

The monologue is her form of revenge.

FLAUBERT

THE silly bastards! I drew the curtains they keep the stupid colored lanterns and the fairy lights on the Christmas trees out of the apartment but the noises come in through the walls. Engines revving brakes and now here they are starting their horns big shots is what they take themselves for behind the wheel of their dreary middle-class family cars their lousy semisports jobs their miserable little Dauphines their white convertibles. A white convertible with black seats that's terrific and the fellows whistled when I went by with slanting sunglasses on my nose and a Hermès scarf on my head and now they think they're going to impress me with their filthy old wrecks and their bawling klaxons! If they all smashed into one another right under my windows how happy I should be happy. The swine they are shattering my eardrums I've no more plugs the last two are jamming the telephone bell they are utterly repulsive yet still I'd rather have my ears shattered than hear the telephone not ringing. Stop the uproar the silence: sleep. And I shan't get a wink yesterday I couldn't either I was so sick with horror because it was the day before today. I've taken so many sleeping pills they don't work anymore and that doctor is a sadist he gives them to me in the

form of suppositories and I can't stuff myself like a gun. I've got to get some rest I have to I must be able to cope with Tristan tomorrow: no tears no shouting. "This is an absurd position. A ghastly mess, even from the point of view of dough! A child needs its mother." I'm going to have another sleepless night my nerves will be completely frazzled I'll make a cock of it. Bastards! They thump thump in my head I can see them I can hear them. They are stuffing themselves with cheap foie gras and burned turkey they drool over it Albert and Madame Nanard Etienne their snooty offspring my mother: it's flying in the face of nature that my own brother my own mother should prefer my ex-husband to me. I've nothing whatever to say to them only just let them stop preventing me sleeping; you get so you are fit to be shut up you confess everything, true or false, they needn't count on that though I'm tough they won't get me down.

Celebrations with them, how they stank: it was ghastly enough quite ghastly enough on ordinary days! I always loathed Christmas Easter July 14. Papa lifted Nanard onto his shoulder so that he could see the fireworks and I stayed there on the ground squashed between them just at prick level and that randy crowd's smell of sex and Mama said "there she is sniveling again" they stuffed an ice into my hand there was nothing I wanted to do with it I threw it away they sighed I couldn't be slapped on a July 14 evening. As for him he never touched me I was the one he liked best: "proper little God-damn woman." But when he kicked the bucket she didn't bother to hold in anymore and she used to swipe me across the face with her rings. I never slapped Sylvie once. Nanard was the king. She used to take him into her bed in the morning and I heard them

tickling one another he says it's untrue I'm disgusting of course he's not going to confess they never do confess indeed maybe he's forgotten they are very good at forgetting anything inconvenient and I say they are shits on account of I do remember: she used to wander about her brothel of a room half naked in her white silk dressing gown with its stains and cigarette holes and he clung around her legs it makes you really sick mothers with their little male jobs and I was supposed to be like them no thank you very much indeed. I wanted decent children clean children I didn't want Francis to become a fairy like Nanard. Nanard with his five kids he's a bugger for all that you can't deceive me you really must hate women to have married that cow.

It's not stopping. How many of them are there? In the streets of Paris hundreds of thousands. And it's the same in every town all over the world: three thousand million and it'll get worse and worse: famines there are not nearly enough more and more and more people: even the sky's infested with them presently they will be as thick in space as they are on the motorways and the moon you can't look at it anymore without thinking that there are cunts up there spouting away. I used to like the moon it was like me; and they've mucked it up like they muck everything up they were revolting those photos—a dreary grayish dusty thing anyone at all can trample about on.

I was clean straight uncompromising. No cheating: I've had that in my bones since I was a child. I can see myself now a quaint little brat in a ragged dress Mama looked after me so badly and the kind lady simpering "And so we love our little brother do we?" And I answered calmly "I hate him." The icy chill: Mama's look. It was perfectly

natural that I should have been jealous all the books say so: the astonishing thing the thing I like is that I should have admitted it. No compromise no act: that proper little woman was me all right. I'm clean I'm straight I don't join in any act: that makes them mad they hate being seen through they want you to believe the stuff they hand out or at least to pretend to.

Here's some of their bloody nonsense now—rushing up the stairs laughter voices all in a tizzy. What the hell sense does that make, all working themselves up at a set date a set time just because you start using a new calendar? All my life it's made me sick, this sort of hysterical crap. I ought to tell the story of my life. Lots of women do it people print them people talk about them they strut about very pleased with themselves my book would be more interesting than all their balls: it's made me sweat but I've lived and I've lived without lies without sham how furious it would make them to see my name and picture in the shop windows and everyone would learn the real genuine truth. I'd have a whole raft of men at my feet again they're such groveling creatures that the most dreadful slob once she's famous they make a wild rush for her. Maybe I should meet one who would know how to love me.

My father loved me. No one else. Everything comes from that. All Albert thought of was slipping off I loved him quite madly poor fool that I was. How I suffered in those days, young and as straight as they come! So of course you do silly things: maybe it was a put-up job what is there to show he didn't know Olivier? A filthy plot it knocked me completely to pieces.

Now of course that just had to happen they are dancing right over my head. My night is wrecked finished tomor-

row I shall be a rag I shall have to dope myself to manage Tristan and the whole thing will end in the shit. You mustn't do it! Swine! It's all that matters to me in life sleep. Swine. They are allowed to shatter my ears and trample on me and they're making the most of it. "The dreary bitch downstairs can't make a fuss it's New Year's Day." Laugh away I'll find some way of getting even she'll bitch you the dreary bitch I've never let anyone walk over me ever. Albert was livid. "No need to make a scene!" oh yes indeed there was! He was dancing with Nina belly to belly she was sticking out her big tits she stank of scent but underneath it you got a whiff of bidet and he was jiggling about with a prick on him like a bull. Scenes I've made scenes all right in my life. I've always been that proper little woman who answered "I hate him" fearless open as a book dead straight.

They're going to break through the ceiling and come down on my head. I can see them from here it's too revolting they're rubbing together sex to sex the women the respectable women it makes them wet they're charmed with themselves because the fellow's tail is standing up. And each one of them is getting ready to give his best friend a pair of horns his dearly beloved girlfriend they'll do it that very night in the bathroom not even lying down dress hitched up on their sweating asses when you go and pee you'll tread in the mess like at Rose's the night of my scene. Maybe it's on the edge of a blue party that couple upstairs they're in their fifties at that age they need whorehouse tricks to be able to thread the needle. I'm sure Albert and his good lady have whore parties you can see from Christine's face she's ready for anything at all he wouldn't have to hold himself back with her. Poor bleeder that I

was at twenty too simpleminded too shamefaced. Touching, that awkwardness: I did really deserve to be loved. Oh I've been done dirt life's given me no sort of a break.

Hell I'm dying of thirst I'm hungry but it would slay me to get up out of my armchair and go to the kitchen. You freeze to death in this hole only if I turn up the central heating the air will dry out completely there's no spit left in my mouth my nose is burning. What a bleeding mess their civilization. They can muck up the moon but can't heat a house. If they had any sense they'd invent robots that would go and fetch me fruit juice when I want some and see to the house without my having to be sweet to them and listen to all their crap.

Mariette's not coming tomorrow fine I'm sick of her old father's cancer. At least I've disciplined *her* she keeps more or less in her place. There are some that put on rubber gloves to do the washing up and play the lady that I cannot bear. I don't want them to be sluts either so you find hairs in the salad and finger marks on the doors. Tristan is a cunt. I treat my dailies very well. But I want them to do their jobs properly without making a fuss or telling me the story of their lives. For that you have to train them just as you have to train children to make worthwhile grown-ups out of them.

Tristan has not trained Francis: that bitch of a Mariette is leaving me in the lurch. The drawing room will be a pigsty after they've been here. They'll come with a plushy present everyone will kiss everyone else I will hand around little cakes Francis will make the answers his father has gone over with him he lies like a grown-up man. I should have made a decent child of him. I shall tell Tristan a kid deprived of his mother always ends up by going to the

bad he'll turn into a hooligan or a fairy you don't want that. My serious thoughtful voice makes me feel sick: what I should really like to do is scream it's unnatural to take a child away from its mother! But I'm dependent on him. "Threaten him with divorce," said Dédé. That made him laugh. Men hold together so the law is so unfair and he has so much pull that it's him that would get the decree. He would keep Francis and not another penny and you can whistle for the rent. Nothing to be done against this filthy blackmail—an allowance and the flat in exchange for Francis. I am at his mercy. No money you can't stand up for yourself you're less than nothing a zero twice over. What a numskull I didn't give a damn about money unselfish half-wit. I didn't twist their arms a quarter enough. If I had stayed with Florent I should have made myself a pretty little nest egg. Tristan fell for me fell right on his face I had pity on him. And there you are! This puffed-up little pseudo-Napoleon leaves me flat because I don't swoon go down on my knees in admiration before him, I'll fix him. I'll tell him I'm going to tell Francis the truth: I'm not ill I live alone because your swine of a father ditched me he buttered me up then he tortured me he even knocked me about. Go into hysterics in front of the boy bleed to death on their doormat that or something else. I have weapons I'll use them he'll come back to me I shan't go on rotting all alone in this dump with those people on the next floor who trample me underfoot and the ones next door who wake me every morning with their radio and no one to bring me so much as a crust when I'm hungry. All those fat cows have a man to protect them and kids to wait on them and me nothing: this can't go on. For a fortnight now the plumber hasn't come a woman on her

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own they think they can do anything how despicable people are when you're down they stamp on you. I kick back I keep my end up but a woman alone is spat on. The concierge gives a dirty laugh. At ten in the morning it is *in concordance with the law* to have the radio on: if he thinks I'm impressed by his long words. I had them on the telephone four nights running they knew it was me but impossible to pin it I laughed and laughed: they've coped by having calls stopped I'll find something else. What? Drips like that sleep at night work all day go for a walk on Sunday there's nothing you can get a hold on. A man under my roof. The plumber would have come the concierge would say good day politely the neighbors would turn the volume down. Bloody hell, I want to be treated with respect I want my husband my son my home like everybody else.

A little boy of eleven it would be fun to take him to the circus to the zoo. I'd train him right away. He was easier to handle than Sylvie. She was a tough one to cope with soft and cunning like that slug Albert. Oh, I don't hold it against her poor little creep they all put her against me and she was at the age when girls loathe their mothers they call that ambivalence but it's hatred. There's another of those truths that make them mad. Etienne dripped with fury when I told her to look at Claudio's diary. She didn't want to look, like those women who don't go to the doctor because they're afraid of having cancer so you're still the dear little mama of a dear little daughter. Sylvie was not a dear little anything I had a dose of that when I read her diary: but as for me I look things straight in the face. I didn't let it worry me all that much I knew all I had to do was wait and one day she would understand and

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she would say I was the one who was in the right and not them and cram it down their throats. I was patient never did I raise a hand against her. I took care of myself of course. I told her, "You won't get me down." Obstinate as a mule whining for hours on end days on end over a whim there wasn't the slightest reason for her to see Tristan again. A girl needs a father I ought to know if anybody does: but nobody's ever said she needs two. Albert was quite enough of a nuisance already he was taking everything the law allowed him and more I had to struggle every inch of the way he'd have corrupted her if I hadn't fought. The frocks he gave her it was immoral. I didn't want my daughter to turn into a whore like my mother. Skirts up to her knees at seventy paint all over her face! When I passed her in the street the other day I crossed over to the other sidewalk. With her strutting along like that what a fool I should have looked if she had put on the great reconciliation act. I'm sure her place is as squalid as ever with the cash she flings away at the hairdresser's she could afford herself a cleaning woman.

No more horns blowing I preferred that row to hearing them roaring and bellowing in the street: car doors slamming they shout they laugh some of them are singing they are drunk already and upstairs that racket goes on. They're making me ill there's a foul taste in my mouth and these two little pimples on my thigh they horrify me. I take care I only eat health foods but even so there are people who muck about with them hands more or less clean there's no hygiene anywhere in the world the air is polluted not only because of the cars and the factories but also these millions of filthy mouths swallowing it in and belching it out from morning till night: when I think I'm swimming

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That bastard Tristan I want him to have me out to a restaurant to a theater I'll insist upon it I don't insist nearly enough all he does is come drooling along here either by

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himself or with the kid sits there with a mealy-mouthed smirk on his face and at the end of an hour he drools off again. Not so much as a sign of life even on New Year's Eve! Swine! I'm bored black I'm bored through the ground it's inhuman. If I slept that would kill the time. But there is this noise outside. And inside my head they are giving that dirty laugh and saying, "She's all alone." They'll laugh the other side of their faces when Tristan comes back to me. He'll come back I'll make him I certainly will. I'll go to the couturiers again I'll give cocktail parties evening parties my picture will be in *Vogue* with a neckline plunging to there I have better breasts than anyone. "Have you seen the picture of Murielle?" They will be utterly fucked and Francis will tell them about how we go to the zoo the circus the skating rink I'll spoil him that'll make them choke on their lies their slanders. Such hatred! Clear-sighted too clear-sighted. They don't like being seen through: as for me I'm straight I don't join their act I tear masks off. They don't forgive me for that. A mother jealous of her daughter so now I've seen everything. She flung me at Albert's head to get rid of me for other reasons too no I don't want to believe it. What a dirty trick to have urged me into that marriage me so vital alive a burning flame and him stuffy middle-class coldhearted prick like limp macaroni. I would have known the kind of man to suit Sylvie. I had her under control yes I was firm but I was always affectionate always ready to talk I wanted to be a friend to her and I would have kissed my mother's hands if she had behaved like that to me. But what a thankless heart. She's dead and so all right what of it? The dead are not saints. She wouldn't cooperate she never confided in me at all. There was someone in her life a boy

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or maybe a girl who can tell this generation is so twisted. But there wasn't a precaution she didn't take. Not a single letter in her drawers and the last two years not a single page of diary: if she went on keeping one she hid it terribly well even after her death I didn't find anything. Blind with fury just because I was doing my duty as a mother. Me the selfish one when she ran away like that it would have been in my interest to have left her with her father. Without her I still had a chance of making a new life for myself. It was for her own good that I was having none of it. Christine with her three great lumps of children it would have suited her down to the ground to have had a big fifteen-year-old girl she could have given all the chores to poor lamb she had no notion the hysterics she put on for the benefit of the police. . . . Yes the police. Was I supposed to put on kid gloves? What are the police there for? Stray cats? Albert offering me money to give up Sylvie! Always this money how groveling men are they think everything can be bought anyhow I didn't give a damn about his money it was peanuts compared with what Tristan allows me. And even if I had been broke I'd never have sold my daughter. "Why don't you let her go, that chick only brings you headaches" Dédé said to me. She doesn't understand a mother's feelings she never thinks of anything but her own pleasure. But one must not always be at the receiving end one must also know how to give. I had a great deal to give Sylvie I should have made her into a fine girl: and I asked nothing from her for myself. I was completely devoted. Such ingratitude! It was perfectly natural I should ask that teacher's help. According to her diary Sylvie worshiped her and I thought she'd hold her bloody tongue the lousy half-

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baked intellectual. No doubt there was much more between them than I imagined I've always been so clean-minded I never see any harm these alleged brain workers are all bull dykes. Sylvie's sniveling and fuss after it and my mother who told me on the phone I had no right to intermeddle with my daughter's friendships. That was the very word she used *intermeddle*. "Oh as far as that was concerned you never intermeddled. And don't you begin now if you please." Straight just like that. And I hung up. My own mother it's utterly unnatural. In the end Sylvie would have realized. That was one of the things that really shattered me at the cemetery. I said to myself "A little later she would have said I was in the right." The ghastliness of remembering the blue sky all those flowers Albert crying in front of everyone Christ you exercise some self-control. I controlled myself yet I knew very well I'd never recover from the blow. It was me they were burying. I have been buried. They've all got together to cover me over deep. Even on this night not a sign of life. They know very well that nights when there are celebrations everybody laughing gorging stuffing one another the lonely ones the bereaved kill themselves just like that. It would suit them beautifully if I were to vanish they hide me in a hole but it doesn't work I'm a burr in their pants. I don't intend to oblige them, thank you very much indeed. I want to live I want to come to life again. Tristan will come back to me I'll be done right by I'll get out of this filthy hole. If I talked to him now I should feel better maybe I'd be able to sleep. He must be at home he's an early bedder, he saves himself up. Be calm friendly don't get his back up otherwise my night is shot to hell.

He doesn't answer. Either he's not there or he doesn't

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want to answer. He's jammed the bell he doesn't want to listen to what I have to say. They sit in judgment upon me find me guilty not one of them ever listens to me. I never punished Sylvie without listening to what she had to say first it was she who clammed up who wouldn't talk. Only yesterday he wouldn't let me say a quarter of what I had to say and I could hear him dozing at the other end of the line. It's disheartening. I reason I explain I prove: patiently step by step I force them to the truth I think they're following me and then I ask "What have I just said?" They don't know they stuff themselves with mental earplugs and if a remark happens to get through their answer is just so much balls. I start over again I pile up fresh arguments: same result. Albert is a champion at that game but Tristan is not so bad either. "You ought to take me away with Francis for the holidays." He doesn't answer he talks of something else. Children have to listen but they manage they forget. "What have I said, Sylvie?" "You said when one is messy in small things one is messy in big ones and I must tidy my room before I go out." And then the next day she did not tidy it. When I force Tristan to listen to me and he can't find anything to reply —a boy needs his mother a mother can't do without her child it's so obvious that even the crookedest mind can't deny it—he goes to the door flies down the stairs four at a time while I shout down the well and cut myself off short in case the neighbors think I'm cracked: how cowardly it is he knows I loathe scenes particularly as I've an odd sort of a reputation in this house of course I have they behave so weirdly—unnaturally—that sometimes I do the same. Oh what the hell I used to behave so well it gave me a pain in the ass Tristan's casualness his big laugh

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his loud voice I should have liked to see him drop down dead when he used to horse around in public with Sylvie.

Wind! It's suddenly started to blow like fury how I should like an enormous disaster that would sweep everything away and me with it a typhoon a cyclone it would be restful to die if there were no one left to think about me: give up my body my poor little life to them no! But for everybody to plunge into nothingness that would be fine: I'm tired of fighting them even when I'm alone they harry me it's exhausting I wish it would all come to an end! Alas! I shan't have my typhoon I never have anything I want. It's only a little very ordinary wind it'll have torn off a few tiles a few chimney pots everything is mean and piddling in this world nature's as bad as men. I'm the only one that has splendid dreams and it would have been better to choke them right away everything disappoints me always.

Perhaps I ought to stuff up these sleeping things and go to bed. But I'm still too wide awake I'd only writhe about. If I had got him on the phone if we'd talked pleasantly I should have calmed down. He doesn't give a fuck. Here I am torn to pieces by heartbreaking memories I call him and he doesn't answer. Don't bawl him out don't begin by bawling him out that would muck up everything. I dread tomorrow. I shall have to be ready before four o'clock I shan't have had a wink of sleep I'll go out and buy petits fours that Francis will tread into the carpet he'll break one of my little ornaments he's not been properly brought up that child as clumsy as his father who'll drop ash all over the place and if I say anything at all Tristan will blow right up he never let me keep my house as it ought to be yet after all it's enormously important. Just now it's per-

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fect the drawing room polished shining like the moon used to be. By seven tomorrow evening it'll be utterly filthy I'll have to spring-clean it even though I'll be all washed out. Explaining everything to him from *a* to *z* will wash me right out. He's tough. What a clot I was to drop Florent for him! Florent and I we understood one another he coughed up I lay on my back it was cleaner than those capers where you hand out tender words to one another. I'm too softhearted I thought it was a terrific proof of love when he offered to marry me and there was Sylvie the ungrateful little thing I wanted her to have a real home and a mother no one could say a thing against a married woman a banker's wife. For my part it gave me a pain in the ass to play the lady to be friends with crashing bores. Not so surprising that I burst out now and then. "You're setting about it the wrong way with Tristan" Dédé used to tell me. Then later on "I told you so!" It's true I'm headstrong I take the bit between my teeth I don't calculate. Maybe I should have learned to compromise if it hadn't been for all those disappointments. Tristan made me utterly sick I let him know it. People can't bear being told what you really think of them. They want you to believe their fine words or at least to pretend to. As for me I'm clear-sighted I'm frank I tear masks off. The dear kind lady simpering "So we love our little brother do we?" and my collected little voice: "I hate him." I'm still that proper little woman who says what she thinks and doesn't cheat. It made my guts grind to hear him holding forth and all those bloody fools on their knees before him. I came clumping along in my big boots I cut their fine words down to size for them—progress prosperity the future of mankind happiness peace

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aid for the underdeveloped countries peace upon earth. I'm not a racist but don't give a fuck for Algerians Jews Negroes in just the same way I don't give a fuck for Chinks Russians Yanks Frenchmen. I don't give a fuck for humanity what has it ever done for me I ask you. If they are such bleeding fools as to murder one another bomb one another plaster one another with napalm wipe one another out I'm not going to weep my eyes out. A million children have been massacred so what? Children are never anything but the seed of bastards it unclutters the planet a little they all admit it's overpopulated don't they? If I were the earth it would disgust me, all this vermin on my back, I'd shake it off. I'm quite willing to die if they all die too. I'm not going to go all soft-centered about kids that mean nothing to me. My own daughter's dead and they've stolen my son from me.

I should have won her back. I'd have made her into a worthwhile person. But it would have taken me time. Tristan did not help me the selfish bastard our quarrels bored him he used to say to me "Leave her in peace." You ought not to have children in a way Dédé is right they only give you one bloody headache after another. But if you do have them you ought to bring them up properly. Tristan always took Sylvie's side: now even if I had been wrong—let's say I might have been sometimes for the sake of argument—from an educational point of view it's disastrous for one parent to run out on the other. He was on her side even when I was right. Over that little Jeanne for example. It quite touches my heart to think of her again her moist adoring gaze: they can be very sweet little girls she reminded me of my own childhood badly dressed neglected slapped scolded by that

concierge of a mother of hers always on the edge of tears: she thought I was lovely she stroked my furs she did little things for me and I slipped her pennies when no one was looking I gave her sweeties poor pet. She was the same age as Sylvie I should have liked them to be friends Sylvie disappointed me bitterly. She whined "Being with Jeanne bores me." I told her she was a heartless thing I scolded her I punished her. Tristan stood up for her on the grounds that you can't force liking that battle lasted for ages I wanted Sylvie to learn generosity in the end it was little Jeanne who backed out.

It's quietened down a bit up there. Footsteps voices in the staircase car doors slamming there's still their bloody fool dance music but they aren't dancing anymore. I know what they're at. This is the moment they make love on beds on sofas on the ground in cars the time for being sick sick sick when they bring up the turkey and the caviar it's filthy I have a feeling there's a smell of vomit I'm going to burn a joss stick. If only I could sleep I'm wide awake dawn is far away still this is a ghastly hour of the night and Sylvie died without understanding me I'll never get over it. This smell of incense is the same as at the funeral service: the candles the flowers the catafalque. My despair. Dead: It was impossible! For hours and hours I sat there by her body thinking no of course not she'll wake up I'll wake up. All that effort all those struggles scenes sacrifices—all in vain. My life's work gone up in smoke. I left nothing to chance; and chance at its cruellest reached out and hit me. Sylvie is dead. Five years already. She is dead. Forever. I can't bear it. Help it hurts it hurts too much get me out of here I can't bear the breakdown

to start again no help me I can't bear it any longer don't leave me alone. . . .

Who to call? Albert Bernard would hang up like a flash: he blubbered in front of everybody but tonight he's gorged and had fun and I'm the one that remembers and weeps. My mother: after all a mother is a mother I never did her any harm she was the one who mucked up my childhood she insulted me she presumed to tell me. . . . I want her to take back what she said I won't go on living with those words in my ears a daughter can't bear being cursed by her mother even if she's the ultimate word in tarts.

"Was it you who called me? . . . It surprised me too but after all on a night like this it could happen you might think of my grief and say to yourself that a mother and daughter can't be on bad terms all their lives long; above all since I really can't see what you can possibly blame me for. . . . Don't shout like that. . . ."

She has hung up. She wants peace. She poisons my life the bitch I'll have to settle her hash. What hatred! She's always hated me: she killed two birds with one stone in marrying me to Albert. She made sure of her fun and my unhappiness. I didn't want to admit it I'm too clean too pure but it's staringly obvious. It was she who hooked him at the physical culture class and she treated herself to him slut that she was it can't have been very inviting to stuff her but what with all the men who'd been there before she must have known a whole bagful of tricks like getting astride over the guy I can just imagine it it's perfectly revolting the way respectable women make love. She was too long in the tooth to keep him she made use

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of me they cackled behind my back and went to work again: one day when I came back unexpectedly she was all red. How old was she when she stopped? Maybe she treats herself to gigolos she's not so poor as she says she's no doubt kept jewels that she sells off on the sly. I think that after you're fifty you ought to have the decency to give it up: I gave it up well before ever since I went into mourning. It doesn't interest me anymore I'm blocked I never think of those things anymore even in dreams. That old bag it makes you shudder to think of between her legs she drips with scent but underneath she smells she used to make up she titivated she didn't wash not what I call wash when she pretended to use a douche it was only to show Nanard her backside. Her son her son-in-law: it makes you feel like throwing up. They would say, "You've got a filthy mind." They know how to cope. If you point out that they're walking in shit they scream it's you that have dirty feet. My dear little girlfriends would have liked to have a go with my husband women they're all filthy bitches and there he was shouting at me, "You are contemptible." Jealousy is not contemptible real love has a beak and claws. I was not one of those women who will put up with sharing or whorehouse parties like Christine I wanted us to be a clean proper couple a decent couple. I can control myself but I'm not a complete drip I've never been afraid of making a scene. I did not allow anyone to make fun of me I can look back over my past—nothing unwholesome nothing dubious. I'm the white blackbird.

Poor white blackbird: it's the only one in the world. That's what maddens them: I'm something too far above them. They'd like to do away with me they've shut me up in a cage. Shut in locked in I'll end by dying of boredom

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really dying. It seems that that happens to babies even, when no one looks after them. The perfect crime that leaves no trace. Five years of this torture already. That ass Tristan who says travel you've plenty of money. Plenty to travel on the cheap like with Albert in the old days: you don't catch me doing that again. Being poor is revolting at any time but when you travel! . . . I'm not a snob I showed Tristan I wasn't impressed by deluxe palace hotels and women dripping with pearls the fancy doormen. But second-rate boardinghouses and cheap restaurants, no *sir*. Dubious sheets filthy tablecloths sleep in other people's sweat in other people's filth eat with badly washed knives and forks you might catch lice or the pox and the smells make me sick: quite apart from the fact that I get deadly constipated because those johns where everybody goes turn me off like a tap: the brotherhood of shit only a very little for me please. Then what earthly point is there in traveling alone? We had fun Dédé and I it's terrific two pretty girls in a convertible their hair streaming in the wind: we made a terrific impression in Rome at night on the Piazza del Popolo. I've had fun with other friends too. But alone? What sort of impression do you make on beaches in casinos if you haven't got a man with you? Ruins museums I had my bellyful of them with Tristan. I'm not an hysterical enthusiast I don't swoon at the sight of broken columns or tumbledown old shacks. The people of former times my foot they're dead that's the only thing they have over the living but in their own day they were just as sickening. Picturesqueness: I don't fall for that not for one minute. Stinking filth dirty washing cabbage stalks what a pretentious fool you have to be to go into ecstasies over that! And it's the same thing everywhere all the time

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whether they're stuffing themselves with chips paella or pizza it's the same crew a filthy crew the rich who trample over you the poor who hate you for your money the old who dodder the young who sneer the men who show off the women who open their legs. I'd rather stay at home reading a thriller although they've become so dreary nowadays. The TV too what a clapped-out set of fools! I was made for another planet altogether I mistook the way.

Why do they have to make all that din right under my windows? They're standing there by their cars they can't make up their minds to put their stinking feet into them. What can they be going on and on about? Snotty little beasts snotty little beastesses grotesque in their miniskirts and their tights I hope they catch their deaths haven't they any mothers then? And the boys with their hair down their necks. From a distance those ones seem more or less clean. But all those louse-breeding beatniks if the chief of police had any sort of drive he'd toss them all into the brig. The youth of today! They drug they stuff one another they respect nothing. I'm going to pour a bucket of water on their heads. They might break open the door and beat me up I'm defenseless I'd better shut the window again. Rose's daughter is one of that sort it seems and Rose plays the elder sister they're always together in one another's pockets. Yet she used to hold her in so she even boxed her ears she didn't bother to bring her to reason she was impulsive arbitrary: I loathe capriciousness. Oh, Rose will pay for it all right as Dédé says she'll have Danielle on her hands pregnant. . . . I should have made a lovely person of Sylvie. I'd have given her dresses jewels I'd have been proud of her we should have gone out together. There's no justice in the world. That's what makes me so mad—the

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injustice. When I think of the sort of mother I was! Tristan acknowledges it: I've forced him to acknowledge it. And then after that he tells me he's ready for anything rather than let me have Francis: they don't give a damn for logic they say absolutely anything at all and then escape at the run. He races down the stairs four at a time while I shout down the well after him. I won't be had like that. I'll force him to do me justice: cross my heart. He'll give me back my place in the home my place on earth. I'll make a splendid child of Francis they'll see what kind of a mother I am.

They are killing me the bastards. The idea of the party tomorrow destroys me. I must win. I must I must I must I must I must. I'll tell my fortune with the cards. No. If it went wrong I'd throw myself out of the window no I mustn't it would suit them too well. Think of something else. Cheerful things. The boy from Bordeaux. We expected nothing from one another we asked one another no questions we made one another no promises we bedded down and made love. It lasted three weeks and he left for Africa I wept wept. It's a memory that does me good. Things like that only happen once in a lifetime. What a pity! When I think back over it it seems to me that if anyone had loved me properly I should have been affection itself. Turds they bored me to death they trample everyone down right left and center everyone can die in his hole for all they care husbands deceive their wives mothers toss off their sons not a word about it sealed lips that carefulness disgusts me and the way they don't have the courage of their convictions. "But come really your brother is too closefisted" it was Albert who pointed it out to me I'm too noble-minded to bother with trifles like that but it's true

they had stuffed down three times as much as us and the bill was divided fifty-fifty thousands of little things like that. And afterward he blamed me—"You shouldn't have repeated it to him." On the beach we went at it hammer and tongs. Etienne cried you would have said the tears on her cheeks were melting suet. "Now that he knows he'll turn over a new leaf" I told her. I was simpleminded—I thought they were capable of turning over new leaves I thought you could bring them up by making them see reason. "Come Sylvie let's think it over. You know how much that frock costs? And how many times will you ever put it on? We'll send it back." It always had to be begun again at the beginning I wore myself out. Nanard will go on being closefisted to the end of his days. Albert more deceitful lying secretive than ever. Tristan always just as self-satisfied just as pompous. I was knocking myself out for nothing. When I tried to teach Etienne how to dress Nanard bawled me out—she was twenty-two and I was dressing her up as an elderly schoolteacher! She went on cramming herself into little gaudy dresses. And Rose who shouted out "Oh you are cruel!" I had spoken to her out of loyalty women have to stand by one another. Who has ever shown me any gratitude? I've lent them money without asking for interest not one has been grateful to me for it indeed some have whined when I asked to be paid back. Girlfriends I overwhelmed with presents accused me of showing off. And you ought to see how briskly they slipped away all those people I had done good turns to yet God knows I asked for nothing much in return. I'm not one of those people who thinks they have a right to everything. Aunt Marguerite: "Would you lend us your apartment while you're on your cruise this summer?" Lend

it hell hotels aren't built just for dogs and if they can't afford to put up in Paris they can stay in their own rotten hole. An apartment's holy I should have felt raped. . . . It's like Dédé. "You mustn't let yourself be eaten up" she tells me. But she'd be delighted to swallow me whole. "Have you an evening coat you can lend me? You never go out." No I never go out but I did go out: they're my dresses my coats they remind me of masses of things I don't want a strumpet to take my place in them. And afterward they'd smell. If I were to die Mama and Nanard would share my leavings. No no I want to live until the moths have eaten the lot or else if I have cancer I'll destroy them all. I've had enough of people making a good thing out of me—Dédé worst of all. She drank my whiskey she showed off in my convertible. Now she's playing the great-hearted friend. But she never bothered to ring me from Courchevel tonight of all nights. When her cuckold of a husband is traveling and she's bored why yes then she brings her fat backside here even when I don't want to see her at all. But it's New Year's Day I'm alone I'm eating my heart out. She's dancing she's having fun she doesn't think of me for a single minute. Nobody ever thinks of me. As if I were wiped off the face of the earth. As if I had never existed. Do I exist? Oh! I pinched myself so hard I shall have a bruise.

What silence! Not a car left not a footstep in the street not a sound in the house the silence of death. The silence of a death chamber and their eyes on me their eyes that condemn me unheard and without appeal. Oh how strong they are! Everything they felt remorse for they clapped it onto my back the perfect scapegoat and at last they could invent an excuse for their hatred. My grief has not lessened

it. Yet I should have thought the devil himself would have been sorry for me.

All my life it will be two o'clock in the afternoon one Tuesday in June. "Mademoiselle is too fast asleep I can't get her to wake up." My heart missed a beat I rushed in calling "Sylvie are you ill?" She looked as though she were asleep she was still warm. It had been all over some hours before the doctor told me. I screamed I went up and down the room like a madwoman. Sylvie Sylvie why have you done this to me? I can see her now calm relaxed and me out of my mind and the note for her father that didn't mean a thing I tore it up it was all part of the act it was only an act I was sure I am sure—a mother knows her own daughter—she had not meant to die but she had overdone the dose she was dead how appalling! It's too easy with these drugs anyone can get just like that: these teen-age girls will play at suicide for a mere nothing: Sylvie went along with the fashion—she never woke up. And they all came they kissed Sylvie not one of them kissed me and my mother shouted at me "You've killed her!" My mother my own mother. They made her be quiet but their faces their silence the weight of their silence. Yes, if I were one of those mothers who get up at seven in the morning she would have been saved I live according to another rhythm there's nothing criminal about that how could I have guessed? I was always there when she came back from school many mothers can't say as much always ready to talk to question her it was she who shut herself up in her room pretending she wanted to work. I never failed her. And my mother she who neglected me left me by myself how she dared! I couldn't manage any reply my head was spinning I no longer knew where I was. "If I'd gone to

give her a kiss that night when I came in. . . ." But I didn't want to wake her and during the afternoon she had seemed to me almost cheerful. . . . Those days, what a torment! A score of times I thought I was going to crack up. School friends teachers put flowers on the coffin without addressing a word to me: if a girl kills herself the mother is guilty: that's the way their minds worked out of hatred for their own mothers. All in at the kill. I almost let myself be got down. After the funeral I fell ill. Over and over again I said to myself, "If I had got up at seven. . . . If I had gone to give her a kiss when I came in. . . ." It seemed to me that everybody had heard my mother's shout I didn't dare go out anymore I crept along by the wall the sun clamped me in the pillory I thought people were looking at me whispering pointing enough of that enough I'd rather die this minute than live through that time again. I lost more than twenty pounds, a skeleton, my sense of balance went I staggered. "Psychosomatic," said the doctor. Tristan gave me money for the nursing home. You'd never believe the questions I asked myself it might have driven me crazy. A phony suicide she had meant to hurt someone—who? I hadn't watched her closely enough I ought never to have left her for a moment I ought to have had her followed held an inquiry unmasked the guilty person a boy or a girl maybe that whore of a teacher. "No Madame there was no one in her life." They wouldn't yield an inch the two bitches and their eyes were murdering me: they all of them keep up the conspiracy of lies even beyond death itself. But they didn't deceive me. I know. At her age and with things as they are today it's impossible that there was no one. Perhaps she was pregnant or she'd fallen into the clutches of a lezzy or she'd got in

with an immoral lot someone was blackmailing her and having her threatening to tell me everything. Oh, I must stop picturing things. You could have told me everything my Sylvie I would have got you out of that filthy mess. It must certainly have been a filthy mess for her to have written to Albert, *Papa please forgive me but I can't bear it anymore*. She couldn't talk to him or to the others: they tried to get to her, but they were strangers. I was the only one she could have confided in.

Without them. Without their hatred. Bastards! You nearly got me down but you didn't quite succeed. I'm not your scapegoat: your remorse—I've thrown it off. I've told you what I think of you each one has had his dose and I'm not afraid of your hatred I walk clean through it. Bastards! They are the ones who killed her. They flung mud at me they put her against me they treated her as a martyr that flattered her all girls adore playing the martyr: she took her part seriously she distrusted me she told me nothing. Poor pet. She needed my support my advice they deprived her of them they condemned her to silence she couldn't get herself out of her mess all by herself she set up this act and it killed her. Murderers! They killed Sylvie my little Sylvie my darling. I loved you. No mother on earth could have been more devoted: I never thought of anything but your own good. I open the photograph album I look at all the Sylvies. The rather drawn child's face the closed face of the adolescent. Looking deep into the eyes of my seventeen-year-old girl they murdered I say "I was the best of mothers. You would have thanked me later on."

Crying has comforted me and I'm beginning to feel

sleepy. I mustn't go to sleep in this armchair I should wake everything would be mucked up all over again. Take my suppositories go to bed. Set the alarm clock for noon to have time to get myself ready. I must win. A man in the house my little boy I'll kiss at bedtime all this unused affection. And then it would mean rehabilitation. What? I'm going to sleep I'm relaxing. It'll be a swipe in the eye for them. Tristan is somebody they respect him. I want him to bear witness for me: they'll be forced to do me justice. I'll call him. Convince him this very night.

"Was it you who phoned me? Oh, I thought it was you. You were asleep forgive me but I'm glad to hear your voice it's so revolting tonight nobody's given the slightest sign of life yet they know that when you've had a great sorrow you can't bear celebrations all this noise these lights did you notice Paris has never been so lit up as this year they've money to waste it would be better if they were to reduce the rates I shut myself up at home so as not to see it. I can't get off to sleep I'm too sad too lonely I brood about things I must talk it over with you without any quarreling a good friendly talk listen now what I have to say to you is really very important I shan't be able to get a wink until it's settled. You're listening to me, right? I've been thinking it over all night I had nothing else to do and I assure you this is an absurd position it can't go on like this after all we are still married what a waste these two apartments you could sell yours for at least twenty million and I'd not get in your way never fear no question of taking up married life again we're no longer in love I'd shut myself up in the room at the back don't interrupt you could have all the Fanny Hills you like I don't give a hoot but since we're still friends there's no reason why we

shouldn't live under the same roof. And it's essential for Francis. Just think of him for a moment I've been doing nothing else all night and I'm tearing myself to pieces. It's bad for a child to have parents who are separated they grow sly vicious untruthful they get complexes they don't develop properly. I want Francis to develop properly. You have no right to deprive him of a real home. . . . Yes yes we do have to go over all this again you always get out of it but this time I insist on your listening to me. It's too selfish indeed it's even unnatural to deprive a son of his mother a mother of her son. For no reason. I've no vices I don't drink I don't drug and you've admitted I was the most devoted of mothers. Well then? Don't interrupt. If you're thinking about your fun I tell you again I shan't prevent you from having girls. Don't tell me I'm impossible to live with that I ate you up that I wore you out. Yes I was rather difficult it's natural for me to take the bit between my teeth: but if you'd had a little patience and if you'd tried to understand me and had known how to talk to me instead of growing pig-headed things would have gone along better between us you're not a saint either so don't you think it: anyhow that's all water under the bridge: I've changed: as you know very well I've suffered I've matured I can stand things I used not to be able to stand let me speak you don't have to be afraid of scenes it'll be an easygoing coexistence and the child will be happy as he has a right to be I can't see what possible objection you can have. . . . Why isn't this a time for talking it over? It's a time that suits me beautifully. You can give up five minutes of sleep for me after all for my part I shan't get a wink until the matter's settled don't always be so selfish it's too dreadful to prevent people

sleeping it sends them out of their minds I can't bear it. Seven years now I've been rotting here all alone like an outcast and that filthy gang laughing at me you certainly owe me my revenge let me speak you owe me a great deal you know because you gave me the madly-in-love stuff I ditched Florent and broke with my friends and now you leave me flat all your friends turn their backs on me: why did you pretend to love me? Sometimes I wonder whether it wasn't a put-up job. . . . Yes a put-up job—it's so unbelievable that terrific passion and now this dropping me. . . . You hadn't realized? Hadn't realized what? Don't you tell me again that I married you out of interest I had Florent I could have had barrowloads and get this straight the idea of being your wife didn't dazzle me at all you're not Napoleon whatever you may think don't tell me that again or I shall scream you didn't say anything but I can hear you turning the words over in your mouth don't say them it's untrue it's so untrue it makes you scream you gave me the madly-in-love jazz and I fell for it. . . . No don't say listen Murielle to me I know your answers by heart you've gone over and over them a hundred times no more guff it doesn't wash with me and don't you put on that exasperated look yes I said that exasperated look I can see you in the receiver. You've been even more of a cad than Albert he was young when we married you were forty-five you ought to understand the nature of your responsibilities. But still all right the past's past. I promise you I shan't reproach you. We wipe everything out we set off again on a fresh footing I can be sweet and charming you know if people aren't too beastly to me. So come on now tell me it's agreed tomorrow we'll settle the details.

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"Swine! You're taking your revenge you're torturing me because I haven't drooled in admiration before you but as for me money doesn't impress me nor fine airs nor fine words. 'Never not for anything on earth' we'll see all right we'll see. I shall stand up for myself. I'll talk to Francis I'll tell him what you are. And if I killed myself in front of him do you think that would be a pretty thing for him to remember? . . . No it's not blackmail you silly bastard with the life I lead it wouldn't mean a thing to me to do myself in. You mustn't push people too far they reach a point when they're capable of anything indeed there are mothers who kill themselves with their children. . . ."

Swine! Turd! He's hung up. . . . He doesn't answer he won't answer. Swine. Oh! My heart's failing I'm going to die. It hurts it hurts too much they're slowly torturing me to death I can't bear it any longer I'll kill myself in his drawing room I'll slash my veins when they come back there'll be blood everywhere and I shall be dead. . . . Oh! I hit it too hard I've cracked my skull it's them I ought to bash. Head against the wall no no I shan't go mad they shan't let me down I'll stand up for myself I'll find weapons. What weapons swine swine I can't breathe my heart's going to give I must calm down. . . .

Oh God. Let it be true that you exist. Let there be a heaven and a hell I'll stroll along the walks of Paradise with my little boy and my beloved daughter and they will all be writhing in the flames of envy I'll watch them roasting and howling I'll laugh I'll laugh and the children will laugh with me. You owe me this revenge, God. I insist that you grant it me.

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