illness. He regrets that he forgot to write to her in the last few months of her illness.

He has a dream about trying to see his grandmother before she dies, but he never reaches the house.

Reality is not perceived passively. It is actively created by the mind.

“we may say that death is not in vain, that the dead man continues to react upon us. He reacts even more than a living man because, true reality being discoverable only by the mind, being the object of a spiritual operation, we acquire a true knowledge only of things that we are obliged to create anew by thought, things that are hidden from us in everyday life”.

Knowledge is an act of creation. When you see a person, you don’t automatically learn about them. You think about them and thus create knowledge (sometimes illusions) about them. For the same reason, people (and other memories) seem more real to us when we are not with them. When we are with them, we are distracted by their surface. Later, we start thinking about them.

When a person dies, you can no longer see them, so you are no longer distracted by their surface. You can *only* think about them. We only have the person in our memory.

“she was nothing more than the reflection of my own thoughts”.

Since the last visit, the hotel manager has learned more languages, but it has diluted his vocabulary, so he keeps saying the wrong words. Marcel has to fill in the blanks to understand what he means. He brings Marcel a

⁷ “Between the two Balbec scenes, so different one from the other, there was the interval of several years in Paris”

message from Albertine. She has changed her plans and will come to Balbec this summer. She wishes to see Marcel, but Marcel is not in the mood for seeing anyone, and he is not at all in love with Albertine.

The Cambremers also visit Balbec. They invite Marcel, but he declines also their invitation.

Mme Poussin is a middle-class woman who lives in Balbec. She embodies the idea of temperance. She is an opposite of the “barking” Charlus. She finds some words too hard, so she speaks them in a softer pronunciation. For example, “spoon” becomes “spune”. Her behavior is extremely soft, such as “slow and melancholy bows”. She has a catchphrase, “that will be a pretty kettle of fish” (meaning “that will not turn out well”) that she uses as a universal warning for any minor physical habit, such as nail biting or eye rubbing. She is never mentioned again.

There is also real-world painter called Nicolas Poussin, who they discuss later in an art discussion.

Everyone at Grand Hotel have heard that Princesse de Parme has booked a room there, so they think that almost every woman who enters is her. Marcel shuts himself in his room because he wants to part in it.

The next time Marcel goes to the drawing room, the Princesse de Parme has arrived. He notes how polite she is, even to the servants. Due to her friendliness, servants and guests do not suspect that she is a noble. She is comfortable even in Balbec (“sovereign princes are at home wherever they are”), acting as if it was her own palace. Marcel previously found that everyday politeness to be unworthy of the aristocracy, but now he gets an insight that there is a “certain grandeur in the royal politeness”.

Marcel seems at this point to have realized that social status does not imply higher intelligence nor happiness. Joining high society, which was something he hoped for, did not make him happy. It wasn’t what he expected.

After a week, Marcel feels like he misses Albertine and her friends, so he gets in contact again. Francoise gives Marcel a final warning about Albertine: “Monsieur ought not to see that young lady. I know quite well the sort she is, she’ll land you in trouble”.

Marcel gets reacquainted with Albertine and other women in Balbec. Relations to them are less inhibited than last time. He explains how he is in a mood for different women at different times. In total, he counts that he sleeps (“ephemeral favours”) with 14 women in Balbec, including Albertine.

“I saw her seldom, and only upon the very infrequent evenings when I felt that I could not live without her”.

Albertine doesn’t stay in Balbec during the summer. For the last few years, she and her aunt (Mme Bontemps) have stayed in Epreville, a resort town a 10-minute train ride away (trains are often called trams, perhaps referring to the smaller coastal trains).

Marcel suspects that Albertine has secrets. She goes to places she doesn’t tell him. For example, when he asks the lift boy to deliver a message to her hotel, he learns that she is not there.

“I was stirred from head to foot by the painful longing to know what she could have been doing”.

Marcel goes to the neighboring village of Incarville to spend time with Albertine and Andrée, among others, at a casino. On the way, the tram has a malfunction and he is left waiting. He then meets Dr Cottard. He considers Cottard a friend, but Cottard has not been answering his letters. That’s just how Cottard is. There is no malice behind it: “friendship does not express itself in the same way in different people” (this contrast to how Charlus demanded a very specific reciprocation of friendship from Marcel). Cottard’s train to the Verdurins has a temporary disruption, so he joins Marcel at the casino. Marcel intends to join Cottard to the Verdurins as soon as the train arrives, but when he hears Albertine laugh, he changes his mind and decides to stay. Albertine and Andrée dance waltz together, “tightly clasped together”, and talk as if they have some secret. Cottard remarks: “women derive most excitement from their breasts. And theirs, as you see, are completely touching”. He finds it inappropriate. Marcel gets further suspicious.

One time when they hang out in Balbec, Albertine must leave to meet someone in Incarville. Marcel tries to talk her into staying, but she insists on keeping her appointment. He says he will come with her and not even all the way, but that appears to make her scared that he will see something he shouldn’t, so she agrees to stay with him after all. Marcel calls her out for lying. He knows she doesn’t really want to stay with him. They argue about it.

Marcel notes that Albertine may be feeling jealousy the same way he does.

“And I believe that she was attached to me, so much so that the other person was more jealous than I was.”

Bloch visits Balbec with his sister and female cousin. There is a rumor that the cousin is in a relationship with a female actress. Andrée and Albertine denounce lesbianism, but in Incarville, Albertine gets caught checking out the girls through a mirror and lies about it.

Marcel starts to resent Albertine and treats her harshly and humiliating, both in front of her and behind her back.

Andrée and Albertine go to visit Elstir. Marcel reflects on how he has come to resent Albertine and wishes her no pleasure. To stop her from enjoying the visit, he goes there but finds only Andrée.

Marcel later sees André greet Albertine in a more than friendly manner, kissing her throat.

Marcel ponders if Albertine is to him what Odette was to Swann. Maybe Albertine is just as promiscuous. But Marcel fails to see the similarities.

“Odette had admitted what Albertine had just denied”.

(yes, after years of cheating, and barely then)

Francoise several times tells Marcel about times that Albertine lies. Marcel refuses to believe her and even omits them “from these pages albeit they hurt me so sorely”.

When Marcel walks with the girls, they meet Mme de Cambremer. She is accompanied by her mother-in-law, dowager Marquise Mme de Cambremer and an unnamed lawyer. They have a long conversation about art. The conversation goes all over the place. Everyone has strong opinions. Dowager Marquise de Cambremer is not knowledgeable about art, but she really enjoys it. Mme de Cambremer (Legrandin’s sister) adjusts her opinion based on what famous people say about art. When told that Degas admires the painter Poussin, she suddenly likes Poussin. The lawyer pretends to be an expert on the subject but makes only shallow, fact-based remarks. Marcel keeps the conversation going, slightly pushing others to review their opinions.

Dowager Mme de Cambremer tells Marcel about the origin of some nearby places names.

They go their separate ways when they reach Grand Hotel. The lift boy announces the lady as Mme Camembert. Marcel corrects him, but even weeks later, he still sometimes says Camembert (mirroring how Swann never made new memories of Odette after the Botticelli painting).

“his memory of our discussion of the name Cambremer had not succeeded in definitely supplanting that of the old”.

Albertine follows Marcel inside. She confronts Marcel about his harsh treatment lately. He lies that he was once in love with Andrée, and almost fell in love with Albertine too, but because of that past, he can never love Albertine. She accepts his reasoning. He feels pity for her because he actually loves her (the explanation is not more complicated than that). He accuses her of being a lesbian with Andrée. She denies it and repeats that she and Andrée denounce lesbians. Marcel says she will be late for her dinner. She tries to kiss him, but he refuses. He later wishes that he had given in as he was offered a glimpse of happiness.

“The wiser course would have been to consider with curiosity, to possess with delight that little parcel of happiness... and - lest the next day should expose this fiction - not to attempt to ask for any fresh favour after this”.

It is an example of how you reflect on a moment only afterwards. Sometimes, you realize that it was a happy moment. This time, he realizes that it could have been a happy moment had he surrendered to the experience.

Nevertheless, they keep spending time together, sometimes alone. Albertine and Andrée actively avoid being together, at least any time Marcel could find out. Albertine makes sure to constantly “prove” to Marcel that she is not in any lesbian relationship. For example, she makes sure he leaves her at her door and picks her up at her door.

Marcel also spends more time with his mother.

He starts to look at many girls in Balbec, most of them tourists on short stays. He tries to flirt with some, especially when he is drunk. It is never clear if he scores. To explain how Marcel feels, Proust makes 23 allusions in one paragraph. Search for “Orphic hymns” if you want to find it. The idea is that there are many women but only a few types of desire. Many women evoke the same type of desire. You think you desire a woman because she is unique, but you are really just recycling the same few types of desire, and therefore also the same disappointments.

Marcel starts to fear that Albertine desires the same women, so he makes sure to go on excursions away from Balbec with her where she can’t see them. For the same reason, Marcel abandons his quest to conquer Mme Putbus’ chambermaid. He fears that Albertine will be attracted to the chambermaid.

Bloch's cousin and the actress take their relationship to the open.

"on a sofa, they made no more attempt to conceal what they were doing than if they had been in bed". It is scandalous, but Nissim Bernard (the Jew) intervenes to keep the event from becoming public knowledge. The women lay low after that, but "gradually they returned to their old ways". Marcel, Bloch and Albertine see the women kiss when they exit the casino. Bloch pretends not to see them.

Bernard takes a vacation in Balbec every year to score with other men. He visits Grand Hotel every day at noon because he has an affair with a much younger waiter. Bernard takes the young waiter from innocence and introduces him to the world of sensuality. That passage is written in verse similar to that written by the playwright Jean Racine, who is mentioned frequently in the novel.

Marcel thinks that Nissim Bernard and his twin brother have heads that look like tomatoes.

In one of the funniest scenes in the whole novel, Marcel befriends two servants that work at the hotel, Marie Gineste and Céleste Albaret. He allows them to come to his room and hang out. They speak to each other about him in third person. Their comments are rather insightful (and funny). The author points out that they are completely uneducated, yet they speak in metaphors, often involving animals. The message is perhaps that artistic expression can exist in everyday speech, not just in books. Marcel barely says anything in the whole section. He is an object described by others. They note that he is fragile, sensitive, helpless, self-conscious and well-mannered.

"But, Céleste, you know he doesn't like having a napkin when he's eating."

"It isn't that he doesn't like it, it's so that he can say nobody can make him do anything against his will. He's a grand gentleman and he wants to show that he is. They can change the sheets ten times over, if they must, but he won't give way. Yesterday's had served their time, but today they have only just been put on the bed and they'll have to be changed already. Oh, I was right when I said that he was never meant to be born among the poor. Look, his hair's standing on end, swelling with rage like a bird's feathers".

Marcel sees an attractive girl on the beach. He later sees her again in the casino where she is staring at Albertine, as if they already know each other ("she was making signals to her from a lighthouse"). Albertine ignores her. She stops looking, as if rejected by an ex-lover. At a later visit to the casino, Marcel notes gazes between the women. Then Bloch's cousin approaches the beach woman and they start flirting. Already on the first evening of their meeting, they have physical contact under the table. The woman obviously knows how to play the lesbian game. Did she choose to stare at Albertine because she knows Albertine is part of that world? The woman's husband appears and has no clue about the lesbianism.

"His wife introduced Bloch's cousin to him as a friend of her childhood, by an inaudible name, for she had forgotten to ask her what her name was. But the husband's presence made their intimacy advance a stage farther, for they addressed each other as tu".

Marcel thinks Albertine is flirting with girls but have ways of hiding it.

"When questioned by some girl, she had a quick, icy, decent way of replying in a very loud voice: Yes, I shall be going to the tennis court about five. I shall bathe to-morrow morning about eight, and of at once turning away from the person to whom she had said this - all of which had a horrible appearance of being meant to put people off the scent, and either to make an assignation, or, the assignation already made in a whisper, to utter this speech, harmless enough in itself, aloud, so as not to attract attention. And when later on I saw her mount her bicycle and scorch away into the distance, I could not help thinking that she was hurrying to overtake the girl to whom she had barely spoken."

Marcel notes that Albertine is looking at girls.

"when some handsome young woman stepped out of a motor-car at the end of the beach, Albertine could not help turning round. And she at once explained: I was looking at the new flag they've put up over the bathing place. The old one was pretty moth-eaten. But I really think this one is moldier still."

Marcel wants to control Albertine so she doesn't flirt with girls, but he also doesn't want to be alone with her because she might get bored and blame him for it.

"Even supposing that she might have found some happiness in spending the afternoons with no company but my own, at Balbec, I knew that such happiness is never complete, and that Albertine, being still at the age (which some of us never outgrow) when we have not yet discovered that this imperfection resides in

the person who receives the happiness and not in the person who gives it, might have been tempted to put her disappointment down to myself”.

He can't take her to Verdurins because Mme Putbus' chambermaid might be there (Albertine might be attracted to her). Therefore, he brings her to Doncières where they visit Saint-Loup.

Marcel's mother is not impressed with Albertine. “You might certainly do a thousand times better”. She cannot name a single positive thing about Albertine, except perhaps that she doesn't have an annoying accent. But she says it is up to Marcel, and she will support him in pursuing her if it makes him happy. Marcel has an insight that he is a grown-up that must make his own decisions.

“we cease to obey orders ... and realise that we have at last begun to live in real earnest, as a grown-up person”

Visiting Doncières

Marcel and Albertine leave Grand Hotel where Albertine has been staying the night. Because the weather is bad, they take an omnibus (a carriage that looks like a bus) to the train station, Balbec-Plage. On the train, they see an old and ugly lady reading a newspaper. Marcel wonders what she works with and speculates that she is a brothel owner.

Marcel wants to hold Albertine while they travel, so he tries to find an empty carriage (train car), but the best they can do is to sit next to the ugly woman, embracing the whole way in spite of her seeing them.

Saint-Loup meets them in Doncières, but he received Marcel's telegram late and has been unable to get out of other obligations. Therefore, they only spend one hour with him before going back to Balbec. Albertine obviously flirts with Saint-Loup, but out of courtesy, he gives no reciprocation. Albertine later apologizes to Marcel for hurting his feelings. Marcel admits to himself at this point that he is jealous. Albertine says she never wants them to quarrel again. In the future whenever Saint-Loup is with them, “to save me from any uneasiness, would upon some pretext or other place herself in such a position that she could not even unintentionally brush against Robert”.

While they wait at the station for the train back, Charlus appears because he is taking a train to Paris. Charlus asks Marcel to fetch him a man that stands on the opposite side of the platform, a man with a violin case who is part of the regimental band. Marcel agrees. When he approaches the man, he sees that it is Morel. Charlus approaches too and makes it seem to Marcel like he knows Morel. Charlus takes an interest in Morel because he finds him assertive. Charlus says, “I should like to listen to a little music this evening” and “the offer of five hundred francs must have made up for the absence of any previous relations”. Marcel thinks it looks like Charlus is trying to pick up Morel. Charlus cancels his train to stay with Morel on the platform.

On the next train, a woman with a cigarette asks to open the window. Marcel is enchanted by her, but he never sees her again. Even as an adult, he still thinks of her.

“I find myself at times, when I think of her, seized by a wild longing”.

Journey to Verdurins

Every Wednesday, The Verdurins host an elaborate dinner party. Toward the end of the season, Mme Verdurin announces the end of Wednesdays, but “we shall have a little Wednesday to ourselves”, and then they keep inviting anyone they know nearby, making every day of the week a Wednesday.

They have invited Marcel over and over. Because Albertine is visiting her aunt the same day, Marcel finally thinks it's safe to go.

Several characters are visiting at the same time. They even take the same train.

The little clan, also known as “the faithful”, get on the train, including two new members.

- Cottard (the doctor)
 - His wife also comes
- Brichot, the professor. He now has more spare time which he spends at Verdurins.
- Elstir
- Saniette
- Ski, a Polish sculptor
- Princess Sherbatoff, a Russian lady outcast by her family, now the most loyal of all faithful. She is still very rich. She sometimes pronounces R as L. She is the ugly woman that Marcel thought was a brothel owner.

On a train, Brichot reads from a book that at length explains the etymology of a variety of French place names.

The little clan discuss the Cambremers. They are not fans.

Marcel's view: "Mme. de Cambremer loved to tease other people in a way that was often highly impertinent. As soon as she began to attack me, or anyone else, in this fashion, M. de Cambremer would start watching her victim, laughing."

They talk about that and the place names so long that they miss the stop in Maineville where they are supposed to greet Princess Sherbatoff. She is used to being a loner, so she gets on the train by herself and sits alone. When they realize that they forgot to pick her up, they seek her out on the train and move to her compartment. She is extremely adaptable. She just goes along without preferences or demands. She would even stand during the train journey if necessary.

Marcel becomes attracted to her. She seems oblivious to the beauty of nature. She only sees the train journey as a journey. Marcel points out several beautiful things outside. She agrees. The Verdurins have the same indifference to nature.

They discuss the death of Dechambre who for 30 years was Mme Verdurin's favorite pianist. They conclude that he is not the unnamed pianist from volume 1. Marcel notes that several faithful have died through the years.

"to escape the nuisance of having to speak of the deceased, in other words to postpone one of the dinners - a thing impossible to the mistress... M. Verdurin used to pretend that the death of the faithful had such an effect on his wife that, in the interest of her health, it must never be mentioned to her. Moreover, and perhaps just because the death of other people seemed to him so conclusive, so vulgar an accident, the thought of his own death filled him with horror, and he shunned any consideration that might lead to it".

About Dechambre, he says: "it's no use crying over spilt milk". They have already recruited a new musician, a violinist.

Carriages await them at the station to bring them to the Verdurins' mansion, La Raspelière.

La Raspelière

Marcel describes at length a dinner party at the Verdurins.

The violinist turns out to be Morel. He arrives with Charlus on the next train. It is still unclear what their relationship is. It is only clear that Charlus is strongly attracted to Morel.

Mme Putbus or her chambermaid never come. They never appear in the story again.

Marcel notes that Charlus's secret homosexuality is still a secret and that his reputation is good, except in the world of painters and actors because there is another Charlus (Comte Leblois de Charlus) unrelated to Marcel's Charlus. The other Charlus has been scrutinized. The painters and actors believe it is Marcel's Charlus, partly because the false Charlus impersonates Marcel's Charlus. When word spread of the impersonation, Charlus started saying "that is not myself". Now he can say that to excuse himself as well. The little clan suspects that he is gay. Marcel notes that he has assumed some feminine attributes.

Morel finally addresses Marcel as Monsieur because he has a request. He wants Marcel to keep hidden that Morel's father was a valet, which is lower class. Marcel agrees to lie to Mme Verdurin. Morel then reverts to his informal language.

The Verdurins have invited the Cambremers from whom they rent the country house. They arrive on an even later train.

The Verdurins make it clear that all guests should arrive with the same train, partly because a carriage must be arranged from the station to the country house.

Marcel describes the appearance and demeanor of Mr and Mme de Cambremer.

Marcel describes Mme de Cambremer's social strategy. Her ultimate goal is to climb and befriend Duchesse de Guermantes. She studies "great masterpieces", in particular famous philosophers. She actually knows a lot about them, but she doesn't truly understand them ("the way is long from the intellect to the heart"). No matter how much she studies them, she herself does not change. She just sees the philosophy as a decoration to impress people ("she emerged from these studies only to weave plots"). Marcel finds her words about the subject predictable and simplistic.

“expressions... used... by all the people of the same intellectual breadth”. Marcel however notes that people of lower intellectual breadth will fall for it.

The Verdurins discuss among themselves the best etiquette for how people should be seated. They seat Cottard next to Charlus. Cottard tries to be friendly, but he is socially awkward, so Charlus initially thinks he is flirting with him before concluding that Cottard is not gay and therefore also not a threat to stealing Morel.

Brichot explains the etymology of various expressions and family names. Everyone discusses the etymology of a forest called Chantepie.

Cottard asks Marcel if his choking fits (an unfortunate ailment of his) are worse at this higher altitude. Mme de Cambremer finds it exciting that her sister has the same choking fits that Marcel has. She laughs about it but shows no empathy about it. She is happy to have found something in common. It is indicative of her personality. She seeks connections in the mechanical sense, not in the friendly sense. Thenceforth, she brings up the subject whenever she meets Marcel.

They gossip about a rumor that Saint-Loup is to marry the niece of Princesse de Guermantes. Marcel thinks the girl is too young.

There is also an unnamed Norwegian philosopher at the table, previously not mentioned. He pauses after every word he speaks because he is highly thoughtful and only recently learned French. Later, they look for him, because “he had vanished without anyone's noticing his departure, like a god”. Marcel quotes the Norwegian philosopher at later times rather than portraying them as part of a specific conversation.

For a time, Forcheville banned Saniette from the little clan, but he has since returned. Several characters mock and bully Saniette under the guise of wit. He responds by being timid. Upon being asked a question about the theatre, Saniette stumbles on his words, which is an unfortunate trait of his. Mr Verdurin mocks him and makes him repeat himself, leading to further embarrassment. The others laugh. Mme Verdurin feigns pity (“poor Saniette”) and jokes that she can give him some food to take him if he manages to finally answer. When he does, they mock it as unbelievable, calling him stupid. Marcel changes the subject because he feels empathic. In the following discussion (more etymology), Saniette tries to impress but fails due to timidity and because others steal his ideas.

Marcel confronts Mme Verdurin about it. She says she tries to keep her husband from bullying Saniette too much, but she insists that Saniette really needs the group and that it's like charity to allow him to come.

A discussion about Elstir follows. He used to be a faithful, but he left when he grew tired of the Verdurins. Mme Verdurin thinks he is overrated and outdated. She insults his wife as immoral and unbearable. However, the paintings he made before he left are still considered good.

Marcel describes the Verdurins' and the little clan's stance towards Brichot. In front of him, they call him cultured and excellent, but behind his back, they mock him. They also laugh about him in front of him. They admit that he “knows everything”, but they have grown tired of it. He gives dictionary-like lectures. Brichot understands that he is mocked, but he is loyal anyway.

Marcel enjoys picking Brichot's brain. Marcel fears that Mme Verdurin disapproves of that.

Charlus points out to Marcel that Brichot is obviously in love with Mme de Cambremer (the younger, not the dowager Marquise). Marcel is the only of the frequent visitors who hasn't realized.

Mr de Cambremer gives Marcel a letter from the dowager Marquis de Cambremer. He notes that she writes in an aristocratic manner. She has a “three adjectives” habit where she piles up three compliments in adjoining sentences (“delighted - happy - pleased”). She ends her letters with “believe my true friendship”, when sincere would be a more appropriate word than true. The message is perhaps that her attempts at individual expression ends up producing predictable, empty affection.

Charlus tells of a time he got a letter that addressed him as His Highness and Monseigneur. Mr de Cambremer believes it is an exaggeration. Charlus makes a long digression where he insists that heraldry and history support the epithets. He claims he has no personal interest in it. It's just facts.

Soon after, he goes into a long digression with anecdotes about nobility. The speech is aimed at Morel, probably to impress him. Charlus claims that the Guermantes family has ancient legitimacy and natural superiority.

Morel plays music. Charlus unexpectedly joins in at the end and turns out to be brilliant. That is the only thing he has never bragged about.

“To the general astonishment, M. de Charlus, who never referred to his own considerable gifts, accompanied, in the purest style, the closing passage”.

Charlus then gives a speech about the archangel Michael, his patron saint. He explains a grand ritual he will join on September 29. He wants Morel to play music at the event, like an angel. Charlus tries to frame it as a humble act of piety.

Ski is portrayed as dumb. During the train journey, he misreads timetables and almost causes the party to miss their train. During the party, he misunderstands titles, thinking that Charlus is part of some family called Gandin.

Brichot holds a monologue that even Marcel finds boring. Brichot tries to impress and flatter Marcel through allegorical language and similes. The monologue makes Mr de Cambremer believe that Marcel is a Dreyfusard. To make Marcel feel good, he tells Marcel about a Jewish colonel who got a promotion based on merit, which Mr de Cambremer feels was well-deserved.

Mr Verdurin wishes to play cards, but Saniette knows not a single card game. He only knows how to play the piano. So, they put him on the piano while they play.

Mr de Cambremer is stunned when he realizes who Cottard is, as he is a great admirer and even knows his address in Paris.

Mme Cottard sits in a sofa separate from the card table. She falls asleep, snores and dreams of Mrs Swann. Cottard and Mr de Cambremer hold a trivia for each other about sedatives.

The Cambremers tell about a family, Arrachepele, that they inherited the country house from. The name Arrachepele is a word play meaning “pull out stake” because an ancestor was good at tearing up defensive stakes in sieges (the stakes you put on the ground to deter cavalry charges and other assaults).

Marcel notes a “skirmish” between Mme Verdurin and Charlus. Mme Verdurin offers orangeade. Charlus says he prefers strawberry juice over orangeade. Marcel likens it to preferring men over women. Charlus remains seated when Mme Verdurin stands, which is rude. Mme Verdurin thinks Morel should play the violin instead of playing cards, but Charlus disagrees. Mme Verdurin asks Charlus if he knows any “ruined old nobleman” that she could hire as a porter. He advises against it because “I should be afraid for your sake, that your smart visitors would call at the lodge and go no farther”.

Mme Verdurin suspects that Charlus is lying about knowing (and visiting) Mme Molé. To test him, she asks if he has seen Duc de Guermantes there, mocking him for not knowing the Duc. He then reveals that he is the Duc’s brother. “The idea that the brother of the Duc de Guermantes might be called Baron de Charlus never entered her head”.

Mme Verdurin invites Marcel to visit next Wednesday also, and he can bring his “cousin”, referring to Albertine. Marcel mentioned Albertine as cousin to make it more likely that she would be invited.

Marcel and Albertine spend time with the various aristocrats in the coastal area near Balbec, such as the Verdurins and the Cambremers. They travel a lot around the area, mainly by train.

Upon return to Balbec, a page at the hotel tells Marcel that his sister is married to a very rich man and that she likes to have fun by leaving “something” in hotel rooms and cabs that they will have to clean up after she leaves.

Marcel returns to the Verdurins many times (“these evenings when I came back late from la Raspelière”). He reflects on sleep and memory again. Some of the quotes are continuations or variations of the past sleep argument, so I have put them in that section. But then follows a new idea.

“We possess all our memories, but not the faculty of recalling them ... But what, then, is a memory which we do not recall? Or, indeed, let us go farther. We do not recall our memories of the last thirty years; but we are wholly steeped in them; why then stop short at thirty years, why not prolong back to before our birth this anterior life? who can assure me that in that mass unknown to me there are not some that extend back much farther than my human life. If I can have in me and round me so many memories which I do not remember, this oblivion (a de facto oblivion, at least, since I have not the faculty of seeing anything) may extend over a life which I have lived in the body of another man, even upon another planet. But what, in that case, signifies that immortality of the soul the reality of which the Norwegian

philosopher affirmed? The person that I shall be after death has no more reason to remember the man whom I have been since my birth than the latter to remember what I was before it.”

I first dismissed it as a religious argument, but it is the opposite. There are clearly memories that we cannot recall. For example, we do not remember what we did 20 years ago on the 13th of May, even though we definitely existed at that time. We can then imagine that we go back in time so far as to be sure that we have no memories whatsoever, such as before our birth. Since we cannot ever recall those memories, it doesn't matter whether we are reincarnated. Even if reincarnation was true, it would be psychologically meaningless because we don't remember the previous lives. Identity is a continuity of memory. Even if an immortal soul exists, it does not preserve *you*, so you are not immortal even if your soul is.

It also means that parts of our past are effectively dead to us in spite of definitely having taken place. So, part of us are already dead.

Normandy

Volume 4 takes place 1899-1900. There are two stories taking place simultaneously:

- Marcel and Albertine
- Charlus and Morel

The first story will be summarized here, under the Normandy header. The second follows in the next header. In the book, they alternate and sometimes integrate when all the characters meet.

Marcel and Albertine are still in Balbec. They mingle with the aristocracy in Normandy (where Balbec and La Raspelière are), often by travelling by train. People often greet them on train stations as they pass by. Sometimes, people even offer to join them on their journey.

Mme Verdurin starts having tea parties on Mondays. Marcel sometimes goes there with Albertine.

Marcel encourages Albertine to take up painting, something she did in the past. His idea is to keep her mind occupied, so she won't flirt with girls. He arranges for a daily motor-car ride together, for example in the forest of Chantepie. He buys her a toque and veil (a hat with a netting that covers the head). It seems like he is buying her affection.

Marcel reflects on how impressive motorcars are. Locations that he saw as distant are now 20-30 minutes away. La Raspelière is just 35 minutes from Balbec.

Marcel and Albertine spend lots of time together. They spoon all night. Marcel admits to himself that he may be in love and that he suffers from jealousy that only breaking up with her can solve. He is not happy with her either, it is “a life devoid of keen pleasures”. He is determined to break up with her.

Marcel's mother warns him: “you have gone about quite enough with Albertine. I assure you, you're overdoing it, even to her it may seem ridiculous ... , I am not asking you never to see her again, but simply that it may not be impossible to meet one of you without the other.” Marcel agrees to break up with her soon.

Marcel and Albertine dine at Rivebelle. Albertine stares at a waiter who stares back. Marcel wonders if they already know each other. Maybe the waiter signaled something to Albertine. Will Albertine suddenly get up and go to the waiter? Nothing happens. It's just Marcel's jealousy running amok. After the event, he vows never to return to Rivebelle and convinces Albertine to make the same promise (he controls her). He admits that he will return to Rivebelle many times alone, drunk.

One time when Marcel returns to Grand Hotel, the lift boy says he has a message from a gentleman. The boy is in poor shape, coughing. Meanwhile, there is noise and other distractions. Due to those problems, the message is never delivered. Marcel tries to remain courteous, but he doesn't want to get contaminated either. It is symbolic. A message can be lost due to noise.

Marcel and Albertine go horseback riding. Marcel sees an airplane for the first time and cries with joy. They sometimes sit by the airport watching planes take off and land.

Marcel finds himself singing a song that reminds him of times with Albertine when he heard that song (similar to Swann's sonata). He admits to himself that he is in love with her again. But a few pages later, he says he no longer loves her.

One time at a train to Verdurins, Mme de Villeparisis (the younger) enters the train while Marcel is speaking to Princess Sherbatoff. Marcel speaks to Mme de Villeparisis for an hour. After that, Princess Sherbatoff is cold towards Marcel. Marcel thought she was emotionless, but even she can be offended. The belief that someone

won't give you a hard time for treating them poorly doesn't mean you should treat them poorly. It can be compared to how the Verdurins treat Saniette.

Cottard's wife tells Marcel that she saw his cousin (Albertine) who "behaved rather weirdly" with another woman. Later in the same volume, Marcel instead recalls that it was Cottard who told him about it when they visited the town of Parville. Marcel considers confronting Albertine about it, but he realizes how unlikely the story is, so he never says anything. Marcel decides that he no longer wants to marry Albertine (which is the first time the reader hears that he even had such an idea) and that he instead intends to break up with her.

Marcel reflects on how the beautiful countryside is devoid of beauty when you only see it from a practical point of view (familiarity and the complex social relations in the area). "I am beginning to find this sort of life really stupid". "[From a practical point of view,] the idea of marrying Albertine appeared to me to be madness." He tells his mother that he will not marry Albertine and that he will break up with her soon. His mother is extremely happy to hear it.

Bloch accuses Marcel of being a snob. He tells Marcel of a luncheon at Mme Bontemps. Everyone at the luncheon praised Marcel. Marcel is happy to hear it because the praise should reach Albertine. But, Bloch continues, he himself said nothing.

"I admire you because I understand you, and they admire you without understanding you. To tell the truth, I admire you too much to speak of you thus in public, it would have seemed to me a profanation to praise aloud what I carry in the profoundest depths of my heart".

While Bloch meant it as a well-meaning gesture, the others likely interpreted it as criticism rather than praise. Marcel sees it as disloyalty. He recalls that Albertine once reacted with silence when he mentioned Bloch's affection for himself.

Charlus is attracted to Bloch. He asks Marcel questions about Bloch. He speaks in circles but is obviously trying to find out Bloch's address. He realizes that Bloch stays at a place, La Commanderie, that is unsuitable for Bloch because that was once the name of the estate of a medieval Christian order. Charlus goes into an antisemitic rant delivered through allusions.

Marcel tells Albertine that he looks forward to listening to music at the Verdurins. Albertine asks music by whom. Marcel says Vinteuil, if she must know, assuming she's never heard of him. Albertine says that she already knows a Vinteuil, namely his daughter and her friend, the latter who has been like a mother to Albertine. Albertine "had been virtually brought up" by that friend. Marcel recalls the time he saw Mlle Vinteuil and her friend do lesbian stuff. He realizes that what Cottard told him in Parville is true, after all.

"That friend is Mlle. Vinteuil had been the open sesame which I should have been incapable of discovering by myself, which had made Albertine penetrate to the depths of my shattered heart".
"Her vice now seemed to me to be beyond any doubt".

Marcel meets Albertine, intending to break up with her. He says that all this time, he has loved a different woman who he intends to go back to. He explains to the reader why he is acting so irrationally: "I was too much inclined to believe that, from the moment that I was in love, I could not be loved in return, and that monetary interest alone could attach a woman to me". He loves Albertine, but he won't tell her because he is afraid to lose her if he does. "For fear of blows, I was not guilty of the imprudence (if such it was) that I should have committed in Gilberte's time, of telling her that it was she, Albertine, whom I loved."

He is still scarred by the past. It is reminiscent of a specific moment when he realized that if he showed his affection for Gilberte too openly, she would push him away.

Albertine reacts with pity because she sees that Marcel is sad about the other woman. She advises him to marry the made-up woman because it will make him happy. Marcel notes how good Albertine is to him in spite of what this means for her.

Marcel invites Albertine to live with him in Paris. She declines because they can't pretend like they're cousins in Paris, and they aren't engaged. She intends to go to Maineville to meet her aunt, Mme Bontemps, and pick up letters. Marcel asks her to stay with him instead. They can send the lift-boy to Maineville. She says "alright".

The situation is indicative of much of what is about to happen. She is "anxious to show herself obliging but annoyed at being tied down". She secretly gives the lift-boy a request for Mme Bontemps to let her go to Paris, which is granted.

Officially, Marcel is just being hospitable, but the real driving force is jealousy. Albertine's motives for coming to Paris are never clearly stated except indirectly via the quotes above.

They never speak of the made-up woman again.

Marcel reports to his mother that his mind is made up once and for all: "it is absolutely necessary that I marry Albertine." That is the final line of volume 4. His explanation:

"when I decided to live with Albertine, and even to marry her, it was in order to guard her, to know what she was doing, to prevent her from returning to her old habits with Mlle Vinteuil".

Charlus' secret life

These things happen simultaneously with the love story summarized in the previous header.

Charlus arranges a private dinner with a footman at Grand Hotel. Through the footman, he tries to recruit men for casual relationships. He prefers a certain type of man. The conversation is in code because open homosexuality is unthinkable. Whenever someone passes, Charlus abruptly changes topic. The footman understands that Charlus wants men, but he doesn't understand what type. For example, the footman himself is too effeminate for Charlus. Aimé (the headwaiter) and Françoise understand what's going on. They are disgusted.

Aimé shows Marcel a letter from Charlus that he received after the Paris luncheon when Charlus spied on Saint-Loup. Charlus invites Aimé to spend time with him, indicating that they would have a close relationship ("sharing all that I possess"). He describes his desire for Aimé as something sacred. He denounces Aimé for rejecting thrice his invitations (like Peter denied Christ three times).

The letter is similar to the conversation Marcel had when he visited Charlus.

Aimé never read the letter properly. Marcel explains what it means. Aimé regrets not taking the opportunity to get big payments.

Marcel later learns that his chauffeur often drives Charlus and Morel to distant villages where no one knows who they are. An omniscient third-person narrator describes the two men making evil plans. Morel wants to attract a girl, take her virginity and then abandon her just to feel powerful. Jupien's niece (who is never named) is a prime target. Morel understands what Charlus wants. Morel displays to Charlus that he has a gaydar.

Morel puts an elaborate and vile plan in motion to get rid of the Verdurins' coachman and replace him with a motor-car chauffeur. It is the same chauffeur that Marcel hires.

Charlus is in love with Morel, not just attracted. To spend more time with Morel, Charlus becomes as faithful as Princes Sherbatoff. The other faithful don't like Morel, but they never speak ill of him in front of Charlus.

Charlus frequently speaks to others of how beautiful Morel is. He thinks no one suspects that he is attracted to Morel, "as though it had no connection with an inclination".

Charlus makes an innuendo that Morel is a "young lady" and is gay. Only Marcel catches it.

Charlus and Brichot have a long conversation about François-René de Chateaubriand, a writer, and Honoré de Balzac, a playwright. They discuss who is good and who is overrated. Charlus cites works that have sexual and psychological complexity. He thinks Balzac is profound because he reveals hidden human desires.

Charlus is well-informed about women's fashion. He frequently praises Albertine's clothes, always using the correct terms. He even knows who the designers are.

Charlus wants to make "a little nest" for Morel at his house so that he will return often, but he also wants him to have lots of freedom so he can improve as a musician because then Charlus can say at a concert: "The person they are applauding at this moment is coming home with me tonight."

Charlus offers to adopt Morel to bestow upon him a title. Morel always declines because he is making a name for himself in the world of music and it would be bad for his career to change it. Charlus is not at liberty to bestow such titles anyway.

Morel absorbs Charlus' views on the aristocratic hierarchy, which leads him to look down on the Cambremers, even though he himself is not a noble. The views are quite simple: "apart from ... the Verdurins, there existed only the Guermantes, and the few almost royal houses enumerated by the Baron, all the rest being but dregs or scum."

After a luncheon at the Verdurins, Charlus hopes to spend the rest of the day with Morel, but Morel has other plans. Marcel sees how sad Charlus is, so he cancels his plans with Albertine to stay with Charlus. Charlus makes up a lie that there is to be a duel. He gives Marcel instructions to take a letter to Morel, mention a duel, and make no attempt at stopping Morel from coming back. Marcel delivers the message to Morel. Morel says he doesn't really have any plans and that he just wants to spend an evening alone, without Charlus for once. He

feels like Charlus' slave. Nevertheless, he agrees to read the letter. Charlus says two men from the regiment have slandered Morel and Charlus must uphold his honor with a duel. Morel agrees to go to Charlus immediately. Charlus says, "I told you, whatever you did, not to bring him back with you." Morel implores Charlus to cancel the duel. Charlus holds a speech about how important his friendship to Morel is. During the course of the speech, he changes his mind and wants to fight a duel after all. Charlus agrees to postpone his final decision two days. Morel agrees to stay with Charlus to talk him out of the duel. Charlus intends to use the two days to convince Morel to make more plans with him.

Cottard arrives because Charlus called for him to be his second. Cottard is disappointed that there might be no duel. Charlus imagines himself as the archangel Raphael that guides the biblical Tobias (Morel) on the right path. Charlus sees how Morel loves the idea, but in reality Morel hates the idea. Nevertheless, the trick has worked. Morel is back.

The duel is never mentioned again.

Morel writes Charlus several letters asking for money for a "ghastly affair". Charlus refuses to give money because that could increase Morel's independence. Charlus suffers from obsession with Morel. He lies awake thinking of what the ghastly affair could be.

The author confirms once and for all that Morel is straight: "being sincerely attached to M. de Charlus, and at the same time absolutely indifferent physically to both of us". Marcel thinks Morel reminds him of the way Rachel used to speak to him, "the same display of warm friendship as a courtesan who knows that you do not desire her and that her lover has a sincere friend in you who will not attempt to part him from her". Marcel finds that both Charlus and Morel word by word say the same things that Saint-Loup and Rachel used to say to Marcel.

A digression is made to portray an aristocrat from the countryside, Mr de Chevregny. He has a big interest in Paris. He sometimes goes there, but he consumes the city so fast that it all becomes a blur: "there was not a moment to waste if he was to see everything". He is uninformed about Paris and art.

The Verdurins' country estate gets even more popular. People come from all over the country. The Cambremers are impressed by Mme Verdurin, but they pretend to look down on her to put themselves in higher regard. The Cambremers take care not to mix different social circles or invite the wrong people. At their country estate, Féterne, they host a dinner for "smart people", such as Cottard and Morel, but that excludes Mme Verdurin herself. She takes it as an insult, so she talks Cottard and Morel into declining the invitation.

It appears to be a petty struggle over status.

Cambremers have high regard for a family called Férés, in spite of that name being obscure. To increase their attraction for yet another party, they invite Charlus, but only Morel comes, which is disappointing. It is never stated why Charlus doesn't come. The Cambremers think Mme Verdurin is behind it. They break all contact with the Verdurins.

They do not invite Mr de Chevregny as his status is too low. He shows up anyway but is sent away. Férés is appalled to even see him in the courtyard.

Marcel ponders local place names that end in "fleur". He recounts more etymology from Brichtot.

Morel's new demand of Charlus is that he devotes his days to him, but his evenings are his own. Charlus is jealous, but Morel insists. Officially, he studies algebra during the evenings, even until midnight. Prince de Guermantes has an errand at the coast. He picks up Morel, unaware that he is the famous musician. Morel, meanwhile, is unaware that the man is the prince. The prince offers Morel 50 francs to spend the night with him at a brothel in Maineville. Morel gladly agrees ("a twofold pleasure"). They go there together regularly. It is clear that the prince wants to bone Morel, but Morel wants to bone women. But Morel probably gives the prince what he wants because Morel wants money.

Charlus gets wind of it and imagines that he has a rival for Morel's affection. He recruits Jupien to arrange a spy shack in the brothel. Morel and the prince get wind of that and counter-spies, realizing that "two gentlemen" are spying on him. That makes him scared.

The prince arranges a villa where he can meet Morel alone, but he still does not reveal who he is. When Morel gets to the villa, the prince has not yet arrived, so Morel looks around, finding photos of the Guermantes family, including Charlus. He fears that Charlus is trying to trap him in the villa, so he escapes. He also suspects the prince, so whenever he sees him after that (and whenever prince tries to contact him), even in Paris, he runs away.

Through the Cambremers, Marcel becomes acquainted with Comte de Crécy, a noble who has become poor.

On days when Marcel can't see Albertine in Balbec, he sometimes invites the Comte. In spite of living like a poor person, the Comte behaves refined. He takes enormous pleasures in things he cannot afford in his daily life, such as cigars, wine and fine food. In spite of not affording such luxuries, he knows them well: correct vintages and proper temperatures. He is impressed with Marcel because he is one of the few who understands the difference between noble families. Regular people don't know, for example, the difference between Guermantes and Cambremer. The Comte is also highly modest. He never brags, not even about his family. The Cr  cy family is originally from England but were transplanted to France. The Comte notes that many noble names are stolen, such as Americans calling themselves Montgomery, which is a noble family in Great Britain. Marcel considers mentioning that he knows a person who has stolen the name Cr  cy (Odette), but he opts not to.

Before Morel leaves Balbec, he gambles away all his money in a casino. He convinces Bloch to take a 5000 franc loan for him from Nissim Bernard. Morel is deeply grateful. Morel then convinces Marcel to convince Charlus to give Morel a monthly allowance of 1000 francs. The first month, Morel pays back 1000 of the loaned francs, but then he rewrites history in his mind and starts trash talking Bloch and refuses to pay back the rest of the money.

The Prisoner

We are now at year 1900 (Marcel is 22).

After the return from Balbec, Albertine lives at Marcel's home in Paris. She has her own bedroom (Marcel's father's study) right next to Marcel's with walls so thin that they can talk to each other through the bathroom and closet walls. Marcel feels calm as long as he knows where Albertine is, so for that reason is happy that she lives with him.

"my sole purpose for more than a year: never to leave her by herself for a single hour".

However, "this calm which my mistress was procuring for me was a release from suffering rather than a positive joy". He thought he could remove Albertine from Gomorra, but Gomorra is everywhere. He feels like he is not in love with her. She even bores him. But as soon as she is away, he loves her again.

Marcel's house has certain rules. Albertine conforms to them all. To let Marcel sleep properly in the morning, no one can make noise until he rings a bell.

Marcel and Albertine are clearly a couple, even though he constantly refers to her as "mon ami" which is ambiguous ("mon amour" would be unambiguous). They are physical all the time, hugging, kissing and "she did give me carnal satisfaction".

They spend lots of time together. They say loving words to each other. "As soon as she entered my room, she sprang upon my bed and sometimes would [praise] my type of intellect, would vow ... that she would sooner die than leave me."

Every evening, Albertine gives Marcel a big tongue kiss. Marcel notes that all of Albertine's kisses have a "soothing power the like of which I had not known since the evenings at Combray long ago when my mother, stooping over my bed, brought me repose in a kiss". "Mother ... whose regular good-night kiss I was beginning again to feel the childish need". One night, she gives him no kiss. He "cried all night long".

In Paris, they can no longer pretend that Albertine is Marcel's cousin, so there is some secrecy to her staying there. Marcel keeps her presence hidden from everyone he knows. Bloch thinks Marcel is speaking to himself once when he passes by.

Another rule is that Albertine's name can never be mentioned in the house while Marcel has a visitor.

The rules serve not only to avoid a public scandal, but to avoid Albertine to fall in love with one of Marcel's friends, such as Bloch.

The title of the 5th volume is *The Prisoner*, or *The Captive*, referring to how Albertine is virtually a prisoner in Marcel's apartment.

They are alone in the apartment except for Françoise. Marcel's mother makes an extended trip to Balbec to take care of a dying aunt (the same aunt that didn't come to Paris when Marcel's grandmother was dying). Marcel's father only makes a single brief appearance throughout volume 5 and 6. Supposedly, he is always away on business. Mme Bontemps doesn't mind that Albertine is moving away either because "she might be able to get rid of her by securing for her a wealthy marriage from which a little of the wealth would trickle into the aunt's pocket" Marcel likely counts as rich enough.

Françoise feels "hatred" for Albertine, "the stupidest person that ever was seen".

Marcel notices that Albertine has changed slightly physically, in particular her eyes. He also notes that she has become "extremely intelligent". He buys her little gifts, such as a scarf and a sunshade. He asks Oriane for help to find the right clothes to buy. In particular, he buys her clothes by a Venetian designer called Fortunio. Oriane and Mme Swann (separately) sometimes do refinements on the clothes that Marcel buys for Albertine, but neither of them know that Albertine lives in Marcel's apartment.

Albertine still wants to prove to Marcel that she is faithful.

"Not only did she take care never to be alone for a moment, so that I might not lack information as to what she had been doing, if I did not believe her own statements, but even when she had to telephone to Andrée, or to the garage, or to the livery stable or elsewhere, she pretended that it was such a bore to stand about by herself waiting to telephone, what with the time the girls took to give you your number, and took care that I should be with her at such times, or, failing myself, Françoise, as though she were afraid that I might imagine reprehensible conversations by telephone in which she would make mysterious assignations. Alas, all this did not set my mind at rest."

Andrée also lives in Paris at that point. She arrives with the Verdurins' chauffeur (the same that Marcel, Albertine, Morel and Charlus hired) to pick up Albertine. They plan to go to Buttes-Chaumont, a park. Marcel

trusts Andrée and does not feel jealous. Albertine goes out with Andrée regularly, leaving Marcel in a pleasant solitude.

Marcel reflects upon the end of nobility: “to many people of intelligence, [Duchesse de Guermantes] was merely a lady like any other, the name signifying nothing, now that there are no longer any sovereign Duchies or Principalities, but I had adopted a different point of view”. He sees her as a living monument to what her house once ruled. She has less money these days than before, and she jokes about being “too poor”.

Marcel, the Duke, the Duchess and Mr de Bréauté discuss the Dreyfus case. The Duke is still salty about the Jockey incident. He makes antisemite remarks and argues against Dreyfus.

Every day, Charlus and Morel arrive at the building to have tea with Jupien (his workshop is in the same building). One time, Jupien’s niece says, “come tomorrow and I’ll stand you a tea”. Charlus finds it vulgar because you don’t “stand” tea, you “have” it. Also, the girl’s tea is low quality, “stench of sewage”. On the way home with Morel, Charlus has a succession of violent outbursts in front of Morel. He knows Morel is in love with the niece and intends to marry her, but she has shown herself unworthy. Charlus later realizes that he overreacted and praises the girl’s singing to make up for it. He is fine with Morel marrying Jupien’s niece because he knows that she was “in trouble” earlier and plans to reveal it after the marriage and then take control over them both: “to all the world, to everyone who sees that I protect them, house them, to myself, Morel is mine.”

Jupien’s niece finds it weird that “Charlus was tyrannically present at all their meetings”. She sees him as malevolent, not realizing that he is in love with Morel.

Charlus gets a letter from someone called Pierre with an invitation to meet again. He assumes it is from high-ranking aristocratic relative, but investigations reveal it is from a page that he kissed at a gambling club. Charlus keeps the letter to show others that he is desirable.

Oriane gives Marcel some branches of syringa (a purple flower). He returns home with them and unexpectedly finds Andrée there. She and Albertine have returned early from a trip. Andrée distracts Marcel by talking about the syringas and says that Albertine is busy writing a letter to her aunt, but they are really just preventing Marcel from seeing that the bed in Albertine’s room is untidy. They have been doing stuff in it. Marcel doesn’t realize at the time.

Andrée starts behaving with hostility towards Marcel.

Marcel lies to Albertine that the doctor has ordered him to lie in bed. He listens to music (Vinteuil), looks at art (Elstir), and reads books (Bergotte). He is lazy. He likes to just lie there, observing the weather, procrastinating.

Marcel reflects on how, in his mind, Albertine has changed through the years.

“No more than my own progression in time, no more than the act of gazing at a girl seated opposite to me beneath the lamp, which shed upon her a different light from that of the sun when I used to behold her striding along the seashore, was this material enrichment, this autonomous progress of Albertine the determining cause of the difference between my present view of her and my original impression of her at Balbec.”

The sentence is difficult to read at first. Notice the negatives at the start of the sentence. The lamp is Paris. The sun is Balbec. Marcel’s view of Albertine has changed, but that is not necessarily because she has changed. In Balbec, Albertine was distant and fleeting. Now, she is familiar and possessed.

The little band “no longer held any mystery for me. They had become ... a mere grove of budding girls, from among whom I was quite distinctly proud of having plucked, and carried off from them all, their fairest rose.”

That rose is Albertine.

There is a part of Marcel that clings to the first memory of Albertine on the beach in Balbec. He sometimes emotionally retreats to that memory. However, that memory only plays a small role in his love for her now.

“my first impressions at the sight of Albertine, against a background of sea, might to some small extent persist in my love of her: actually, these earlier impressions occupy but a tiny place in a love of this sort; in its strength, in its agony, in its need of comfort and its return to a calm and soothing memory with which we would prefer to abide and to learn nothing more of her whom we love, even if there be something horrible that we ought to know - would prefer still more to consult only these earlier memories”.

Rather, love is now driven by jealousy, anxiety, habit and control.

When Albertine sleeps, Marcel is at peace because she cannot deceive him and he doesn't have to constantly mind his words. It seems that Marcel is acting when he is with Albertine. He can't be himself because he thinks she will reject him. That is extremely tiring for him.

"In this way her sleep did to a certain extent make love possible. When she was present, I spoke to her, but I was too far absent from myself to be able to think. When she was asleep, I no longer needed to talk to her, I knew that she was no longer looking at me, I had no longer any need to live upon my own outer surface ... I had that impression of possessing her altogether".

"One lies all one's life long, even, especially, perhaps only, to those who love one. For they alone make us fear for our pleasure and desire their esteem."

He describes how beautiful she is while she sleeps.

In spite of their words of affection, Marcel does not dare to tell Albertine that he loves her.

"But the confession of that love, apart from the fact that it could not have told Albertine anything new, would perhaps have made her colder to me than the harshness and deceit for which love was the sole excuse".

Marcel wonders if Aimé meant lesbian when he said Albertine had "bad style". He wonders which girls Albertine has slept with. Maybe the girls in the mirror at Incarville. Maybe Mlle Vinteuil's girlfriend. Maybe Bloch's cousin Esther. Marcel asks Bloch to see a picture of Esther just to judge whether Albertine would want her. He then sends the picture to Aimé to see if he recognizes Esther. Aimé eventually responds that he does not recognize the girl. That makes Marcel even more jealous as Albertine must have met some other girl.

Marcel is overcome by jealousy. He explains many details and imagination that makes him jealous. He doesn't trust Albertine.

"I tried to remember whether she had said this or that, in what tone, at what moment, in response to what speech of mine".

"Albertine had that morning refused me a pleasure which might indeed have tired her. Was that in order to reserve it for someone else? This afternoon, perhaps? For whom?"

We tend to think that jealousy is a reaction to something that has happened, such as a suspicious look, but jealousy doesn't need facts to exist.

"We are, when we love, in an abnormal state, capable of giving at once to the most apparently simple accident ... a seriousness which in itself it would not entail."

Proust gives this example: a man is interested in a woman. The woman goes to visit her sister. The man learns at random from a phonebook that Mr E lives in the same town that the woman visits. The mind of the man suddenly starts wondering if the woman is visiting Mr E. In that way, the mind is like a canvas. Any blank space can be filled with false ideas.

"now the space that stood empty in our canvas is filled to abundance. And the whole composition takes shape, thanks to the presence, evoked by jealousy, of the beauty of whom already we are no longer jealous and whom we no longer love."

Marcel's jealousy appeared in the same way. He filled in blank spaces on the canvas, similar to the stereoscope he played with in Balbec.

A digression is made into describing a spring day in Paris. He describes the sounds of the streets. Street vendors are described like a choir singing a rhapsody. Albertine wants to buy food from all street vendors they hear pass by. They also order ice (cream) from Swann's favorite shop. Albertine has a well-developed taste for the varieties of ice.

The items (and other daily chores such as laundry) are often delivered by young women. Marcel compares himself to a bird watcher, classifying the girls. He identifies in himself a need to capture them and possess them. At one point, Marcel goes out to buy cheese (Françoise usually buys it). He sees a dairy maid from afar. Later, the same dairy maid visits his house. Seeing her up close, she is not what he thought from afar.

"the fair dairymaid ... stripped of all that I had imagined and of the desire that had been aroused in me, was reduced to her own proportions."

Albertine goes alone to Versailles, driven by the usual chauffeur. Marcel questions the chauffeur and learns that Albertine went off on her own for 7 hours. The chauffeur followed her during that time, as he felt was his duty. She really just looked at the castle, alone, keeping her gaze in her guidebook as she walked.

Albert says she intends to visit the Verdurins without Marcel, but with Andrée.

“It is possible that I may go to-morrow to the Verdurins, I don't in the least know whether I shall go, I don't really want to. A childish anagram of the admission: I shall go to-morrow to the Verdurins, it is absolutely certain, for I attach the utmost importance to the visit.”

They argue about it. Marcel says that if they go, he will make a surprise appearance. In the end, Albertine and Andrée instead go to a *matinée* (theatre performance) in Trocadéro (a park in Paris), which Marcel thinks is a better idea. Then he learns that the actress Léa will perform at the *matinée*. Léa is a friend of the girls in the mirror at Incarville. Albertine tells several lies that reveal that she already had relations with Léa. Marcel sends Françoise to bring Albertine back. He notices a deterioration in Françoise, perhaps due to age. While waiting for them to return, he plays Swann's sonata.

The same day, Bergotte dies. The newspapers report that it was the day before. Marcel notes that the newspapers are wrong since Bergotte had met Albertine and spoken to her the day before. Then he realizes that that too was a lie.

Bergotte wasted time in his life on women, habits, pleasures and distractions. He justified it by saying it created material for art, but he was not happy with his art at the end. He saw a painting by Vermeer. It had a tiny patch of yellow wall. He saw that yellow wall as an ideal for his writing. He thought his writing was not rich or precise enough.

“My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with several coats of paint, made my language exquisite in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall.”

Marcel concludes that in the end, the only thing that mattered is Bergotte's art, which, in a way, makes him immortal. But it is also a cautionary tale.

Marcel is, in a way, also a prisoner. He dreams of traveling, especially to Venice, but he can't because he can't leave Albertine out of his sight. He is also trapped in his jealousy. He gives up much of his social life to keep watch on Albertine (“could think only of keeping her at any cost to myself”).

While out on a walk, Marcel meets Gisèle who lets slip that she wants to talk to Albertine about some girls. Realizing she already said too much, she says nothing more. Marcel confronts Albertine about a time when she claimed to take drawing lessons late in the day. She admits that it was a lie but claims she does not lie to Marcel anymore.

Morel gets engaged to Jupien's niece. He then proceeds with his plan to take her virginity, but since they aren't married, she refuses him over and over. He tries to make her find other girls for him to sleep with. Her refusal to satisfy his desires causes him to stop loving her. He breaks up with her. Morel feels bad about what happened, but just as the last event with Bloch, he rewrites the past and makes Jupien's niece the bad guy in his head. His feelings turn to hatred for her.

Visiting Verdurins again

Marcel visits the Verdurins alone without telling Albertine.

Charlus is in poor physical shape. His secrets have spread to become public knowledge. He is followed by blackmailers. It has taken a toll on him. He is also out of the loop, even in homosexual practices.

Morel receives a letter from Léa where she addresses him as a girl. Morel is having relations with her and a network of women she knows. Charlus is dumbfounded about the code in the letter. For example, “so” means gay. He nevertheless admires Morel's success with women.

Saniette informs everyone that Princess Sherbatoff has died today. Mr Verdurin says Saniette always exaggerates everything and keeps mocking him as usual. Brichot joins in.

Charlus gets too eccentric with the Verdurins' footman who he is attracted to. For example, he touches the footman's nose while saying “pif!”. The footman is confused and alarmed but no one else bats an eye because Charlus is like that now.

The author makes a digression about how the Dreyfus case affected aristocratic life and Mme Verdurin's salon (in Paris) in particular. It split some groups in half.

Mlle Vinteuil and her friends are invited to the party, but they never come. Marcel thinks that must be why Albertine wanted to visit the Verdurins alone.

Mlle Vinteuil's friend has deciphered and reconstructed Vinteuil's unpublished work. She has put together chaotic, almost unreadable manuscripts. Mlle Vinteuil's completed puzzle is a work of genius. The new compositions become Vinteuil's most celebrated. Morel and some other musicians play one of the unpublished compositions. Everyone listens carefully. Marcel describes the composition. It really gets to him. Artists tap into their subconscious to produce art, and those that enjoy the art experience their subconscious through the art.

Mr d'Argencourt is at the party. He has a mistress these days, one that has a "taste for intelligent people". Therefore, Mr d'Argencourt is friendly to Morel and Charlus. He sees them as safe because they won't try to steal his girl.

Charlus tells Brichot that 30% of all people are truly virtuous and the rest are sinners. Brichot is shocked.

A discussion on homosexuality follows. Charlus claims that more people are "interested in the subject" than the others believe.

Charlus reveals that before Odette met Swann, she was pursuing Charlus. He introduced her to Swann to get rid of her. He even wrote her letters to Swann. He helped her cheat on Swann with several men. He also reveals that when he met Odette, she was married to Mr de Cr  cy. She took him for all he had. That is a surprise to the reader as we thought Swann was Odette's first husband. The conversation Marcel had with Mr de Cr  cy indicated that Odette had taken the name as a fake name when she was a prostitute, but she is his ex-wife.

"we picture the future as a reflection of the present projected into empty space, whereas it is the result, often almost immediate, of causes which for the most part escape our notice."

Charlus exaggerates admiration for the Queen of Naples' fan (one you wave in your face to cool down). He says this party should go into history books.

Charlus is the most important man at the party. He has invited most of the guests, and the party has been a success. Mme Verdurin has been somewhat ignored by the guests who behave as Charlus is the host. At the end of the party, everyone lines up to say goodbye to Charlus instead of Mme Verdurin, and Charlus plays along. Charlus prolongs the proceedings by telling an anecdote of a time he was invited by a Mme de Montmorency. She wrote him to "remember me by 9:30 at..." He took it literally, so he didn't come, but he made sure to remember her while sitting in front of his fireplace at the given time. Charlus displays wit but also cruelty. He criticizes high society for various rituals, insults the Verdurins' planning, and praises Morel.

Mme Verdurin is "blind with fury". She wants to separate Charlus and Morel. She resents Charlus. He has taken too much control of her parties. He blacklists certain guests that Mme Verdurin would like to invite, such as Mme Mol  . Charlus also invites guests that Mme Verdurin finds rude. The exception is the Queen of Naples who everyone likes.

Mme Verdurin slanders Charlus in front of several guests. He is chased by the police and has money problems. Mme Verdurin asks Brichot to go and smoke with Charlus while Mr Verdurin speaks to Morel ("his Dulcinea"). After their conversation, Mme Verdurin reiterates to Morel the same ideas: He is better off without Charlus. Charlus is limiting him. "People are talking freely" about their relationship, and it may damage Morel's reputation. Furthermore, Charlus has said that Morel wants the Legion of Honour (a military medal) just to please his uncle. Morel is sad but convinced. Just then, Charlus walks in and talks about the medal. Morel tells Charlus: "Leave me alone, I forbid you to come near me". Charlus reacts with introversion. He is "stupefied, measuring the depths of his misery without understanding its cause, finding not a word to utter". He leaves with the Queen of Naples. He falls ill and is on the verge of death for months. The illness wipes out his desire for revenge. For a time, he is humble and gentle until his old self returns.

Saniette is not at the party. He had a stroke when he realized how much in debt he was in. In an act of compassion, the Verdurins save him, possibly downsizing their own lifestyle to afford it. They join with Cottard to make Saniette believe that the money is from Princess Sherbatoff. Saniette dies three years later from his illness.

Flight of Albertine

Albertine's imprisonment is also a rebirth. She reads Marcel's books (such as Dostoyevsky) and improves her intellect.

When Marcel comes home from the Verdurins, they argue about the lies they keep telling each other.

"Our engagement had assumed the form of a criminal trial".

Marcel accuses Albertine of lying, referring to her wanting to go to Verdurins alone to see Mlle Vinteuil.

Albertine interprets it as Marcel meeting Mlle Vinteuil at the party and learning the truth: Albertine did not "grow up" with her. They were just acquaintances. "But I felt so looked down on by you ... I stupidly thought that I might make myself seem interesting to you by inventing the story that I had known the girls quite well. I felt that I bored you, that you thought me a goose."

Marcel confronts her about a time when she went to Balbec for three days without telling him. She admits that she didn't even go there. The lie was a lie. The chauffeur wanted three days off, so Albertine covered for him. He dropped her off in Auteuil (a district of Paris) where she spent three days with a friend "bored to tears". She gave the driver postcards to send to Marcel, but he botched the plan by sending them late. They arrived after Albertine returned home. During the three days, Albertine only went out once, disguised as a man. She saw Bloch who didn't recognize her. Considering those stories, it's obvious that there are a lot of lies, inconsistencies and things left out. Marcel feels hurt by the lies and the fact that she never paid him a visit during those three days since she was in Paris and bored.

She also admits that she knew Mlle Vinteuil would be at the Verdurins.

The next part is almost lost in translation. Albertine says: "rather you left me alone for once in a way so that I can go and get someone decent to *casser le pot*". It is an extremely vulgar term, meaning to be sodomized. She blushes, covers her mouth and changes the subject. But the fact that she said it is telling. She has a secret life where she talks like that.

Marcel tries reverse psychology, threatening to break up. Both agree that it would be sad to break up. Albertine insists that she likes living with Marcel. They agree to try a few more weeks, "a new lease of life".

Marcel's mother sends a letter asking what is going on in the question of marriage.

"This letter from my mother brought me back to earth. What am I doing, seeking a mysterious soul, interpreting a face and feeling myself overawed by presentiments which I dare not explore?"

Albertine has improved at music to a point where she can play the pianola quite well, including music by Vinteuil. While listening to Albertine play, Marcel makes another insight about art.

"In this music of Vinteuil, phrases that I had not noticed at Mme. Verdurin's, obscure phantoms that were then indistinct, turned into dazzling architectural structures; and some of them became friends, whom I had barely made out at first, who at best had appeared to me to be ugly, so that I could never have supposed that they were like those people, unattractive at first sight, whom we discover to be what they really are only after we have come to know them well."

"the phrase that had seemed to me too little melodious, too mechanical in its rhythm, of the swinging joy of bells at noon, had now become my favorite, whether because I had grown accustomed to its ugliness or because I had discovered its beauty."

"this music seemed to me to be something truer than all the books that I knew ... what we feel in life, not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary (that is to say an intellectual) translation in giving an account of it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recompose it as does music".

Music is described there like an involuntary memory. It is experienced, not just thought of.

Marcel analyzes his jealousy. He realizes that his jealousy is driven by ignorance and imagination, not knowledge.

"Love of woman for woman was something too unfamiliar".

Love makes everything connected to the beloved feel alive and painful. You notice things that would be meaningless if you weren't in love.

"Love ... is ... space and time rendered perceptible by the heart."

Jealousy comes from within, not from without.

"we can feel no jealousy save of ourselves. Observation counts for little."

Marcel wants to know the truth: has she been cheating on him or not? The search of that truth becomes an obsession of its own. He suspects that she is lying and cheating, but he still has no definite confirmation. He can possess Albertine physically and socially, but he can never possess her mind or her past.

“her mind escaped from the grasp of mine ... urging me with a cruel and fruitless pressure to the remembrance of the past, she resembled, if anything, a mighty goddess of Time.” Albertine is driven by pleasure seeking, “gripped by the irresistible temptation of a pleasure.” She cannot help it. He also recalls her tendency to do multiple utilization. When she suddenly changed her mind about leaving Balbec, something must have happened. Marcel deduces through dates that the reason must be that she learned that Andrée was not going to return to Balbec. By returning to Paris, Albertine pleased both Marcel and Andrée.

Mme Bontemps stops by and speaks of Buttes-Chaumont as if Albertine has gone there frequently. But Albertine told Marcel that she had never been there before her visit with Andrée.

Marcel gets an outburst of anger when Albertine acts with indifference.

“Françoise had let fall in my hearing that Albertine was satisfied with nothing, that when I sent word to her that I would be going out with her, or that I would not be going out, that the motor-car would come to fetch her, or would not come, she almost shrugged her shoulders and would barely give a polite answer”.

He apologizes and they speak again about breaking up. Marcel confronts Albertine about Andrée. Maybe the person he trusted is also a lover. Albertine denies it.

By spring (whys is symbolic for this), Albertine stops putting out, so Marcel longs for other women and starts to resent Albertine.

“And so, no longer deriving from her even those carnal satisfactions on which I depended, finding her positively ugly in her ill humor, I felt all the more keenly my deprivation of all the women and of the travels for which these first warm days reawakened my desire.”

He also longs for Venice. He can't travel there because of Albertine.

“I felt that my life with Albertine was on the one hand, when I was not jealous, nothing but boredom, and on the other hand, when I was jealous, nothing but pain.”

Several things happen that foreshadow Albertine's departure. They reconcile, but only as friends. She refuses his advances and won't even give him a good-night kiss. She agrees to sit in his bed, but she sits further away than normal, “withdrew with the sort of instinctive and fatal obstinacy of animals that feel the hand of death”. At night, he hears her window open, but he finds her still present. She just wanted some air. They go for a drive and see another airplane (“flight”).

The same evening, they go to a pastry place. Albertine keeps looking at a waitress trying to get her attention, but the waitress is completely oblivious and never even looks at Albertine. Marcel feels schadenfreude about it. After the visit, Marcel fears that the waitress will give their address to some random girl, and they will discover Albertine in his home. He plans to tell the waitress not to give away his address, but he decides to wait a week first, so it doesn't look so important. All of that is just his fantasies running amok.

Marcel feels like Albertine is content with living with him again. A moment ago, she was cold and distant, so he felt anxiety, jealousy and fear of losing her. Now, he feels like he once again possesses her. She is calm and the tension is gone.

“the possession of her no longer seemed to me a treasure for which we are prepared to sacrifice every other...”

He didn't want Albertine for who she was. He wanted her for the relief she offered his suffering.

“we should have done so only to rid ourselves of a grief”.

He plans to break up.

“Now that life with Albertine had become possible once again, I felt that I could derive nothing from it but misery, since she did not love me; better to part from her in the pleasant moment of her consent which I should prolong in memory. Yes, this was the moment”.

He never gets to break up with her. In the morning, Françoise tells Marcel: “Mademoiselle Albertine has gone”. That is 1902 (Marcel is 23), “more than a year” since they went to Paris.

The Fugitive

The sixth volume is called The Fugitive, as if Albertine escaped the prison.

Marcel feels regret now that Albertine is gone.

“I was so much in the habit of having Albertine with me, and now I suddenly saw a new aspect of habit. Hitherto I had regarded it chiefly as an annihilating force which suppresses the originality and even the awareness of one’s perceptions; now I saw it as a dread deity, so riveted to one’s being, its insignificant face so incrustated in one’s heart, that if it detaches itself, if it turns away from one, this deity that one had barely distinguished inflicts on one sufferings more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself.”

Habit is unnoticeable while you are in it. When you break habit, you feel hollow. He is so used to his daily routine with Albertine by his side that he doesn’t know what to do now that it’s over. His mind wants to bring her back. It’s easy to mistake habit for love or comfort.

In a way, experience reinforces habit even when that habit is bad for us.

“No doubt I had had experience with Gilberte of the danger of letters expressing an indifference which, feigned at first, ends by becoming genuine. And this experience ought to have restrained me from writing to Albertine letters of the same sort as those I had written to Gilberte. But what we call experience is merely the revelation to our own eyes of a trait in our character which naturally reappears, and reappears all the more markedly because we have already once brought it to light, so that the spontaneous impulse which guided us on the first occasion finds itself reinforced by all the suggestions of memory.”

Simplified:

I once wrote a letter. It turned out bad. I should not do it again.

I feel the impulse to do it again.

Because I once did it, my memory makes it feel natural to do it again.

So, I do it again.

It’s easier to do what you did before. Acting in a new (possibly healthier way) requires breaking a habit, which requires effort. Marcel admits that he is flawed.

Albertine left a letter with Françoise. She writes that it is time to part and hope they can remain friends. Marcel thinks she’s lying again (“all this means nothing”) and that she wants to return.

Bloch reveals that he recently (before Albertine left) met Albertine with Mr Bontemps. Bloch told Mr Bontemps that Albertine treats Marcel poorly and that he should chastise her about it. Marcel is angered about Bloch’s meddling, but Bloch finds it funny.

Marcel picks up a random young girl and takes her home, but once she sits in his lap, he changes his mind because he misses Albertine. He gives the girl 500 francs and sends her home. The local Sûreté (civil police force), spelled Streté in my translation, summons Marcel to accuse him of abducting and sleeping with a minor. They have no evidence, so the meeting ends. The meeting “was extremely violent for as long as the parents were in the room. But as soon as they had gone, the head of the Streté, who had a weakness for little girls, changed his tone and admonished me as man to man: Next time, you must be more careful. Good God, you can’t pick them up as easily as that, or you’ll get into trouble. Anyhow, you’ll find dozens of little girls who are better-looking than that one, and far cheaper. It was a perfectly ridiculous amount to pay.”

Françoise informs Marcel that the house is now under surveillance. Marcel laments that he can never bring home any young girls again.

Marcel wonders if he can forget Albertine. It would free him of his own mind, “like a cripple who has recovered the use of his legs and can dispense with his crutches”.

Albertine once said she might go to her aunt (Mme Bontemps) in Touraine if they break up. Marcel gives Saint-Loup money to give to Mme Bontemps to indirectly bribe her into sending Albertine back. He also gives Saint-Loup a photo of Albertine. Saint-Loup does not recognize her because she looks different now (she has “put on weight”), and apparently, he has forgotten her name too (or Marcel never told him her name when they met).

Saint-Loup is clearly unimpressed by the appearance of the girl in the photo. Marcel feels the same about Rachel: “the first time I met her with Saint-Loup, at the thought that anybody could be tormented by not knowing what such a woman had been doing one evening”.

Saint-Loup’s mission fails. He is spotted by Albertine. Marcel sends a telegram to Saint-Loup to abort the mission, but it is too late. Albertine understands what’s going on. She writes a letter to Marcel:

“My dear, you have sent your friend Saint-Loup to my aunt, which was foolish. My dearest, if you needed me, why did you not write to me directly? I should have been only too delighted to come back.”

Francoise discovers two rings that Albertine left behind. She notices that they are from the same craftsman. Albertine previously told Marcel that one ring was from her aunt and that she bought one herself. That must be a lie. Both rings are probably from a past lover. It's evidence but still no conclusive truth. You must drop all illusions before you can find the truth.

Marcel responds with a letter full of lies, driven by pride. He says he is happy that it's over, but it was a pity because he had just acquired his mother's approval for marriage. He had just bought a yacht and a Rolls-Royce for Albertine. He had no idea that Saint-Loup was in Touraine. The letter is written in the hope that the reverse psychology will make Albertine come back. Albertine responds with a letter starting with “dear friend” and proceeds to give advice on selling the car.

Marcel's next attempt is to make Albertine jealous. He invites Andrée to stay with him for a while and writes a letter informing Albertine about it. He says he intends to marry Andrée. Andrée never comes, but that's not necessary for the manipulation attempt.

Saint-Loup comes to visit Marcel. Outside, he speaks to one of Oriane's footmen. He gives the footman advice on how to get another servant dismissed. The plan is calculated and cruel, involving sabotaging his work, hiding items, and dirtying his clothes. It's the first time Marcel hears Saint-Loup do something vile. It's a part of him that Marcel has not seen before.

Saint-Loup tells Marcel that he heard Albertine sing in Touraine. When he spoke to Mme Bontemps and offered her money, Mme Bontemps said “we understand one another so well”. Neither Saint-Loup, Marcel or the reader understand what that means. It's unclear whether she took the money or not. In any case, she told Saint-Loup that she believed Marcel had no intention of marrying Albertine; “you yourself had informed her niece that you wished to leave her”.

Marcel sends Albertine a telegram begging her to come back on any terms. He imagines what would happen if she had an accident.

“Can I really have believed ... that death merely strikes out what exists, and leaves everything else in its place, that it removes the pain from the heart of him for whom the other's existence has ceased to be anything but a source of pain?”

It is not the first time Marcel has had such a thought (if Albertine died, it would, in a way, set him free), but it is a fitting time as the answer is soon given. Mme Bontemps writes a telegram saying that Albertine has died in a riding accident.

“it was not a suppression of suffering”.

Francoise delivers two letters from Albertine which just arrived. In the first letter, Albertine approves of Marcel's marriage to Andrée. In the second letter, she asks if it is too late to return. She wishes to return. Marcel recalls memories he had with Albertine, but what he recalls is routines, not specific memories. Things they used to do together, such as visiting Chantepie forest. He looks back upon the relationship in retrospect, considering every aspect of it and how it came to be in the first place. What if Mlle Stermaria had not stood him up? What if Marcel never went to Balbec? Would Mlle Stermaria have been the object of his love instead?

Albertine was not the cause of Marcel's love. She was just the occasion of it.

“It is we ourselves who by giving her her features have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object”.

His love is “vaster than Albertine”. Yet Marcel feels like she is the one and only love. The reason for that is habit: “The more I see you, the more I shall love you”.

He fantasizes that Albertine is not dead. Then he has an idea to bring her back from the dead. He realizes it is impossible, so he hopes to be reunited with her in the afterlife. But he knows that he will eventually forget about her: “the fact of her death, would lead me to the same indifference as had resulted from my voluntary separation from Gilberte.” The way he explains his feelings of losing Albertine do not seem like sorrow. We have already seen him describe sorrow when his grandmother died. The worst part for Marcel appears to be that he will never get answers about Albertine's lesbian life.

Marcel remembers a time when Albertine blushed at the mention of a bath robe. He goes into a long speculation that it could mean that she was frisky in the hotel's bath. Marcel sends Aimé to investigate. Aimé's source from the bath says Albertine used to take showers and spend a long time locked away with a tall woman always

dressed in grey. She also brought several other younger women. The whole thing seemed quite organized with people coming from far away. Marcel doubts the story. He thinks Aimé just didn't want to return empty-handed, "had made the girl tell him what he wished to hear", as he was paid to do the job.

Next, Marcel sends Aimé to Touraine to seek information there. He meets a laundry-girl who tells of how Albertine and other girls used to do stuff in nature. The laundry girl shows Aimé what she did with Albertine. Three pages go to describing a painting by Elstir. It portrays nude women that remind Marcel of Albertine and the laundry-girl. Even after Albertine's death, his jealousy remains.

Memories of Albertine mix with Marcel's everyday life, for example how he ties his scarf. Little memories of Albertine pop up here and there.

Marcel considers how one person, in particular Albertine, can have both good and bad sides. He forgives her. He begins the process of getting over her as well as grieving her death. "One is cured of suffering only by experiencing it to the full".

"my love was not so much a love for her as a love in myself ... being a mental state, it might survive the person for some time ... it must, like every mental state, even the most lasting, find itself one day obsolete ... the memory of Albertine would no longer exist for me."

Andrée visits Marcel. Marcel asks if he can watch her do lesbian stuff with some girls. Andrée declines, but she admits she is a lesbian. However, she says she never did anything with Albertine because Albertine was not a lesbian. Albertine detested lesbians. The reason Albertine left Paris was that another man who was in love with Albertine had asked for her hand. Since Marcel would not marry Albertine, Mme Bontemps summoned Albertine home. "When she realised that they were forcing her hand, she left you."

The man who was in love with Albertine is Octave, who Marcel met in Balbec. When Albertine wanted to go to Verdurins alone, it was because the Verdurins wanted to introduce her to Octave, who was in love with Albertine, hoping to marry her. Octave even visited Marcel's apartment once and was overly friendly, perhaps to create an excuse to stop by more often to see Albertine.

Andrée later marries Octave. Marcel remembers Octave as a crude man who mixed drinks in a bar, saying "I'm a wash-out". But Octave turns out to also be a brilliant playwright. Marcel will watch his plays.

As for why Albertine went to Paris with Marcel, no one knows according to Andrée. Not even Albertine could explain it to her friends.

Marcel describes that his road to indifference will come in three stages. In the first stage, the memory transitions from a raw, physical pain into intellectualized, aesthetic appreciation, a "secondary chemical state". When Albertine first left, her memory was like a chemical reaction that created an "anxious oppression of the heart". Now, those memories are inert. As Marcel walks by the Bois, he remembers Albertine playing Vinteuil's music, but there now a certain sweetness in it rather than pain. The memory splits into "scattered fragments".

"And now, aware that, day by day, one element after another of my love was vanishing, the jealous side of it, then some other, drifting gradually back in a vague remembrance to the first tentative beginnings, it was my love that, in the scattered notes of the little phrase, I seemed to see disintegrating before my eyes."

The other stages will follow later.

Mademoiselle de Forcheville

Throughout the novel, Marcel has struggled to get started with his desire to write. He needs to find something good to write about. He wants to write, but he can't.

"Since I wished someday to become a writer, it was high time to decide what sort of books I was going to write. But as soon as I asked myself the question and tried to discover some subject to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value, my mind would stop like a clock."

Several times, Marcel has looked at *Le Figaro* (a newspaper) looking for an article he sent them, hoping to see it published. In 1902 (age 24), the article is finally published. He imagines the article from the perspective of a reader. His thoughts are shining like an "auroral light" shining upon thousands of readers, a "multiplication of my thought" (in the sense that the paper is mass printed). By pretending he is a stranger that reads the article, he can enjoy his own metaphors, especially since it's been a while since he wrote the article. He is impressed by himself. He realizes that it doesn't have to be perfect as long as there are "enough good things".

Mme Putbus and Théodore write congratulatory letters when the article is published.

Marcel starts to find other girls attractive again. He stalks three girls (two dark and one fair) from afar. The fair girl looks back at him, rousing his passion. A few days later, he sees the three girls again in the doorway when he comes home. Once again, the fair girl gives him a glance.

A concierge says one of the girls is called Mlle d'Eporcheville. Saint-Loup once told Marcel about her. He had met her in a brothel and slept with her. Marcel doesn't know which of the three girls is her, but he is already in love with her and hopes it is the one that looked back at him. Marcel sends a telegram to Saint-Loup to ask which of the girls is Mlle d'Eporcheville. It turns out none of them are, as Mlle de l'Orgeville is currently in Switzerland. All those names are wrong, but it's part of the mystery. What happened is that Marcel misheard the concierge, misremembered Saint-Loup's name and then Saint-Loup was confused by Marcel's telegram, thinking he asked about a different girl. The fair girl among the three is indeed Mlle de Forcheville. The girl that Saint-Loup had relations with is Mlle de l'Orgeville.⁸

After Swann's death, Odette "astonished everyone by her profound, prolonged and sincere grief". She is rich because she inherited Swann's fortune. She marries Forcheville. That gives her a title (countess). She has climbed from a poor prostitute to a rich countess. One of Swann's uncles dies, leaving his fortune to Gilberte, making her one of the wealthiest heiresses in France.

Swann is a Jewish name. Because of the Dreyfus affair, Judaism is a sensitive matter. Forcheville agrees to adopt Gilberte, so her last name becomes Forcheville.

While Swann was alive, Oriane refused to see Gilberte, seemingly just to exert power over Swann. When he died, there was no longer any fun in that, so she welcomed Gilberte to high society. The fact that Gilberte is rich likely played a role too, as well as an interest shown in her by a rival social group. Oriane frames it as paying a tribute to Swann. Gilberte should be offended, but she instead admires Oriane for her arrogance.

Gilberte becomes a snob. She pronounces her last name in a snobbish way. She insinuates that she is a "natural daughter of some great personage", which sounds better than being Swann's daughter. She never mentions her father, not even when he is the source of something she claims. She removes the initials from the motorcars she inherits from Swann. Yet, many people know who her father is. Gilberte is a "human ostrich" who pretends like no one every talks about it. The Guermantes never mention their old friend Swann in front of Gilberte. They don't even say "your father". Gilberte starts calling herself a Guermantes, which is technically correct since she is married to one.

Marcel goes to the Guermantes to ask what they think of his article. There, he sees the fair girl again. It is Gilberte. They discuss Elstir whose paintings have become fashionable.

Gilberte says she will read Marcel's article later, but the Duke reads it immediately and becomes immersed in it. Meanwhile, Oriane talks about completely different things (her husband's noble titles) because she has no interest in the article.

Marcel thinks Gilberte's way of erasing her father's memory can be mimicked by him to forget Albertine.

"There are optical errors in time as there are in space ... like a thick fog at sea which obliterates all the landmarks distorted".

Time can feel longer than it really was.

"those last months of Albertine's existence ... seem to me much longer than a year".

He looks back in time and sees "a succession of periods in which, after a certain interval, nothing of what had sustained the previous period survived in that which followed". For example, there was a period when he loved his grandmother and a period when he loved Albertine. Both those periods have ended.

⁸ It is cleared up in volume 7.

“And as in the new spaces, as yet unexplored, which extended before me, there would be no more trace of my love for Albertine than there had been, in the time lost which I had just traversed, of my love for my grandmother, my life appeared to me ... as something utterly devoid of the support of an individual, identical and permanent self.”

“I should have been incapable of resuscitating Albertine because I was incapable ... of resuscitating the self of those days”.

There is no permanent self that connects those periods. It's like a series of different people inhabiting the same body. The Marcel who loved his grandmother no longer exists, as if he is dead. Proust compares it to a history class that ends abruptly at some arbitrary year. History doesn't end there, but the history course ends.

The second stage to indifference is substitution. Marcel starts having “semi-carnal relations” with Andrée, partly because of nostalgia for the little band. Andrée reveals more secrets. Andrée and Albertine were indeed friends with benefits. They sometimes did it in Buttes-Charmont and in nature. Morel used to find young girls (most likely prostitutes) for Albertine. They had orgies. Albertine felt ashamed by it and saw Marcel as a way to curb her desires. That time Marcel returned home with syringas, Andrée and Albertine had sex in his house. After that, Albertine couldn't sleep for three nights out of remorse. She never had sex with Andrée again. Towards the end, Albertine felt like Marcel had caught onto her and that she could never regain his trust. It probably influenced her decision to escape.

Funny reasoning:

“I was going perhaps to learn, now that Albertine was dead, the secret of her life. Here again, do not these indiscretions which come to light only after a person's life on earth is ended prove that nobody really believes in a future life? If these indiscretions are true, one ought to fear the resentment of a woman whose actions one reveals fully as much in anticipation of meeting her in heaven as one feared it while she was alive and one felt bound to keep her secret. And if these indiscretions are false, invented because she is no longer present to contradict them, one ought to be even more afraid of the dead woman's wrath if one believed in heaven. But no one does believe in it.”

Marcel suggests that his mother should visit Princesse de Parme who has invited her. When she arrives, the Princess treats her like a stranger and ignores her. The Princess later realizes her mistake. She is part of a German court of manners where you never apologize but instead make grand gestures. So, she visits Marcel's mother and spends 3 hours in her drawing room.

Venice

Throughout the novel, Marcel has dreamed of visiting Venice. In 1902 (age 24), he finally does so with his mother. Marcel describes the city and in particular one specific Gothic window that acts like a frame behind his mother.

The third stage towards indifference is never explicitly mentioned, but it is oblivion. It's not about erasing memory but to stop associating memory with emotions. Marcel is still sometimes reminded of Albertine, "the tight lid of which some incident occasionally lifted to give me a glimpse of that past". Eventually, "I felt no regret that what might have been had failed to come about, so impervious had I become to the memory of Albertine".

Marcel enjoys himself in Venice. He is not anxious, jealous or sad. He explores the city. In particular, he visits the Giotto Chapel which he finds beautiful. Swann once showed him pictures of it, but the picture missed important features.

They meet Norpois and Mme Villeparisis. They were once lovers and have since become a couple. Their passion has cooled into habit. Norpois sees Mme Villeparisis as a pupil that he must constantly coach to stop social blunders.

Norpois discusses Italian politics with Prince Foggi. Norpois discretely suggests a certain candidate for prime minister and ends up influencing a change in the Italian government.

Marcel recounts how Norpois in 1870 wrote a newspaper article about a declaration of war. He announces a disaster but makes it sound optimistic.

A telegram arrives to Marcel.

"My dear friend, you think me dead, forgive me, I am quite alive, I long to see you, talk about marriage, when do you return? Affectionately. Albertine."

It is very odd since she is dead. Nevertheless, the important thing about the event is how it affects Marcel.

"not only did it enable me to realise how far I had already proceeded along the road towards indifference, it at once and so abruptly accelerated that process".

"the knowledge that she was alive, and the possibility of our reunion made her suddenly cease to be so precious to me".

He realizes that he didn't love her for her, but for a concept she represented: youth, the sea air of Balbec, and the little band.

"my love for Albertine had been but a transitory form of my devotion to youth. We think that we are in love with a girl, whereas we love in her, alas! only that dawn the glow of which is momentarily reflected on her face."

Albertine was a construction in Marcel's mind. He was obsessed with her secrets as if they mattered.

"My feeling for Albertine, my jealousy, stemmed, as we have seen, from the irradiation, by the association of ideas, of certain pleasant or painful impressions".

Marcel later reads a letter from Gilberte. Seeing Gilberte's handwriting, Marcel realizes that the telegram was from her, not from Albertine. The way Gilberte writes her name can make it look like it says Albertine. Marcel describes several other handwriting peculiarities which led to the misunderstanding from the telegrapher. Those peculiarities were described by Francois already in volume 2. The content of the telegram was also misinterpreted. There was no declaration of love.

In the letter, Gilberte informs Marcel that she is marrying Saint-Loup. Marcel is surprised because there have never been any such indications. Several families wanted to secure marriage to the rich Gilberte, but Saint-Loup's mother's scheme was the winning one. For Gilberte, "it was the belief that Robert had been loved, and loved for so long, by Rachel that had made her desire him, had made her reject more glittering matches". Aristocrats gossip about the marriage and judge it.

When the time comes to leave Venice, Marcel learns that Mme Putbus is coming to the hotel. He still wants to seduce her maid, so he asks to postpone the departure. His mother completely ignores his request. Marcel decides to stay. He hears a singer sing *O sole mio*. Venice loses its enchantment. The song is symbolic for Marcel's procrastination. "I'm going to listen to one more phrase [before I decide whether to stay]". His will to action arises at last and he runs to the train station just in time to join his mother home.

Charlus adopts Jupien's niece and bestows upon her the title d'Oloron, which is his right to do. He has spread a lie that she is the daughter of his brother (the Duke), which his brother confirms. Princesse de Parme and Charlus arrange for Mlle d'Oloron to be married to an unnamed Cambremer son (Legrandin's nephew) instead

of Morel. The marriage means that Mme de Cambremer finally gets what she wants: a place in high society. She starts spending time with Oriane but gets tired of her soon.

Throughout the novel, Legrandin has been chasing the goal of reaching high society. Through the marriage, he achieves his goal. Because he no longer needs to act, he becomes himself. He stops snobbery and networking. He spends less time in high society and instead spends time with people he likes.

Legrandin changes his name to Legrandin de Méséglise, although “he had no sort of right to that name” since his blood is not in any way connected to the last Comte de Méséglise. With the help of the Duc de Guermantes, Legrandin manages to gain the “bogus title” Comte de Méséglise.

Mme d’Oloron dies from typhoid soon after the marriage, but the titles have already been given, so it doesn’t matter to anyone else.

Tansonville

After her marriage, Gilberte and Saint-Loup move into Tansonville, Swann’s house in Combray.

Gilberte becomes a social strategist. She wants to reach the pinnacle of high society. She invites her mother’s social circle (such as the Bontemps and Cottards) only to remain heir to Odette’s fortune, but she never mixes their circle with the serious one. Saint-Loup is a Guermantes (the nephew of Basin and Charlus). His title is Marquis. That makes Gilberte a Marquise.

After the initial social strategy, Gilberte loses interest in high society.

“One is always ready to despise a goal which one has not succeeded in attaining, or has finally attained.”

“Gilberte suddenly began to flaunt her contempt for what she had once so ardently desired, to declare that all the people in the Faubourg Saint-Germain were idiots, simply not worth meeting, and, suiting her actions to her words, ceased to meet them.

After that, she stops holding big parties.

“[Gilberte and Saint-Loup] had the best of saddle-horses on which to go out riding together, the finest of yachts in which to cruise - but they never took more than a couple of guests with them.”

Now that Marcel is no longer in love with Gilberte, they can be real friends.

Proust describes a concept that he calls the muse of history. Most literature tries to reach for something universal, a timeless truth of philosophy and art. The muse of history “has gathered up everything that the more exalted Muses of philosophy and art have rejected, everything that is not founded upon truth, everything that is merely contingent, but that reveals other laws as well.” Proust’s book is about those contingent things, not about universal truths. We are reading things that just happen to be true rather than universally (for every case) true. For example, we are reading who invited who and which stations the train passes. Truth is not just found in abstract ideas. It is found in everyday things, unimportant objects, and dirt on the streets. Proust is building something bigger through the sum of its parts.

Marcel visits Jupien’s shop to check up on Charlus who has health issues. He mentions to Jupien that he has read love letters from someone called Bobette addressed to Saint-Loup. Jupien reveals that Bobette is Morel. Apparently, Saint-Loup is bisexual, and so is Morel, and they are lovers. Morel and Jupien are involved in a gay network. Jupien, though rather corrupt himself, thinks Morel stepped out of line when he seduced Charlus’ nephew.

“among so-called immoral people, moral indignation is quite as violent as among other people, only its object is slightly different.”

Another example of the same issue is Mme de Marsantes, Saint-Loup’s mother. She knows he is bisexual, but she arranges his marriage anyway. Some people marry for convenience rather than love.

“people whose own hearts are not directly involved always regard unfortunate entanglements, disastrous marriages, as though one were free to choose whom one loves, and do not take into account the exquisite mirage which love projects and which envelops so entirely and so uniquely the person with whom one is in love that the “folly” a man commits by marrying his cook or the mistress of his best friend is as a rule the only poetical action that he performs in the course of his existence.”

In retrospect, Marcel realizes that Saint-Loup knew already in Balbec that Albertine was gay. He even said he would marry her if she was richer. Their marriage would cultivate their gayness rather than inhibit it.

Aimé reveals that he knew Saint-Loup was gay for a while. Saint-Loup once tried to seduce the lift-boy which almost caused a scandal. It is likely that the lift-boy wanted to do it, but he had to decline because it wouldn’t be a secret.

Towards the end of their relationship, Rachel was just a screen to hide the truth.

Saint-Loup treats Gilberte well, down to the last detail like taking her coat. He spends as little money as possible at home so he can spend more on Morel. "But no doubt he did so principally in order to be able to give [Morel] the benefit". Odette facilitates Saint-Loup's trips to Morel in exchange for payment, such as jewelry. She pushes "Gilberte to be more generous to her husband" because she knows the money will end up with herself. Gilberte is in the dark about the scheme. The reason Odette needs valuables is that men no longer chase her. She is getting old.

Marcel is devastated to see that the old Saint-Loup has died.

It is a time when Marcel reevaluates people, finding sides he has not seen before. The latest such scrutiny is Legrandin. He has a relationship with Théodore who is now a chemist at Méséglise. Their relationship works like Morel's relationship with Saint-Loup and Charlus' relationship with Jupien. Françoise notices the relationships, but she doesn't understand their true reasons. She thinks the older men and are being nice to the younger men, not using or abusing them.

In 1903 (age 25), Marcel goes to Tansonville to visit Gilbert and Saint-Loup for a while. Marcel and Gilberte take walks in nature. Marcel also walks alone sometimes. He no longer finds the nature in Combray enchanting.

Gilberte shows Marcel that you can go to the Guermantes castle via Méséglise way (also known as Swann's Way). Marcel thought the two paths were separate and irreconcilable. It is symbolic. Swann was once a friend of the Guermantes. Gilberte's marriage to Saint-Loup is a union between Swann and Guermantes. Now, the paths also join.

Gilberte admits that she was in love with Marcel back in Combray (around 1887, age 9). The first time she saw Marcel, when his family passed by Tansonville, she found him attractive and sent him a vulgar glance for only him to see. She interpreted Marcel's gaze as contempt. Both of them misinterpreted the scene.

"I pictured Gilberte again in my memory. I could have drawn the rectangle of light which the sun cast through the hawthorns, the spade which the little girl was holding in her hand, the slow gaze that she fastened on me. Only I had supposed, because of the coarse gesture that accompanied it, that it was a contemptuous gaze ... after an interval of so many years, to touch up a picture which I recalled so well."

She used to do stuff with boys after dark in some ruins, including Théodore. She wished Marcel would join them.

The day before Marcel met Gilberte again at Oriane's place (in the Mademoiselle de Forcheville chapter), Gilberte passed by him in the doorway and felt the same attraction due to her memory of the past. "I didn't recognize you at first, or rather I did unconsciously recognize you because I felt the same attraction as I had felt at Tansonville". Marcel remembers it. "I had not been altogether mistaken as to the meaning of her glance".

The day Marcel saw Gilberte with another man on Champs-Élysées, she was walking with Léa, dressed as a man.

Gilberte feels guilt over cruelty after the death of her father.⁹

Gilberte believes that Robert is turning away from her and has a mistress. He has been seen walking with strange women in public. Marcel never tells her the truth. Marcel notices a harsher Saint-Loup. Saint-Loup likes Gilberte as a person, but he loves Morel. He constantly lies to Gilberte in ways reminiscent of how Albertine lied to Marcel. Gilberte is aware of his lies but not of what he is hiding.

Morel has no love for Saint-Loup. He is a scammer, asking for "more and more money".

Marcel reads a book called Goncourt Journal. In that book, they describe a visit to the Verdurins. On the surface, it is a refined group (Cottard, Brichot, Swann, Princess Sherbatoff) and a fine salon, but it is satire. It dismantles Marcel's view of the Verdurins. Goncourt is impressed by the beauty of the house and the salon, the quality of the food, and the guests' knowledge in their areas of specialization. But if you read between the lines, there is name dropping, self-promotion and petty ego battles. Mr Verdurin brags about his writing in spite of never completing a book. Mme Verdurin claims that she made and taught Elstir. Swann collects pearls that he shows others. Cottard gives pseudo-scientific lectures. No one knows about Goncourt's past work, which should be considered well-known. No one even mentions it because everyone is busy bragging about themselves. The dinner is described by its porcelain and wine, not its company. The house is designed to resemble Venice, like a dream rather than a real house.

Marcel notes that he is often blind in the moment but reflects upon it later to understand what actually happened and what he could have done. A moment that was ordinary when first experienced can later become precious

⁹ "it's not those childish whims that I feel most guilty about". It is also explicitly stated in Proust's manuscript.

and interesting. Perception is constructed by desire and memory. Maybe literature falsifies life, portraying mediocre people as fascinating, or maybe it reveals the true value of what we failed to see in the moment. Goncourt's journal makes people seem fascinating, but Marcel has met those people in real life. Elstir was often vulgar. Vinteuil was boring. Bergotte was uninteresting. But "this would be no argument against the value of a life that can produce such geniuses". Judging an artist by their personality is a mistake. If literature creates such an illusion, does that mean that real life is disappointing? Marcel reflects on his own lack of writing.

"Goncourt knew how to listen, just as he knew how to see; I did not."

That either means that Marcel can't see the greatness of everyday people or that greatness is not inherent in them. The latter would mean that Goncourt and Bergotte create such greatness where it does not exist in reality. Art reveals what is invisible.

"it is not the man with the liveliest mind, the most well-informed, the best supplied with friends and acquaintances, but the one who knows how to become a mirror and in this way can reflect his life, commonplace though it may be, who becomes a Bergotte".

A true artist does not need exceptional subjects to write about. He becomes a mirror of reality, revealing its hidden truths. What's stopping Marcel from writing isn't the world but his inability to see the world the way an artist does.

World War I

After the visit to Tansonville, a long time skip follows. We know little about 1903-1914. Between 1914 and 1916 (age 36 to 38), during World War I, Marcel spends time in a sanatorium, a medical facility that treats his illness. He leaves the sanatorium for a short time in 1914 to visit a doctor in Paris and then again in 1916 because the sanatorium is shutting down.

Marcel describes how fashion has changed in Paris. Women wear something that looks like turbans. Due to the war, all museums are closed, but art is still spread in the form of fashion. It is but a shell of what art used to be. Nevertheless, "life continued almost unchanged for" many people. The aristocracy carries on just as it has been described throughout the novel. It is still important who invites who. New people become popular due to fashion or being hosted in the right salon. Verdurins, who were considered second-rate in status except by the little clan, are now highly esteemed. They have a salon in Paris.

The Dreyfus affair and the conflicts it created have been forgotten. Some Dreyfusards are now extreme nationalists. Mme Bontemps takes a hard line against Germany, hoping that the whole country is dismantled. She is praised for her stance. Over the course of just a few days, she goes from socially awkward to being part of high society. People go to her and Mme Verdurin for news about the war, but it is a pretense for regular socializing. Morel joins them too as he has managed to desert the army unnoticed. He is nowadays completely faithful to a woman that he lives with.

Marcel walks around in Paris. The 1914 nighttime walks are reminiscent of Combray. The 1916 walks are different. There are allied troops on the streets from all over the world. It makes Paris feel exotic and unfamiliar, "an oriental scene". He meets a barely recognizable Charlus. Marcel feels like Charlus has lost his identity and now only looks like a gay person. He is estranged from society. While Europe is crumbling in the war, Charlus deals with petty things at home: his jealousy over Morel, his own pride, and quarrels over a salon.

While some people have distanced themselves from Charlus, he has distanced himself from more, including his Guermantes family. Mme Verdurin calls him "pre-war", outdated, and accuses him of being pro-Germany. While most find the latter accusation unreasonable, Morel actively supports it. He slanders Charlus in newspapers, adding criticism against Charlus' homosexuality. His writings gain popularity. It turns out that he is somewhat right. Charlus likens nations to individuals. Each person in a nation is a cell in its body. Each side believes it is right due to some subjective idea similar to how people identify themselves in personal conflicts. Patriots are not patriots because they conclude that their country is right, but because they live in that country. Charlus lacks patriotism, so he is like a spectator. He feels like if they win, they should be compassionate toward Germany because he hates cruelty and suffering. If France wins, Charlus believe they will not show pity, so he hopes they don't win. Besides, he knows the French and hates them at this point. The Germans have not yet wronged him.

What Marcel learns from that is:

"to a certain extent, the Germanophilia of Charlus (like the expression on the face of Saint-Loup when he had looked at the photograph of Albertine) had helped me to free myself for a moment, if not from my Germanophobia, at least from my belief in the pure objectivity of this feeling, had helped to make me think that perhaps what applied to love applied also to hate and that, in the terrible judgment which at this time France passed on Germany - that she was a nation outside the pale of humanity - the most important

element was an objectification of feelings as subjective as those which had caused Rachel and Albertine to appear so precious, the one to Saint-Loup and the other to me. What, in fact, made it possible that this perversity was not entirely intrinsic to Germany was that, just as I as an individual had had successive loves and at the end of each one its object had appeared to me valueless, so I had already seen in my country successive hates which had, for example, at one time condemned as traitors ... the Dreyfusards.” That passage unifies many of the psychological themes.

Society changes to adapt to the reality of war, such as “the baking of bread or the speed of transport”. Charlus argues that the war makes people dumb because it’s easy to discuss something so colossal. It replaces discussion about beautiful things.

“little minds are crushed, not by the beauty, but by the hugeness of the action”. Many rumors about the war turn out to be false, but people forget them and make new false rumors instead. Charlus also thinks that there is a herd mentality. “The public judges the King of Greece and the King of the Bulgars only as it is told to judge them by the newspapers.” Charlus makes insightful analyses, but he is at the same time delusional, like a “morphine addict who takes out his syringe in public”. He has a “narrow little philosophy ... which explained everything by reference to [his homosexuality]”. He fails to realize how absurd, narrow and delusional he sounds.

Charlus argues that Norpois propaganda has been affected by the war. Norpois’ use of the word *savoir* (will know) avoids future contradictions. Instead of writing that someone will do something, he writes that they “would know”. “America would not know how to remain indifferent to these repeated violations of international law”, “the region of the Lakes would not know how to fail to fall speedily into the hands of the Allies”. He is issuing commands rather than describing facts. Such is propaganda. Norpois argues that other countries, such as Italy, Romania and Greece have the right to neutrality, but all who are not on the side of the allies are not on the side of “law and order”. Every six months, he reiterates “any further delay and it may be too late”. He portrays it as black and white to turn common people to his cause. Charlus further argues that both France and Germany are using the same rhetoric, claiming to be “struggling for existence” against a “cruel enemy”.

Mme Verdurin avoids inviting “bores”, but “every bore who had come to call on her and asked to be invited to her parties immediately became a charming and intelligent person”. They invite Odette after a long absence because of nostalgia and because time softens old resentment. Mme Verdurin does her best to keep her little clan from not going to war. Cottard dies in battle. Mr Verdurin dies next. Elstir is the only person who mourns him because Mr Verdurin was part of the cultural and social environment that supported and validated Elstir’s art.

Mme Verdurin visits Venice, but she ignores art and history.
“when she said that “it” was “marvelous”, she was referring not to Venice, or St Mark’s, or the palaces, all that I had so loved and she thought so unimportant, but to the effect of the searchlights in the sky, of which searchlights she could give you a detailed account supported by statistics” .

Mme Verdurin reads that the ship Lusitania has sunk. “How horrible”, she says as she dips a croissant.

Saint-Loup says that refusing to join the army is natural because you are afraid of dying. That’s why he is not in the war. Yet, he actively tries to rejoin the army and acts like a patriot. Marcel interprets his statement about fear to an attempt at seeming original and knowledgeable about psychology. Bloch is proud of France and thinks they will win, but he panics when he hears that he is declared fit for duty. He becomes bitter, anti-militarist and hostile towards Saint-Loup.

Proust makes an argument about manliness. There is a conventional masculine ideal that is found in soldiers and diplomats. It is shown as a lack of emotion and tenderness masked as roughness. That ideal is “ridiculous ... wretched and ugly” because it is a falsehood. Homosexuals like Saint-Loup and Charlus adopt a different ideal of manliness. For Saint-Loup, manliness is the camaraderie between tough soldiers. In that way, war is for him a projection of his desire. He can call it duty and patriotism, but it is rooted in his own psychology and imagination. “Physical desire lies at the root of the sentiments to which they ascribe another origin ... war was the very ideal which he imagined himself to be pursuing in his desires.” Charlus, meanwhile, follows the idea that you must not be the least effeminate. For example, he refuses to wear brightly colored cravats.

Saint-Loup makes an argument that information is key in war. Airplanes can gather information like never before. "The best army will be, perhaps, the army with the best eyes." It is symbolic for the idea that seeing clearly gives you power.

A butler helps Francoise read the news every day. Neither she nor the butler understand most of it, but they pretend like they do. The news bulletins tell of victories in war, but Marcel is "alarmed at the speed with which the scene of these victories was approaching Paris".

Gilberte writes a letter to Marcel at the sanatorium. She has managed to escape the danger and reach Tansonville. Some French soldiers come rushing by, plundering things in her backyard. Then German soldiers come and treat her well, asking nicely if they can pick some flowers.

Saint-Loup sends a letter too. He describes war in terms of art and philosophy. War tactics are constantly changing. Each battle influences the next with innovation. It is symbolic for how people change over time. Saint-Loup tells how working men show great courage. After being wounded in seven separate battles, the son of the diplomat Vaugoubert dies. The soldiers tell Vaugoubert that the son died for France. The ideas of the soldiers, such as patriotism, are important for their performance.

In 1916, two years after her last letter, Gilberte writes another. She now claims that she went to Tansonville to defend it from the Germans in the sense that all other house owners in the area abandoned theirs. She is not lying. She believes her own version. From Tansonville, she experiences the war first-hand. It is fought near Combray and Méséglise. Locations in the area become historical landmarks. The hawthorn path becomes known as Hill 307 in media.

Before the war, Brichot was a welcome member of the little clan. During the war, he starts writing newspaper articles. Other aristocrats invite him to their salons, and he accepts. Mme Verdurin slanders him among the faithful. She no longer needs Brichot now that the salon is popular.

Charlus laments that "marvelous young men" are dying in the war. In particular, he laments the "footmen six foot tall" that used to work in noble houses. He laments the whole disappearance of the social order he understood. The aristocracy is disappearing.

Marcel and others admire airplanes. During the war, airplanes are often above the city. Marcel describes a nighttime raid over Paris. Seeing searchlights towards the sky, directed with intention, he appreciates how the military protects Paris.

Charlus argues that the heroism of airmen should also apply to the German airmen. Those that attack the city are courageous. Marcel ponders whether he is afraid of the bombs and concludes that he is more afraid of his own laziness.

Charlus says, "I admire all the heroes of this war". He blames the initial French struggles in the war on dilettantism, a preoccupation with art and literature over "virile" (manliness) preparation. But he is himself a big dilettante.

Charlus compares current Paris to Pompeii which was buried by a volcanic eruption similar to how Paris is bombarded by planes. Some graffiti on a wall in Pompeii said "Sodom, Gomora". Paris is a city of sinners. Only a sudden destruction can stop the shallow lives of the aristocracy.

Because Charlus is a scandalous person, a group stares at him and Marcel while they talk.

The last time Charlus met Morel, it "made him feel that he needed Morel's presence beside him that evening". His plan to achieve that was to say goodbye with the phrase "Take care, I shall have my revenge." Both understood it as a joke. Speaking to Marcel in 1914, Charlus says that he would reconcile with Morel if Morel came to him first. In a flash forward, two years later, Marcel tells Morel to go to Charlus. Morel refuses because he fears Charlus. They never reconcile. Many years later, Marcel finds a letter from the late Charlus where he says it was lucky that Morel never came because Charlus would have killed him. Marcel notes that since the letter was written, Charlus has completely forgotten Morel.

Charlus and Marcel part with a really hard handshake. "The intensity of contact and of gaze was greater than propriety permitted."

Jupien's brothel

Since the bombings started, almost every hotel in Paris has closed. Marcel finds one that's open and sees someone who resembles Saint-Loup leave it in a suspicious manner, entering an alleyway. The hotel is full of soldiers. Others are denied patronage. Marcel listens to the soldiers speak. They are waiting for their manager to bring back chains so they can shackle someone. But it's not what we first think. Marcel enters and discovers that it is a male brothel owned by Charlus and managed by Jupien. On the top floor, Marcel sees Charlus chained to a bed. Maurice, a young man, brutally beats him with a whip. Marcel listens to a conversation between Charlus and Jupien. Maurice and other workers are hired because they look like Morel. Simultaneously, the workers are patriots that speak with genuine sorrow about the death of French soldiers and the horrors of the German invasion.

Marcel interprets Charlus' psychology. Charlus could never truly get Morel, nor reconcile with him. Just as the allies refuse peace to Germany (in spite of German victories), Morel refused Charlus' victories. Charlus now seeks a controlled physical war where he can play the victim. Jupien maintains the façade that the men are criminals, but they are actually soft-hearted and patriotic.

Jupien has a "ventilator" that Charlus can sit in to secretly watch others at the brothel. Jupien allows Marcel to sit in the ventilator to watch Charlus. When Charlus is paying his torturers, he mentions a murder. Maurice says he wouldn't hurt a fly. He only does this weird stuff because of poverty caused by war. Charlus is disgusted because Maurice being a criminal was part of his fantasy.

A real murderer doesn't talk about his crimes, and a kind-hearted man like Charlus has a thirst for evil that actual wicked men cannot satisfy.

"Nothing is more limited than pleasure and vice. In that sense one may say truly, altering slightly the meaning of the phrase, that we revolve always in the same vicious circle."

Prince de Foix, the father of the snobby and arrogant Prince de Foix that Marcel and Saint-Loup once met, is a regular at Jupien's brothel. Like Charlus, he lives a double life. Publicly, he is a handsome aristocrat and a member of the exclusive Jockey Club. At the brothel, he likes to engage in petty gossip "with an audience from the underworld". His son inherits his traits.

A priest visits the brothel. He forgets to pay for his room. Jupien shakes a collecting box, saying "for the expenses of the church".

Jupien takes requests for certain men, such as Canadians, soldiers and disabled people. He argues that the people who visit the brothel are both intelligent and virtuous outside of the brothel. The brothel could have been a great salon had it not been a brothel.

Saint-Loup also visits. He loses his military medal (Croix de guerre) there and never finds it again.

During the brothel visit, German planes bomb the city. People flee into the metro. Marcel compares it to a catacomb. He thinks it's a good time for people to have a casual sexual encounter because the fear could be a liberating force and being "plunged into the new element" can bypass the usual hesitation. The darkness means people are anonymous, so they can make advances without fear of future repercussions.

"the bombs mimicked the rumbling of a volcano, deep in the earth as in a Pompeian house of ill fame, their secret rites in the shadows of the catacombs."

At home, Marcel's family has a butler who uses the war to torture Françoise. The butler finds sadistic pleasure in scaring her. He says the worst is yet to come. He secretly fears an allied victory because then he can't scare Françoise anymore.

Both François and the butler refuse to believe that Saint-Loup is brave because rich people always go where it's safe. They therefore assume he has gone to war because it is safe.

Boche is a slang slur for Germans at the time. Françoise can accept that the Germans are murderers, but she finds the word Boche terrifying.

The butler says Françoise has rich cousins. One of them has lost a nephew in the war. Proust writes that everything in this book is fiction except those cousins, the Larivières. In spite of being rich enough to retire, they return to manual labor to support their nephew's widow.

Saint-Loup dies while covering the retreat of his men. Marcel mourns him, "the being for whose friendship I had so greatly wished. That wish had been realised beyond the limits of what I should ever have thought possible".

Françoise mourns in a dutiful manner.

Saint-Loup is buried as simply "Guermantes". His other names are ignored at the funeral. He is reduced to a name.

Oriane unexpectedly takes the death hard. She cries and falls ill for more than a week.

"When I heard of her grief, I was touched. It enabled society to say, and it enables me to vouch for the truth of the statement, that a great friendship existed between them. But then when I recall all the little malicious utterances, all the ill-natured refusals to help each other which this friendship had not excluded, I cannot help reflecting that in society a great friendship does not amount to much."

Before Saint-Loup died, he brought to his general's attention that Morel had deserted. Morel is arrested. He thinks Charlus is behind it. Morel tells on Charlus and d'Argencourt who are also deserters. Upon their arrest, they realize that they have for a long time been each other's rivals not only for Morel but for several other men. Charlus and d'Argencourt are soon released. Morel escapes punishment because the general knows he was Saint-Loup's friend, but he is sent to the frontline where he serves with bravery and earns a medal.

Marcel thinks Saint-Loup's military merits would have gotten him elected as deputy after the war. Instead, one of Jupien's customers is elected unopposed. Newspapers and wealthy ladies promote him. He wears his war uniform long after the war ends.

1925

When the last sanatorium closes in 1916, Marcel joins yet another sanatorium. Neither sanatorium manages to cure him. Not much is said about the years 1916-1925. It's not stated how much of that time he spends in the sanatorium. He returns to Paris in 1925 (age 47). He is still invited to high society.

The train to Paris stops in the middle of the countryside. Marcel looks outside and tries to appreciate the forest and use it for art, but he is still unable. He asks another passenger if they can appreciate it, but all they can do is name the colors.

Cars are commonplace now.

Marcel is traveling to a *matinée* at Prince de Guermantes' residence. On the way, he meets Charlus. After suffering a stroke, Charlus is in bad physical shape, but his intellect is intact. Jupien helps him walk. Charlus was blind for several months after the stroke and still has poor vision.

Mme de Saint-Euverte drives past. She is no longer on the blacklist. Charlus greets her. Marcel pities him. He looks like a child as he greets her.

"To receive the homage of Charlus had been, for her, the highest ambition of snobbery, just as, for the Baron, the central principle of snobbery had been to be rude to her."

Charlus can only whisper now. He speaks slowly as he tells Marcel a list of all the friends and relatives he has outlived, such as Swann. A random duchess (Létourville) passes by and greets him. She looks offended by what he has become.

Jupien tells of how Charlus still manages to sneak off with men.

Marcel, about the blindness: "At least that must have made your surveillance largely unnecessary?"

"Not at all, no sooner had he arrived in a hotel than he would ask me what this or that individual on the staff was like. I used to assure him that they were all horrors. But he realised that that couldn't be universally true, that I must sometimes be lying ... Look! He's already managed to get into conversation with a gardener's boy."

Marcel leaves them.

Involuntary memories

I will now list all the involuntary memories. All in this bullet list have been described before.

- Hawthorns (failed memory).
- Spires of Martinville (failed memory).
- Public lavatory on Champs-Élysées.
- Three trees in Hudimesnil (failed memory).
- Statue in Mme Morency's garden (failed memory).
- He bends down to untie his boots and gets memories of his grandmother.
- Morel's Vinteuil concert (close, but not involuntary memory).
- Then there is the petit madeleine. It happened not too long ago, likely between 1916 and 1920.

When he arrives at the Guermantes courtyard, Marcel steps on uneven paving stones. That is his fourth involuntary memory.

"I tripped against the uneven paving-stones in front of the coach-house. And at the moment when, recovering my balance, I put my foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbor, all my discouragement vanished and in its place was that same happiness which at various epochs of my life had been given to me by the sight of trees which I had thought that I recognized in the course of a drive near Balbec, by the sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, by the flavor of a madeleine dipped in tea, and by all those other sensations of which I have spoken and of which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to combine the quintessential character. Just as, at the moment when I tasted the madeleine, all anxiety about the future, all intellectual doubts had disappeared, so now those that a few seconds ago had assailed me on the subject of the reality of my literary gifts, the reality even of literature, were removed as if by magic."

"I had followed no new train of reasoning, discovered no decisive argument, but the difficulties which had seemed insoluble a moment ago had lost all importance. The happiness which I had just felt was unquestionably the same as that which I had felt when I tasted the madeleine soaked in tea. But if on that occasion I had put off the task of searching for the profounder causes of my emotion, this time I was determined not to resign myself to a failure to understand them."

He recalls when he stood on two uneven stones in the baptistery of St Mark in Venice.

Because he is going to the party, he does not explore the phenomenon further. Once he gets inside, a servant asks him to wait in a small library because a song is currently being played in the drawing room.

"A servant, trying unsuccessfully not to make a noise, chanced to knock a spoon against a plate and again that same species of happiness which had come".

The sound reminds him of a railway man's hammer against a wheel. He remembers the trees he saw outside the train carriage when it stopped enroute to Paris.

While Marcel is waiting for the song to end, the servant brings some pastries and orangeade. When Marcel wipes his mouth with a napkin, he gets yet another involuntary memory.

"so strong was this impression that the moment to which I was transported seemed to me to be the present moment".

The napkin has "precisely the same degree of stiffness" as a towel that Marcel used the first day in Balbec. He remembers looking at the sea through the window.

"And what I found myself enjoying was not merely these colors but a whole instant of my life on whose summit they rested, an instant which had been no doubt an aspiration towards them and which some feeling of fatigue or sadness had perhaps prevented me from enjoying at Balbec but which now, freed from what is necessarily imperfect in external perception, pure and disembodied, caused me to swell with happiness."

He understands what Vinteuil's sonata did to Swann.

"the sudden pain which he had been caused by the little phrase of Vinteuil when it gave him back the days themselves, just as they were when he had felt them in the past".

While pondering these phenomena, Marcel hears the sound of a water pipe. It triggers yet another involuntary memory of a time he had dinner at Grand Hotel in Balbec.

"coming back to dinner at the Grand Hotel appeared to me as one of those indescribable happinesses which neither the present nor the future can restore to us, which we may taste once only in a lifetime."

The sudden quick fire of involuntary memories ("fragments of existence withdrawn from time") give rise to many insights all at once.

The “fatigue or sadness” quote is a good place to start to explain Proust’s new insights. The past exists in our memory, not as it was but how we imagined it to have been. When the moment in Balbec happened in the past, Marcel’s mind was preoccupied, clouded by fatigue or sadness (external perception). In his involuntary memory of that same moment, he sees past fatigue and sadness and therefore sees the essence of the memory. He may still remember that he was fatigued or sad (as a fact), but he does not experience that in the recall. He only experiences the essence of the memory. The moment, or at least the essence of the moment, was beautiful after all.

What essence mean is never really explained. It appears to be the metaphysical essence¹⁰, which means what a thing is, its core identity and nature. It is not realism as in the art movement. Essence here means something beyond perception. The word essence is mentioned often in the novel. Marcel often seeks to capture the essence of things.

Marcel is always thinking about things that happened or planning future things. He never lives in the present. Because our present is always clouded by illusion, self-deception and other limitations, we can only experience the essence of a moment in retrospect. Proust does not argue that you should learn to live in the moment, free from illusion and self-deception. Rather, he says that is impossible. While living a moment, we don’t fully feel or understand it. Only afterwards do we start pondering about it. Even if you try to live in the moment and enjoy it, you are distracted, influenced, interpreting, projecting, thinking about something else or planning something. You don’t understand reality while you live it. You only understand it later. You can realize what illusions affected you in the past.

“The beauty of images is situated in front of things, that of ideas behind them. So that the first sort of beauty ceases to astonish us as soon as we have reached the things themselves, but the second is something that we understand only when we have passed beyond them.”

The first type of beauty is what you get when you look at a beautiful sea. That beauty is temporary. You can get used to seeing the sea every day, which makes it a habit. The second type of beauty means that you look beyond what you see. What truth about yourself (or life in general) was hidden in the experience of watching the sea?

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/F6l-oD4gb5I?t=3065>

Matinée Guermantes

When Marcel finally leaves the little library and goes to the drawing room, he is surprised at how old everyone has become. He describes how age has affected characters, one by one. Some are barely recognizable, as if they are wearing costumes at a masquerade. Some have white or gray hair. Some limp. Are they really the same people? Just like Swann thought Odette a Botticelli painting regardless of how she changed, “we see as always young the men and women whom we have known young”. “Time which changes human beings does not alter the image which we have preserved of them”.

In this section, Proust makes frequent references to aging and death. Aging brings us closer to death, not just time-wise but also physiologically. People at the party are visibly dying. The party is a “peaceful cemetery”. Characters discuss who has died recently. With a wide social circle, deaths have become frequent.

“Hardly a day passed without their having to send to inquire for news of friends and relations [at the point of death], some of whom, they would be told, had recovered while others had succumbed, until a point was reached where they no longer very clearly remembered whether this or that person who was no longer seen anywhere had pulled through his pneumonia or had expired.”

Bloch has managed to invite himself to the party. He is now an adult and referred to as such, which is unfamiliar for Marcel who first thought people meant Bloch’s father (who died in the war). Bloch has changed his name to Jacques du Rozier. He has taken a “chic” English style. Chic means something neutral that everyone accepts without thinking about it. He has deliberately altered his voice to sound refined. His behavior is an act. Marcel agrees to introduce him to Prince de Guermantes (which is now Gilbert since his father died), mirroring his own experience at the old soirée.

Bloch is these days a popular man. He is invited to visit many friends. Back in the day, he was insecure and eager to prove himself, but now he is selective. He says yes only to invitations he wants to go to. He feels less need for validation. Some traits in people are just phases you pass through. “Certain defects, certain qualities are attached less to this or that individual than to this or that moment of existence... One may almost say that they are external to individuals”, as if something we just pass through rather than something we are, and therefore difference between people can be due to which stage they are in.

Personalities have also changed. Mr d'Argencourt is no longer hostile.

Marcel is also older. People greet him as an adult ("old friend", "as a veteran Parisian", “at least you see that [your illness] is no bar to longevity”).

Mr de Cambremer is almost unrecognizable, but he talks, moves and behaves just as before. His wife hasn’t noticed his disfigurement because she saw it gradually. Marcel struggles to reconcile his memory of Mr de Cambremer with the current Mr de Cambremer.

Legrandin has changed color. He is grey and stone-like. He no longer wears make-up. Marcel never realized that he used to wear makeup. Legrandin used to be witty and animated, but now he is silent and slow. The few things he says are trivial or empty. He used to be hostile towards Bloch, but now he is friendly.

Prince d’Agrigente used to be thin and uninteresting. He is now corpulent, broad-shouldered and confident, “a metamorphosis more appropriate to an insect”.

Mme d’Arpajon looks so different that Marcel avoids saying her name or epithet because he is not sure who she is, “it was impossible to suspect that it was she”.

One old, unnamed friend is now stout and unrecognizable, but his voice is identical, like a gramophone. He thinks he still looks the same as before.

Odette looks like she hasn’t aged at all. Marcel finds it difficult to recognize her because he expected her to look older. The reason for her appearance is heavy makeup and “a face with a fixed expression of surprise” that makes her look like a doll. Because she still looks the same, she is like a ghost of the past. “She seemed scarcely to be alive ... like a rose that has been sterilized”.

In a flash forward, three years later, Odette appears to have dementia. She is hosting a party, but no one wants to talk to her, and they actively speak ill of her in front of her. The finest lady at that time, Marquise de Sabran, arrives at the house. Odette is happy that she has brought Gilberte into high society.

Princess of Nassau (née d'Orvillers) has done the same thing. She is "preserved, one might almost say embalmed, by a thousand cosmetics", like a mummy. Her personality is unchanged, eccentric: "a strawberry tart could send her into an ecstasy". She remembers flirting with Marcel in a carriage. Marcel has no memory of that.

Duc de Guermantes (Basin) has an affair with Odette. He is in love with her and suffers from jealousy. He spends his days and evenings with her. Odette treats him with contempt and takes younger lovers. The Duke is in poor physical shape, but it is "a magnificent ruin", as if he was an ancient sculpture, a monument of time. His old wit and social domination has been replaced by an illness.

Odette also recently came out of a two-year relationship with Mr de Bréauté. She also remembers loving an American that she dumped when he wanted to join her to America. She admits to loving Swann, but that was after he realized that she was not his type.

Since Albertine, Marcel has fallen in love with many women. It appears that he was in relationships with some of them. With each woman, he built an idea of her, often before even meeting her.

"I guessed her to be beautiful, I fell in love with her and I constructed for her an ideal body".

Desire invents women that don't exist. He places each woman in a dream landscape, like a painting, creating a mythic scene. Then, in hindsight, his memory of the woman is different from the preconceived ideal.

"I saw her from the angle of memory, surrounded by the places in which I had known her and which, remaining attached to them, she recalled to me".

He himself moved on, but his memory of the women remains.

"if our life is vagabond our memory is sedentary".

But that memory is not of one specific snapshot of the woman or of Marcel himself. They are memories of many different moments, even with the same woman.

"this second image [the one in hindsight], the one born not of desire but of memory, was, for each of these women, not unique. For my friendship with each one had been multiple, I had known her at different times when she had been a different woman for me and I myself had been a different person."

There is no fixed personality. Therefore, each memory of each woman is a memory of a different version of her, remembered by a different version of Marcel.

People have forgotten (or never learned in the first place) how the characters' lineages and family relations started. Swann has been erased from memory. Some treat others with lower regard because they don't know what families they are really from. Those "who knew that Gilberte was not a Forcheville, that Mme de Cambremer had not been born a Méséglise ... were already reduced in number."

Oriane thinks Marcel first met Swann at her house.

People who once mattered have been forgotten, replaced by new people who are deemed important.

"conglomerations of social groups had disintegrated and re-formed under the magnetic influence of new stars destined themselves also to fade away and then to reappear".

Marcel speaks to a young girl, but "many of the names which I pronounced meant absolutely nothing to her... they had all sunk into oblivion". Individuals are forgotten, but family names are remembered, if even that. "A name: that very often is all that remains for us of a human being, not only when he is dead, but sometimes even in his lifetime."

Like Swann and Odette, there is a continuous stream of non-nobles that flow into high society at an almost statistical rate, "like a stream... does not see another stream... and yet... ends up as a tributary of the same river". Each of them thinks their story is special, but "this was a social phenomenon less rare than I had at first supposed ... just as every year ... an average number of marriages take place, so any other rich and cultivated middle-class ... could be found ... flowing into the ocean of high society."

Marcel and Oriane do a tour of the house together. They walk past a room with Empire style.

"Mme de Guermantes declared that she had always detested [Empire style], a remark which meant merely that she detested it now, which was true, for she followed the fashion, even if she did not succeed in keeping up with it."

It is her third statement about Empire style.

In the room, they find a Mme de Saint-Euverte. It is not the same Mme de Saint-Euverte that Marcel met while speaking to Charlus before the party (the same Mme de Saint-Euverte that was at the soirée in an earlier volume). This one is married to a great-nephew of that madam. The confusion is intentional. It's different individuals under the same label, a name.

The reason people are within the Empire style room is that they are listening to a musical performance there. Because Marcel and Oriane whisper, one man decides to move chairs to hear better. He accidentally pushes a chair and makes a sound. "Mme de Guermantes and I, who had caused this unfortunate little incident, hurriedly left the room".

An old prime minister has become "a little phantom". At the end of his career, he was accused of corruption, disgraced and humiliated. He suffered back then, but now he is respected and honored. Time has made people forget and erased his suffering.

After the death of Mr Verdurin, Mme Verdurin married an elder duke, Duc de Duras. He was a remote Guermantes, so that made Mme Verdurin a Guermantes. The duke soon died, but Mme Verdurin maintained her higher title. When Princesse de Guermantes (Marie-Hedwige) died, Mme Verdurin married Prince de Guermantes (Gilbert) and thus became Princesse de Guermantes. Most people disapprove of their marriage.

Long ago, Marcel had a conversation with Marquis de Villemandois. The Marquis was rude, so Marcel was rude in return. At this party, they meet again, but the Marquis has forgotten that he ever met Marcel. He is now serious, not rude. Memory is selective and subjective: "two people with an equal endowment of memory do not remember the same things ... one of two men, for instance, will have paid little attention to an action for which the other will long continue to feel great remorse"

Morel is present. He is now a respected public figure.

Rachel's recital

Rachel is at the party, "a hideous old woman". She is now a famous actress present to recite poems.

Oriane looks older. She has lost her wit, but no one notices because expectations replace reality.

"Because the procedure was the same they believed that the wit too had survived intact, like those people who, superstitiously attached to some particular make of confectionery, continue to order their [pastries] from a certain shop without noticing that they have become almost inedible."

Only the newcomers see "what a stupid woman this is". She is a memory of herself that continues to act in the present.

She associates with Rachel who is of a much lower class. Marcel wonders if Oriane, like Marcel, has realized the shallowness of high society and that maybe she was intelligent after all. He concludes that she tries to pretend to be an intellectual without being intelligent. She tries to act intellectual but fails because she has no idea how to do it.

"the intelligence of the Duchess was no more than commonplace, but had remained unsatisfied and at a late hour, when she was tired of society, had driven her, totally ignorant as she was of the veritable realities of the intellectual life, to seek for intellectual fulfilment with a touch of that spirit of fantasy which can cause perfectly respectable ladies, thinking to themselves: "How amusing it will be!", to end an evening with a prank which is in fact deadly dull: you go off and wake up some acquaintance and then, when you are in his room, you don't know what to say, so, after standing awkwardly by his bed for a few moments in your evening clothes and realizing how late it is, there is nothing left to do but go home to bed yourself."

It is possible if you read between the lines to believe that Oriane's life has been easy. Her way of life has perhaps avoided some of the hardships that Marcel has gone through and which have led to personal growth. She has not needed to make much of an effort and therefore never improved in knowledge or as a person.

Rachel managed to gain Oriane's approval by acting, not on the stage but socially. "She had taken very great pains to form this friendship ... pains which the Duchess had failed to detect beneath a mask of simulated disdain and deliberate incivility ... [had] given [Oriane] an exalted idea of an actress so little susceptible to snobbery." It appears that when a person humiliates you in a hierarchy, they become more powerful in your eyes (like Gilberte once looked up to Oriane). Indeed, Rachel sees Oriane as prestigious because she once humiliated her when she first tried to enter high society.

Meanwhile, Berma holds a tea party, but no one comes because everyone prefers Oriane's party. Berma's daughter is married and has a child. The husband is poor, but he has high demands. Berma fears that if she cannot supply them enough money for a rich lifestyle, the husband will leave and take the child with him. Therefore, she has returned to acting in spite of her old age. In spite of her lethal illness, habit allows her body to perform as in the past. Her daughter shows no appreciation for it. Berma's performance hurts her and hastens her death. It is symbolic for habit in general.

Berma has a feud with Rachel because she considers Rachel an intruder on the theater scene. Rachel trash talks Berma at the party.

Rachel holds a recital. She is terrible. "Each member of the audience waited, his head lowered but his eyes furtively prying, for others to take the initiative and decide whether to laugh or to criticize, to weep or to applaud." Oriane gives the cue, which is approval, so everyone loves the recital. Oriane says she "discovered" Rachel and that Oriane herself has a natural (in spite of no education in the area) and superior taste. After the first poem, Bloch gives an exaggerated appreciation, clearly pretending just to be liked. The situation echoes the time when Marcel applauded Berma in spite of not liking her performance. Marcel fails to recognize Rachel, even after her recital. To him, it's just a random girl reading poems.

Berma's daughter and her husband arrive at the party asking to watch Rachel's recital. Rachel tells her footman to tell the new arrivals that the recital is already over. The footman comes back with a request to at least shake Rachel's hand. Rachel allows them in, but not before she engages in "ludicrous" slander about them and Berma. Once they enter, Rachel welcomes them with open arms, which is an act. Everyone else sees it as humiliation. Having Berma's daughter in Rachel's social circle is also a way to hurt Berma. Berma's daughter abandons Berma who dies alone.

Gilberte

When Marcel sees Gilberte again, he thinks she is a stranger. She is stout and reminds him of Odette. They discuss Saint-Loup's war ideas. "We marveled how often... his views had been proved correct by the events of the late war". Once again, war is treated as art.

"And even if war were scientific, it would still be right to paint it as Elstir painted the sea, by reversing the real and the apparent, starting from illusions and beliefs which one then slowly brings into line with the truth, which is the manner in which Dostoyevsky tells the story of a life."

They never directly discuss Saint-Loup himself, just his ideas of war, but Marcel sees Gilberte's demeanor as reverent.

Gilberte is good friend with Andrée nowadays. Marcel wonders if it may have anything to do with nostalgia for old love affairs. Andrée stole a man from Rachel. Rachel was once Saint-Loup's lover. But Marcel realizes that he is just speculating. The only way to know is "the testimony of the parties themselves", assuming they have "both insight and sincerity".

Gilberte invites Marcel to small gatherings of intellectuals which he may like better, but he is determined to go into solitude and write. He believes that through his book, he will reveal truth the way Elstir does with his paintings. His only exception is if Gilberte can set him up with young girls, which she almost seems to agree to.

Oriane thinks Gilberte never loved Saint-Loup. She married him just to climb in status and then endured seeing his old lover, Rachel, in high society. "She is a bitch." Oriane has no idea that Saint-Loup was gay with Morel.

We learn in the 6th volume that Gilberte will somehow get the title Duchesse de Guermantes. That tells us that neither Basin nor Charlus will have male children before they die.

Gilberte was once Swann, then Forcheville, then Saint-Loup, and finally Duchesse de Guermantes. Marcel was in love with Gilberte Swann, then Duchesse de Guermantes. Gilberte married Marcel's best friend and became Duchesse de Guermantes.

Gilberte introduces Marcel to her daughter, Mlle Saint-Loup, who is now around 16 years old. Gilberte hopes that her daughter will be a part of high society and marry a royal prince. In a flash forward, Marcel tells us that she will never be a snob, will marry an obscure writer, and people will forget all about her family's attempt at social climbing. That is what Swann's Way represents!

Marcel considers how Mlle Saint-Loup is like a star-shaped crossroads in a forest. Roads from different directions all meet at one point. She is a union between the Guermantes Way (Saint-Loup was a Guermantes) and Swann's Way (Gilberte is Swann's daughter). There is a whole web of people and places that lead to Mlle Saint-Loup: Robert Saint-Loup, Swann, Odette, Gilbert, Morel, Charlus, the Verdurins, Albertine, Elstir, Legrandin, Vinteuil. While each person lives a sequence of events, everyone is connected through the web.

"life is perpetually weaving fresh threads which link one individual and one event to another, and ... these threads are crossed and recrossed, doubled and redoubled to thicken the web".

Marcel can consider any person, place or memory and link them to several others.

"between any slightest point of our past and all the others a rich network of memories gives us an almost infinite variety of communicating paths".

For example, if Swann never told Marcel about Balbec, he would never have gone there and met Saint-Loup or Albertine. If Vinteuil didn't write his music, Swann would never have fallen in love with Odette and Mlle Saint-Loup would never have existed. Gilberte was the first to mention Albertine to Marcel. Albertine played Vinteuil's music, as did the Verdurins. Verdurins united with Guermantes through marriage.

The web gets wider and thicker as we age, and our mind gets more experience.

"we occupy a place, always growing, in Time".

Marcel wants to make time itself visible in people.

"This notion of Time embodied... I intend to emphasize".

The idea of the web means that there are invisible connections, not just between people but between people and places, among other things. A book can reveal those connections and bring out their beauty. The book will contain not random life fragments but a structured network where everything connects.

Marcel realizes that his life was not wasted. The jealousy, pain, heartache, suffering, confusion, procrastination and all the other negative experiences are material for art. Without those, he would have nothing to write about.

"How much more worth living did it appear to me now, now that I seemed to see that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined, this life that at every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape, that a life, in short, can be realised within the confines of a book!"

He is no longer afraid of death. "I had already died many times". He only fears that he discovered this too late and may die before he finishes the book.

Final insights

Insight 1

Every perception and every memory is clouded by illusion, desire and self-perception.

Marcel realizes the mistake he has been doing time and again:

“countries were not such as their names painted them to my imagination”.

“not only had I failed to discover the beauty of Balbec as I had imagined it when I had gone there for the first time, I had failed also when I went back the second time to rediscover the remembered beauty which that first visit had left me”.

“Experience had taught me only too well the impossibility of attaining in the real world ... what lay deep within myself”.

“the disappointment of travel and the disappointment of love were not different disappointments at all”.

In his book, Marcel plans to “represent some of my characters as existing not outside but within ourselves”.

The early part in this summary about Proust’s views of love has much more about that insight.

Insight 2

Each person is a pile of memories stacked on top of each other.

Proust was influenced by Henri Bergson, a philosopher who called time “duration.” He compared time to music. You don’t hear a melody as separate notes. You experience it as a continuous unfolding where each note carries the memory of the previous notes and shapes the future notes. Unlike time illustrated by a clock, duration has no pauses. Moments are interconnected and indistinguishable from each other. The pile of notes makes a song.

The common theme in the *Matinée Guermantes* section is that time changes things, sometimes gradually, sometimes through specific events. It is similar to Heraclites’ river metaphor. You cannot step into the same river twice. The water is constantly replaced, so it is no longer the same river. Also, you yourself have changed since last time you stepped into the river. Everything is constantly changing.

“people - and in saying people I mean what people are for us - do not in our memory possess the invariability of a figure in a painting”.

Even if Odette was at some point the woman in the painting (which she never was), she would not remain that woman.

Even though people change, there is a continuity of moments (memory snapshots) that link any moment in the past to the present. The people we remember do not exist in the present, but they do exist in our memory. We can even trace them backwards and see that the same person was constantly changing. We remember what they once were (at least what they were to us), and sometimes we have several memories of the same person from different times. That person was a different person in each memory because people constantly change. It is a mistake to believe that the person we know now is the same person we knew 10 years ago. The old person is, in a way, dead.

Some places (like the way Champs-Élysées looked when Marcel was young) no longer exist except in our memories. The self of the past no longer exists either.

“each alteration of the brain is a partial death”.

“One cannot change, that is to say become a different person, while continuing to acquiesce to the feelings of the person one has ceased to be.”

A person exists both now and in every moment of their past, like a sum of their memories, but that person is different in each moment.

Everything changes, but you can track the changes to your previous memories of the same person.

“As I followed the stream of memory back towards its source, I arrived eventually at images of a single person separated from one another by an interval of time so long, preserved within me by I’s that were so distinct and themselves ... when I surveyed ... the whole past course of my relations with that particular person I omitted these earliest images and had even ceased to think that the person to whom they referred

was the same as the one whom I had later got to know, so that I needed a fortuitous lightning-flash of attention before I could re-attach this latter-day acquaintance,”
As that quote continues, we understand why etymology has been a recurring theme.
“like a word to its etymology, to the original significance which he or she had possessed for me.”

That said, you don't really remember the real person. You remember what you thought the person was.
“No doubt life, by placing each of these people on my path a number of times, had presented them to me in particular circumstances which, enclosing them finally on every side, had restricted the view which I had of them and so prevented me from discovering their essence.”

The story in Marcel's upcoming book cannot be told like a conventional story where each person never changes.
“to tell the story of a life it would be necessary to use not the two-dimensional psychology which we normally use but a quite different sort of three-dimensional psychology”.

The third dimension is time. Each time Marcel met someone, they were different from the last time he met them. For example, Gilberte was his childhood love, a forgotten memory, and then a friend. Oriane was a glass-stained window, then someone to look at, then a friend. Albertine was different from day to day. Charlus was different every meeting. A person is not a fixed identity but a series of transformations across time.

“memory by itself, when it introduces the past, unmodified, into the present - the past just as it was at the moment when it was itself the present - suppresses the mighty dimension of Time which is the dimension in which life is lived.”

During an involuntary memory, you are in two places at once, as if they shared the same consciousness. In the same way, you are connected to all of your past memories. That is true regardless of whether you are currently experiencing an involuntary memory. Proust compares aging to walking on higher and higher stilts, putting your accumulated time beneath you (not behind you). You are carrying every past version of yourself simultaneously.

“to describe men as occupying so considerable a place ... like giants plunged into the years, they touch the distant epochs through which they have lived”.

Memory by itself is misleading because each memory is frozen in time. With this new understanding of time as another dimension, Marcel wants to tell how people and places journey through time. One might think that in an involuntary memory, a person exists in two places at once, but that's not what Proust says. He says you exist outside time. That means this extra-temporal existence is not limited to two moments. One person exists in all times at the same time, even though that person is different in each time: “the mighty dimension of Time which is the dimension in which life is lived”.

Marcel describes himself as a pile of memories.

“I felt ... a sensation of weariness and almost of terror at the thought that all this length of Time had not only, without interruption, been lived, experienced, secreted by me, that it was my life, was in fact me, but also that I was compelled so long as I was alive to keep it attached to me, that it supported me and that, perched on its giddy summit, I could not myself make a movement without displacing it. A feeling of vertigo seized me as I looked down beneath me, yet within me, as though from a height, which was my own height, of many leagues, at the long series of the years.”

Marcel's understanding of memory becomes less naïve and therefore more precise. He becomes better at interpreting memories. He hears the bell of his childhood as if it was really there.

“in order to get nearer to the sound of the bell and to hear it better it was into my own depths that I had to re-descend. And this could only be because its peal had always been there, inside me, and not this sound only but also, between that distant moment and the present one, unrolled in all its vast length, the whole of that past which I was not aware that I carried about within me.”

The past is not behind us. It is not lost. It is within us.

“for me still to be able to hear that peal, there must have been no break in continuity, no single second at which I had ceased or rested from existing, from thinking, from being conscious of myself, since that moment from long ago still adhered to me and I could still find it again, could retrace my steps to it, merely by descending to a greater depth within myself.”

The child who heard the bell in the past and the man who hears the bell now are connected by an unbroken continuity of existence.

Insight 3

In spite of everything, life is beautiful, but that is difficult to see.

“that the reason why life may be judged to be trivial although at certain moments it seems to us so beautiful is that we form our judgment, ordinarily, on the evidence not of life itself but of those quite different images which preserve nothing of life - and therefore we judge it [unfavorably].”

“Different images” are voluntary memories. For example, if we look at a vacation photo, we can say that we were there, but we don’t experience being there.

“voluntary memory requires no more exertion on our part than turning over the pages of a picture-book”. Such memories are trivial. Because our daily judgement of life is based on such hollow memories, we judge them unfavorably. From that perspective, it seems like life has low value. Perhaps life is even wasted. In an involuntary memory, you experience the memory itself, as if you were there.

The conclusion of that is that life is not trivial. Our way of remembering life is trivial. Life is beautiful while it’s happening. Memory makes it dull. We mistake memory for reality, so we conclude that life is boring.

Life is not inherently experienced as beautiful. For example, Marcel’s life with Albertine was not happy. But there can be beauty in the art that the experience inspires. The beauty lies in the precision with which jealousy is analyzed, the way it the story is interpreted and shaped. In that way, even negative experiences like suffering can be turned into beauty. The illusions in the memory cannot be removed, but they can be identified and therefore integrated into the truth that the art (such as this book) reveals.

For the same reason, Proust argues against realism (the art movement).

“the kind of literature which contents itself with “describing things,” with giving of them merely a miserable abstract of lines and surfaces, is in fact, though it calls itself realist, [is] the furthest removed from reality”.

“If reality were indeed a sort of waste product of experience, more or less identical for each one of us, since when we speak of bad weather, a war, a taxi rank, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden full of flowers, everybody knows what we mean, if reality were no more than this, no doubt a sort of cinematograph film of these things would be sufficient and the “style,” the “literature” that departed from the simple data that they provide would be superfluous and artificial.”

No moment exists in isolation. For example, if you eat a cookie, the moment of eating the cookie involves a thousand things like the temperature, scent, the color of the sky, the wallpapers, your physical state, and so on. But when the event becomes a memory, your intellect throws away those useless details to focus only on the facts. You ate a cookie.

“the slightest word that we have said, the most insignificant action that we have performed at any one epoch of our life was surrounded by, and colored by the reflection of, things which logically had no connection with it, and which later have been separated from it by our intellect which could make nothing of them for its own rational purposes”.

A memory is split into “a thousand sealed vessels”, each containing one aspect such as temperature and color. For the same reason, a bad book (“a uniform depiction of life”) feels like a voluntary memory. It does not evoke the full experience or the essence.

We don’t understand how happy we are when we are happy. We can only understand how happy we were in retrospect.

“People don't know when they are happy. One is never as unhappy as one thinks.”

An involuntary memory that we recall is isolated. It is not influenced by anything, not even our feelings in the present. It is recalled exactly as it was.

“the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute ... it remains in the context of its own place and date ... it keeps its distance, its isolation .. upon the highest peak of a mountain summit”.

If so, it feels like something we have lost but which we have regained.

“for this very reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past, that purer air which the poets have vainly tried to situate in paradise and which could induce so profound a sensation of renewal only if it had been breathed before, since the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost.”

Something unsettling about that is that the most intense happiness is never available in the present. It only exists in memory or in imagination.

“We dream much of paradise, or rather of a number of successive paradises, but each of them is, long before we die, a paradise lost, in which we should feel ourselves lost too.”

We take life itself and our habitual pleasures for granted, so we don't realize that we enjoy them, and therefore we do not actually enjoy them, at least not in the present.

"if habit is a second nature, it prevents us from knowing our original nature, whose cruelties it lacks and also its enchantments".

The present is blurred by habit.

"if there were no such thing as habit, life must appear delightful to those of us who would at every moment be threatened with death - that is to say, to all mankind".

Without habit, every moment would feel new and exciting.

Because certain things were experienced together in childhood (places, feelings, people, landscapes), they are fused as one in memory.

"by virtue of having permanently and indissolubly united so many different impressions in my mind, simply because they made me experience them at the same time,"

You think you want to see a person again, but what you really want is the feeling associated with their memory.

"the Méséglise and Guermantes ways left me exposed, in later life, to much disillusionment and even to many mistakes. For often I have wished to see a person again without realizing that it was simply because that person recalled to me a hedge of hawthorns in blossom."

The trigger doesn't have to be a person. Just seeing one thing from a past time can trigger memories of that time. That thing that you see is not the source of the feeling, but you think it is. You think a person is desirable when in reality, they only remind you of a package of good memories of which they were only a part, if even that.

It explains why Swann became obsessed with Odette, and Marcel with Gilberte and Albertine. They don't love the actual person, but what that person awakens in them.

Marcel remembers that his mother used to read to him in bed. She read the novel *Françoise le Campi* by George Sand. Marcel realizes that it was not the novel that he liked, but the situation of being read to.

"this book which my mother had read aloud to me at Combray ... kept for me all the charm of that night ... the "pen" of George Sand ... no longer seemed to me ... in the least a magic pen."

A good example is when Marcel realizes that his grandmother is lost forever. He then realizes that she still exists in his memory. Although it is over now, it happened, and it mattered. Memory doesn't replace the person, but it rescues experience from being meaningless or lost.

Insight 4

The past is not lost, and you don't need to rely on involuntary memory to recapture it.

So far, it appears that the only way to recapture the past (see its essence) is to get lucky and get an involuntary memory. But that is most certainly not the case. If that was the case, Proust would not be able to write this book. Proust says it himself: "every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape". The book is full of analysis and insights. The miracle (involuntary memory) is the proof, not the practice. Can you really say, after reading the scene where Marcel and his grandmother knocked on the wall, that Proust failed to capture the essence of that memory? That was not an involuntary memory. 99% of everything he tells in the book is not from involuntary memory, but from Proust's voluntary recollection. Therefore, it must be possible to gain such insights in other ways than involuntary memory. In fact, involuntary memory gives no insights. It just takes you back to a past memory. Proust must have developed an ability to access truth and identify his past self-deception without relying on involuntary memory. That method appears to be wisdom.

"We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world."

The start for Proust to obtain that wisdom was the involuntary memories that he experienced. Without the involuntary memories, he would not have made the remaining insights.

In this passage, he shows that he has acquired an ability to recall past moments at will.

"... my life was entirely altered. What had constituted its sweetness ... was precisely the perpetual resurgence, at the bidding of identical moments, of moments from the past. From the sound of pattering raindrops, I recaptured the scent of the lilacs at Combray; from the shifting of the sun's rays on the balcony the pigeons in the Champs-Élysées; from the muffling of sounds in the heat of the morning hours, the cool taste of cherries."

When he thinks about being read to at a child:

“a thousand trifling details of Combray which for years had not entered my mind came lightly and spontaneously leaping, in follow-my-leader fashion ... in a ... chain of memories.”
That is not an involuntary memory.

Another example:

“There is, for instance, a book by Bergotte ... which I read years ago one winter day when I was unable to see Gilberte and which I now search in vain for the phrases which I then thought wonderful. Certain words almost make me believe that I have found them, but it cannot be so, for of the beauty that I once saw in them there is no trace. But the volume itself still glistens with the snow that covered the Champs-Élysées on the day when I first read it - I open its pages and the scene is before my eyes.”
That is not an involuntary memory.

Because such memories are not involuntary memories, they are probably not as vivid, but the way he talks about them indicates that it is possible to work with voluntary memory as if it was almost as meaningful as involuntary memory. Involuntary memories are just examples of experiences that are always structurally possible (though not as vivid). You don't even need moments like the hawthorns or the spires of Martinville to look into your past and see the essence of memories. At least not once you have achieved the wisdom that Proust achieved.

You can argue that Proust did not capture the essence of the memories and that he just described how he felt and what he perceived. But how he felt and what he perceived is part of the memory, even if he was deceived by his own mind. Essence does not mean the absolute objective truth of the world. Even essence is part of our own subjective memory. Proust does not mean that you can strip illusion off a memory and see the objective world of the memory. That would be realism.

Also, after reading the book, can you really say that he failed to capture the essence of the memories? For example, when he saw the little band the second time, Albertine looked different from the first time. That means the first memory must have been clouded by illusion or self-deception. But do we not feel like the essence of the moment was captured anyway?

That also indicates that we can learn from experience. The whole reason Marcel writes the book is to teach people something.

“Was it not, surely, in order to concern myself with them that I was going to live apart from these people who would complain that they did not see me, to concern myself with them in a more fundamental fashion than would have been possible in their presence, to seek to reveal them to themselves, to realise their potentialities? What use would it have been that, for a few more years, I should waste hour after hour at evening parties pursuing the scarcely expired echo of other people's remarks with the no less vain and fleeting sound of my own, for the sterile pleasure of a social contact which precluded all penetration beneath the surface? Was it not more worthwhile that I should attempt to describe the graph, to educe the laws, of these gestures that they made, these remarks that they uttered, their very lives and natures?”

We can look back on past memories and identify what illusions affected us. Such reflect can lead to greater wisdom, but it can never cure us from our human limitations. What we take for reality is always shaped by imagination, habit, and self-deception. Proust does not mean that you can learn to live without illusion. Illusion is unavoidable. Nevertheless, it can be identified. You can realize that illusion was there. You cannot separate or isolate illusion from an experience or from a memory.

Although Proust does not give us any direct advice, there is a lot to take away from *In Search of Lost Time*. We can read almost any page, and it becomes like a tool to open our mind. Each reader will likely learn different things. Perhaps you become more aware of illusions, less dogmatic. Perhaps you get some experience or insight that improves your mindset or your behavior. Maybe you learn something about your own psychology. Maybe you get new perspectives of the world. You may feel like there is more to life than what is directly perceived, a web of structures that interact.

Understanding something is meaningful, even if you cannot immediately do anything about it.

Proust compares human feelings to a photographic negative.

“what one feels is like a negative which shows only blackness until one has placed it near a special lamp and which must also be looked at in reverse ... until one has brought them within range of the intellect one does not know what they represent”.

People rarely look past the surface of things. We simplify. We are stuck in habits, conventions and arbitrary ideas. We avoid effort. Our lives are the photographic negatives. We can look past that, but doing so requires

effort and is often painful because we must abandon illusions, vanity and comforting self-deception. We must develop the negatives. Only then can we uncover the authentic reality.

Proust does not claim that there is an illusion-free reality underneath and that we can experience that reality. We can't even do that in memories. We don't understand our experiences while we live them because there are so many illusions. You can remember something that happened, but what happened includes the illusions too. When we read about Marcel's jealousy for Albertine, we thought that he was dumb, but that *is* the experience. The jealousy is part of the experience. It shapes his actions and defines the relationship. But a later, reflecting Marcel realizes that that was the case.

What Proust adds to Heraclites' river metaphor is that the past is not lost. The past is still in your memory and can be recovered. Different times, in a way, coexist. We have seen in the novel many examples of how one person or thing changes with time. For example, Rachel was a prostitute, then a girlfriend, then an actress and finally a part of high society. But she was also not a prostitute (in Saint-Loup's mind), not a girlfriend (after they broke up, she was more of a mistress), not a good actress (except when people pretend), and not a noble. Combray was a location of Marcel's childhood, then Gilberte's family, then a battlefield, and finally a war memorial.

Insight 5

Memory and perception are subjective, not shared.

Examples: Many characters were secretly gay. Gilberte's gaze in Tansonville was seduction, not contempt. To Swann, Odette was a figment of imagination. When Marcel's grandmother took pictures, she did it for his benefit, but he thought she was vain.

In your memory of a person, you see only what is in your imagination of them, but in reality, they are part of a whole universe that you know nothing about. The same is true for other things than people. Similarly, people pretend like they know things. Not just facts, but people and beliefs. We fool ourselves into believing that we know things. In particular, many characters in the book pretend like they know art without experiencing art.

"I had seen people present various aspects according to the idea that I or others possessed of them, a single individual being several different people for different observers ... or even for the same observer at different periods over the years ... I had seen that love places in a person who is loved what exists only in the person who loves, indeed I could hardly have failed to become aware of this when I had seen stretched to its maximum the distance between objective reality and love (in Rachel, for instance, as she appeared to Saint-Loup and to me, in Albertine as she appeared to me and to Saint-Loup)".

There have been many examples in the story where characters were unable to communicate with each other. People are trapped within their own bubbles.

"between us and other people there exists a barrier of contingencies".

Art can let us experience what the world is like for someone else.

"the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain forever the secret of every individual. Through art alone, we are able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own."

Literature is an example of art.

Insight 6

People pretend instead of experiencing.

All the high society scenes portray that idea. People pretend like they are something they are not, and that other people are something they are not. The acting is not just for the benefit of others. You are also deceiving yourself.

Snobbery is a form of imagination applied to the wrong targets.

Here is an analogy. Let's say you go on a ski vacation. You ski together with other people. You think about what they think of how you ski. You want to impress them. So, you ski to impress the others instead of enjoying skiing. You are not really skiing. You are performing the idea of a skier. You are focusing on the external, how you look to others, rather than the internal, how you feel while skiing. You replace your authentic life with a

social narrative. That removes the potential for true memory of the skiing. Your perception and memory is clouded. Years later, you won't remember the skiing itself.

In that way, high society is like a perpetual ski trip where everyone tries to impress the others without enjoying the skiing.

People deal with art the same way. They focus on its external features: technique, who made it, what other people think, what politics it supports. Art is used as a social currency. People discuss for the purpose of socializing and gaining status. They label it, classify it and judge it. But true art is not about classification.

"many art-lovers stop there, without extracting anything from their impression, so that they grow old useless and unsatisfied, like celibates of Art!"

They are not consuming art. They are consuming social approval.

"at concerts they will shout 'Bravo, bravo' till they are hoarse at the end of a work they admire and imagine as they do so that they are discharging a duty. But demonstrations of this kind do not oblige them to clarify the nature of their admiration and of this they remain in ignorance".

There have been many examples of that in the story. We can, for example, compare the first time Marcel saw Berma to the second time.

Insight 7

Art can recover the past and bring illusion to light.

With his new insights, Marcel has something to write about, and with his new ability of recall, he has the content. He finally starts writing. Life is the raw material for art. Everything he has lived, even the bad parts, even boredom and trivial moments, has been stored inside him like nutrients for a seed. That seed will become a plant (his book).

"one must wait for suffering before one can work ... one is afraid of each new literary undertaking because one thinks of the pain one will first have to endure in order to imagine it ... [but] suffering is the best thing that one can hope to encounter in life."

Desire for women does something to your mind, something that develops it.

"the emotions which a young girl of no kind of distinction arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the most intimate parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more essential than would be reached by the pleasure that we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work."

Pain, grief and other negative emotions each serve their purpose for art. Pain and love reveal deeper truths about human nature. What hurts a person enriches the artist within that person. Suffering can lead to insight, which can help produce art. Through all experiences, an artist can turn personal experiences into more general truths. Art is not about copying the world (like realism) but to reveal the truths hidden beneath the obvious. A successful artist suffers through illusions, then extracts truth from them and offers that truth to readers who must discover that truth for themselves.

"when it is a question of writing, one is scrupulous, one examines things meticulously, one rejects all that is not truth. But when it is merely a question of life, one ruins oneself, makes oneself ill, kills oneself all for lies."

Art can't shove the truth in your face. Not even Proust's book can do that.

"it seemed to me that they would not be my readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass ... it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves."

Art can help illuminate an experience for us so that we can gain an understanding of it and perhaps learn from it.

Marcel's life, exactly as it was, including all his errors, is the material for his book.

True art reveals patterns, connections across time, and connections that were previously invisible. It makes you realize illusions, and that is something you can learn from.

By art, Proust means all art. A book can be art through words. A painting can transform an ordinary scene into something that gives you an idea. Music can reveal emotional structures that could otherwise not be expressed. What they have in common is that they break habitual perception. They make you see things differently, reveal connections you didn't notice, and turn subjective experience into something intelligible and meaningful.

He decides to start the story in Combray.

“In this vast dimension which I had not known myself to possess, the date on which I had heard the noise of the garden bell at Combray - that far-distant noise which nevertheless was within me - was a point from which I might start to make measurements.”

After he starts writing, Marcel shows people excerpts from his book, but it cannot be understood until it is completed.

“Even those who commended my perception of the truths which I wanted eventually to engrave ... congratulated me on having discovered them with a microscope, when on the contrary it was a telescope that I had used to observe things which were indeed very small to the naked eye, but only because they were situated at a great distance, and which were each one of them in itself a world. Those passages in which I was trying to arrive at general laws were described as so much pedantic investigation of detail.”

When you look back on this summary, or if you re-read any page in the book, almost every paragraph in the book in some way represents, either directly or through symbology, one or more of the final insights. When I reached the end, I wanted to start from the beginning to read the book that Marcel plans to write, his stack of memories.

Review

It is unique.

The psychological aspects create extreme immersion. You really get inside Marcel's consciousness and recognize yourself in parts of it. That can be magical.

Even though the story is sad, it is beautiful. Finish the book felt like I had lived a whole second life.

It was enjoyable to analyze.

The maximum level is on a different level than all other books I have read, but there is also a tendency to boring scenes like the Guermentes dinner.

It is often hilarious in a variety of ways. I have not laughed this much about perhaps any other book.

Sometimes, I had to re-read sentences several times, which was often unavoidable because of the reflection required. But some sentences are long for no good reason. He could have split them up into several sentences and still get his point across. I felt like some sentences was like reading Ulysses. I was trying to decipher the words rather than the message.

The number of gay people is silly.

Proust was not a psychologist, but he was a philosopher. The final conclusions are more philosophy than psychology.

Although Proust was not a psychologist, much of the psychology in the book is recognized as legit. I recognized part of myself in the psychology, but the book is case study, not universal. For example, most psychologists define love as a state of safety, trust and mutual support, which is the opposite of Marcel's torment.