

# **TOME 2**

**Une traduction du *Maître des âmes* d'Irène**

**Némirovsky**

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## Translator's Note

In the translation of the *Master of Souls*, I have endeavoured to conserve as many elements of Irène Némirovsky's style as possible. No doubt the reader will encounter, at times, some sentence structures or placement of adjectives which do not satisfy their sense of correct English expression. Where possible, I have left French idioms unchanged allowing the reader to interpret them and note how these reflect French culture. I invite the reader to approach the novel bearing in mind the advice of Lawrence Venuti, distinguished translator and commentator on translation. Venuti asks that the novel be read as much for its story as for the appreciation of its language and that the reader have an open mind when they come across a certain strangeness in expression. He advises the reader to appreciate the use of words and cultural allusions as another level of enjoyment. Finally, he asks the reader not to judge the single text as representative of the whole of a foreign literature but to read other translations from the same language.

William Streater.

## **Preface by Olivier Philipponnat and Philippe Lienhardt to the French edition of *The Master of Souls* (2006)**

This preface was translated from the French by William Streater

On the eighteenth of May, 1939, the Parisian political and literary weekly, *Gringoire*, undertook the publication in serial form of *The Ports of the Levant*,<sup>1</sup> the latest novel by Irène Némirovsky, “the great Slav novelist” who published regularly in its pages from 1933.

The “échelles du Levant” are those commercial trading posts, towns and ports of the Near East which for ages have connected Europe and Asia and are firmly attached to the crossroads where spice and silk were traded and where poverty and pogroms flourished.

In the period between the wars, when immigration had never been as strong in France, with the tide of refugees from all Eastern Europe as well as Spain, the trading posts, symbolised the demographic flood which gave birth to a form of muted xenophobia, poisoning the old christian antisemitism with a more general rejection of the “métèque”.<sup>2</sup> In its pejorative use, the word appeared at the end of the preceding century in the wake of the Panama Scandal and the Dreyfus Affair. For those who use it, it is synonymous with outsider, stateless person or Jew. The hero of *Le maître des âmes* is one of these. His name, Asfar, of Punic origin, is still, to-day, widespread in the Near East; it means “traveller” in Arab but it seems, as well, to indicate a universal figure,

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<sup>1</sup> This was also the title of a novel by Amin Maalouf (1996). Because of this, the title of *Maître des âmes* (Master of Souls) was chosen for the present edition. This was the name by which Asfar was known in Paris.

<sup>2</sup> **Translator’s footnote:** The term “métèque” translates into English as “wog”.

that of Ahasvérus, the wandering Jew, a key character of the novelists' imagination in the inter-war years and of contemporary history, a fact borne out by the fact that when *Les Échelles du Levant* appeared, the tragic odyssey of the *Saint-Louis* took place and so many of its Jewish passengers, rejected on both sides of the Atlantic, ended up in Nazi camps.

In the period when the novel begins—1920—a curious debate was stirring the Senate. A mysterious contagion, “an out-of-control microbe” was threatening to transform Paris into a “necropolis”. A senator referred to the infectious agent as: “an invasion of second-rate wogs, “exhausted, infested with vermin”, and who have landed in Paris in “hundreds of thousands”. Of course, these invaders are “Israelites increasingly pouring in from Eastern Europe.”<sup>3</sup> The “trading posts of the Levant”, are also the boarding bridges thrown onto the good ship West (it’s not by chance that Wardes’ domain is called The Caravelle); they are also the social ladder, the hard road to success” that Asfar, the shark, despairs of climbing, fearing his unavoidable shipwreck: “I come from so far, I climb from so low . . .”

She also has come from afar, Irène Némirovsky, but certainly not from so low. She does not emerge from the same “mud” as Dario Asfar, this Jewish *podol* for example, whose mire she describes in *Les Chiens et les Loups*. Her parents lived in the exclusive part of the *Petchersk* and spoke French. Her maternal grand-parents, Iona and Rosa, were from the Jewish quarter in Odessa, two steps away from the Moldavanka ghetto where Asfar, the rough drafts attest, began his brutish childhood; but Iona, a graduate, worked in a bank and Roza came from a family of

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<sup>3</sup> See Michaël Prazan, “The inter-war and the affair of “sickness number 9” in “*Genocidal Literature*, Calmann-Lévy, 2005.

comfortable means. From them Léon Némirovsky, Irene's father, received a considerable dowry, though not really in need of it: he had risen in the field of high finance and was among the fortunate Jews *persona grata* in Saint Petersburg. Nevertheless, Némirovsky's literary ascension in post-war France, where her parents had fled following the revolutionary turmoil, does evoke Asfar's medical epic, developing as he did in fifteen years from the status of a "little foreign quack" to become "the master of souls". Such a status protected him only partly against suspicion, a sword suspended over him, and this book makes this very clear since, in the fullness of his success, Asfar remained at the mercy of changing popularity, reliant on the whims of mindless bourgeois women and dependent especially on word of mouth; he continued to be "the beast at bay" his wife, Clara, never failed to see in him. Némirovsky perceives Dario surrounded by a world of fools, much the same as the one she lived in, peopled by "the conservative rich."

*The master of souls* is a shocking, stubborn and relentless book, the story of immoral integration bought at the cost of repudiation, a Faustian myth adapted to immigration. The doctor selling himself is Dario Asfar, this greedy Knock born in the Crimea of "mixed Greek and Italian blood." Irene Nemirovsky thought of calling him Papadopoulos and having him born in "some obscure Greek village" or even in the United States. Finally, she turned him into her own brother. He is an abortionist by necessity, forced to become a parasite by circumstances and, sadly, by his character. Born "a famished wolf", Asfar will die "a wild beast." Immediately classified as a "Levantine type" and as having "a face that is not one of ours" he is heir to a "whole line of famished ancestors" marked by his heredity, the chain which binds the outsider to his past: "I believe I was destined to be a good-for-nothing, a charlatan and I can't escape my fate. You can't escape your destiny." His hunger for an "honourable career" is an illusion destroyed by the

moneyed world he inhabits. Henceforth, object of either pity or scorn, he will be unscrupulous and the immaculate Sylvie Wardes, virginal stereotype of a comforting West, will never be but a pious fantasy, the “wog’s opium”. Eyes opened by the corruption of the world he inhabits, Dario chooses to become a thief again, “a nasty little prowler,” in a word, to follow his bent and become a “game hunter”. In so doing, Dario follows the implacable logic of the Nemirovskian novel, reducing Zola’s realism to its most savage expression. Men are wolves to each other, and their rapacity is exercised in Ukrainian ghettos as well as villas at Neuilly or on the Riviera. Philippe Wardes and Dario Asfar are both predators, one surviving at the expense of the other. Sooner or later, rich or poor, French or not, each abandons himself to hunting down the other, the nature of human-kind.

Irène Némirovsky witnessed this human characteristic from 1929 to 1934 when her devoted editor was Bernard Grasset. Since the twenties, this wounded wild beast had been receiving treatment for his mental disorder at Divonne-Les-Bains, for many months ignoring the conduct of his affairs. From 1927 to 1931, he had been under the care of Doctor René Laforgue, one of the pioneers of Freudian analysis, whom he eventually described as “a butcher of the mind”. Later, after having deluged his associates in obscenities, having sunk into alcoholism and been restrained in a strait-jacket, he accused his family of mentally destroying him and locking him away with but one purpose—to remove him from his publishing house. In 1932, in Toulon, Doctor Angelo Hesnard had brought some relief, prescribing the need to hunt down “the bewitched judeo-germanic demons”—meaning psychoanalysis—by having Grasset undergo a course of treatment to cure his guilt complex. In fact, Bernard Grasset seemed to have become dependent on this and Paris considered him insane. Impatient shareholders suggested placing him

under guardianship. Under their pressure, his own family began a court case to obtain a restraining order on the publisher of *David Golder*. Irene Nemirovsky was one of the few writers who in November 1935 gave him her public support.

This affair which stunned the Paris publishing establishment was one of the sources of inspiration for *The master of souls*. In shaping Wardes' character, Nemirovsky drew not only on Grasset, "the man successful in all things, but sick in mind," she also supplemented it with those of a compulsive gambler named André Citroën. As for Asfar, he is the product of a multitude of real persons, including Doctor Pierre Bougrat, gaoled in 1927 after a widely publicised trial. In addition, one is not forbidden to see in this "master of souls" a double of the novelist herself. He has imagination. He sees not only inflammation of a vein or syphilitic paralysis and so on but he sees the man. Man interests him. It is man he wants to seduce, conquer or deceive and not the illness. This is so true that when she contemplated writing this book in March 1938, with the temporary title of *The Charlatan*, she began, as usual, by imagining the complete biography of each of her characters.

*The master of souls* is a novel about tainted blood that cannot be cleansed, about the "eastern character" incapable of adaptation, in the words of Paul Morand. *The master of souls* tells the story of a "savage", greedy for respect, conquest and worldly pleasures, becoming a ghoul to gobble up souls, but also to feed on young bodies. Not without reason is it that Elinor, who represents the call of heredity, has a name which is an anagram for the East<sup>4</sup>. This word, employed by Maurras, Léon Daudet, Céline, and also by Martin Buber, is synonymous with Jew.

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<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: In French the word for the East is l'Orient, of which Elinor is an anagram.



Not without reason, either, is it that Dario in chapter 29 quotes Ezechiel. Could *The master of Souls* be the dramatic, or *melodramatic* version of *France-la-doulce*? This novel from 1934 made “light-hearted” fun of the invasion of French society by the “teeming scum” and some of the unscrupulous speculators, naturalised or not, who made their way through the obscurity of Central Europe and the Levant to reach the lights of the Champs Élysées. Isn’t this more or less Irene Nemirovsky’s subject? She read *France-la-doulce* pointing out its comic humour in a personal annotation. In the same year, Morand published four of his short stories, labelled “cinematographic” with Gallimard and entitled “*Talking Films*”. How can we not reproach *David Golder* (1930) with *Lewis and Irene* (1924), the first beginning with “No,” Golder said and the other with “Fifteen,” Lewis said. This is also the beginning of *The master of souls*, “I need money!—I told you: no.”

All in all, it was natural that Nemirovsky was greeted with open arms by *Gringoire*, the most popular French weekly magazine, having at the time a circulation of more than half a million copies. In 1939 no-one had forgotten the extraordinary success of *David Golder* that both the theatre and cinema had quarrelled over eight years earlier. The first friendly sign came from Gaston de Pawlowski, who, in the issue of the thirty-first of January 1931 ranked the novelist in the same class as Tolstoy and Dostoievsky in the “literary forest.” On the same day, however, the Jewish *L’Éveil*. took a different approach, angered that the clichés peddled in *David Golder* about big, Jewish financiers suited the numerous antisemites. On the other hand, it was also natural that Nemirovsky, hounded out of Russia by Bolchevism would find welcome in a weekly whose anti-marxism, before it was poisoned by antisemitism, was the war-horse of its owner, Antonio Carbuccia. It was, however, *Gringoire*’s affection for Mussolini that was responsible for its

literary director, Joseph Kessel, dissociating himself from its views in 1935. Kessel was no doubt responsible for Irene's acceptance by the weekly. Irene, however, stayed. Even the respectable and conservative *La revue des deux mondes* rejected some of her short stories, suspected somewhat precipitately by René Doumic, of antisemitism. *Gringoire*, on the contrary, keen to cast its net as wide as possible was unafraid of wide discrepancies. Whilst in May 1934, Marcel Prévost denounced "the persecution of the Jews" in its pages and welcomed Nemirovsky's Slav temperament and her French clarity, on the tenth of November 1938 the same weekly trumpeted "Out with the wogs". In 1939 in the very act of publishing *The Ports of the Levant*, it handed page one to a new, fiercely antisemitic editorialist, Philippe Herriot. It was also true circulation required that the Paris elite, ranging from Jean Cocteau to Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, to mention only those from the field of literature, should gravitate around Horace and Adry de Carbuccia.

In fact, Irene Nemirovsky did not lack admirers in the anticommunist and antisemitic press. In 1932, Robert Brasillach, writing in *Action française*, found the poetry of *The Flies of autumn* "so moving and so true". In 1939, Jean-Pierre Maxence, closely associated with the *Action française*, welcomed her "poignant stories" which were "brought to maturity without haste".<sup>5</sup> A year earlier, in *Gringoire*, the same critic applauded the cry for blood by Louis-Ferdinand Céline in *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, a frenzied attack on all forms of "Jewishness". And it is true that, beginning with "*Le Malentendu*", published by Nemirovsky when she was twenty-three, there appeared the cliché of the "young, rich and elegant Israelite with an intelligent, pale face [. . .] long pointed nose and hungry eyes." In the summer of 1921, still a student, she published her first "*Dialogues*

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Pierre Maxence, *Histoire de dix ans*, Gallimard, 1939; Éditions du Rocher, 2005, p. 225.

*de Nonoché et Loulotte*” in the bi-monthly *Fantasio*, a magazine distinguished for the foolishness and crudeness of its nationalism. Is all this enough to make Nemirovsky, careful not to generalise and depicting only particular beings, an antisemitic writer, as was hastily done by Léon Poliakov? If she consciously resorts to the same clichés found in similar authors, this is not done to judge the characters but rather overwhelm them with destiny and with additional dramatic force. “Humiliate, cut down to size the main characters”, would, however, be the writer’s purpose defined in the margins of *Suite française*. This authorial freedom, incisive style, and determination, sometimes misrepresented, not to produce the work expected of a woman novelist will always be secured at the cost of these misinterpretations. She was, after all, as Robert Brasillach introduced her to his readers, “Both Russian and Israelite by birth, having immigrated to France after the 1917 Revolution.” Irene Nemirovsky was also careful to avoid lapsing into the easy comfort of “the Jewish novel”, exemplified in the twenties by Jacob Lévy, in his series, *The Jews of to-day*. That her work should be seen as empathy repelled her. She forbade herself to denigrate a character, even if it damaged her personally, because to do so was to sin by subjectivity. Was this the price she had to pay to become a French writer? Was it not Emmanuel Berl, with similar scruples, who first published *France-la-douce* which spoke in the same tones as *Bagatelles*, “France is truly the good God’s concentration camp.”

For some, blessed with a strong sense of history, and sad that Irene herself was an immigrant and even more so that she is Jewish, the sordid Balzacian serial that is *The master of souls* is an unforgivable caricature of the “badly dressed and badly shaven wog”. Asfar is endowed with all the attributes unearthed among the stereotypes in which the period abounds. He is the miserable “morose little outsider with feverish eyes”, a beast “outside his underground lair”, “a little

Levantine from the slums” with a “tormented appearance” and “dark skin” all features of the “Oriental’s mask”. He is the prototype of this “enigmatic race”, “moulded of earth’s clay”. He is what we would call to-day a “shady looking character”.

So, did Irene Nemirovsky ignore this antisemitic threat when she spoke so imprudently about “Levantine riff-raff”? Words like these were scarcely without damaging effect at a time when a work such as “*Trifles for a massacre*” was enjoying popular success. Some eighty-five thousand copies were eventually sold. Published in the final days of 1937, the book was a torrent of abuse directed at, among others, Jews who came from “Ukrainian mud.” Doesn’t Asfar dream of washing himself free of this eastern mud clinging to his skin? Don’t the producers in *France-la-doulce* tremble at the thought of being sent back to this “Ukrainian mud” from where they came? Irene Nemirovsky was fully aware that her native Ukraine, as described by Bernard Lecache in his horrifying inquiry, published in 1927, was the “country of pogroms” where tens of thousands Jews had died on the altar of the civil war.

So, did Nemirovsky deny her roots? Quite the opposite; the natural treatment of Jews in her novels demonstrates she was continually questioning these roots. “I’ve never thought of concealing my origins,” she protested. Every time I’ve had the opportunity, I’ve shouted out I was Jewish, I’ve even proclaimed it!”<sup>6</sup> Do we blame Mauriac for his venomous portraits of the Bordeaux middle-class? What Nemirovsky is unjustly accused of goes unchallenged in Isaac Babel’s “*Tales from Odessa*”. Here, without any generosity, Babel shows us the ordinary inhabitants of a ghetto. What about Shalom Asch in his “*Petersburg*” talking about “the Jewish

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<sup>6</sup> L’Univers israélite, juillet, 1935.

type” or “Jewish capital?” Why do we not find fault in him? The answer is simple. Irene Nemirovsky does not write in Yiddish or Russian, but in French, the language in which writers express their antisemitism, the language of Drumont, of the Anti-jew and Maurras, not to mention Jules Verne who made antisemitism a common feature of French literature. Its traces are found among even the most honoured writers. André Gide is an example. At the risk of making comparisons, Nemirovsky made herself attractive to the French reader. In her first literary efforts, she accumulated formulas for the romantic novel directed to this same end. Is there any artist who, at the outset of their career, has not set up their easel in a museum?

When Irene Nemirovsky was an adolescent she should not have read the good French authors so much since it has not been sufficiently emphasised that the stereotype of the financier, “king of the world”, seen in *David Golder* is the same as that of Gundermann in Zola’s “*Money*” or de Maupassant’s Andermatt in “*Mount Oriol*”. When, however, Irene Nemirovsky borrowed these characters, people pointed the finger at her. Now, it was the antisemite readers of *David Golder* who made the novel suspect, just as it was the Nazis who found antisemitism in Lion Feuchtwanger’s “*The Jew Süß*”. While still writing *David Golder* Irene Nemirovsky was well aware that her intention to create a new novel, entitled *The Jew*, dealing extensively with Jewishness, would be too provocative and again she hesitated writing it. She gave up the idea for fear of being misunderstood. She wrote, “Obviously, *The Jew* would be the best title but there are *extraliterary* considerations.” Could anyone be more clear? The Jews in Irene Nemirovsky’s novels are not subjects to be lampooned but her “madeleine”. They are the powerful pedlars of her imagination. Morand, his face all smiles, has one of his characters say, “Death to the yids”. There you really have the vilest form of debasement not found in Nemirovsky’s novels. Who

calls Asfar a “filthy outsider?”—his wealthy neighbours on Hoche Avenue. Who said of him, “he’s got drug dealing in his blood?” It was Ange Martinelli, consumed by his sense of social inferiority.

In the nineteen-thirties, however, the wave of xenophobia and antisemitism that engulfed the French medical profession was very real. For example, in 1930, the secretary-general of the Confederation of medical unions rebuked members, of foreign extraction, for having performed illegal abortions and supplying addicts with drugs. He claimed these were “peddling their profession in the same way as people hawked carpets in the streets.”<sup>7</sup> In 1933 and 1935 there were two parliamentary acts to restrict the right to practise medicine. From these years onward French certificates of competency were required for immigrant doctors.

Irene Nemirovsky does not create these vile stereotypes. She uses them for her own purposes. They have been the stock in trade of French literature from Voltaire and other luminaries of the Enlightenment, as Hertzberg has pointed out.<sup>8</sup> Nemirovsky’s characters are primarily outcasts before they are Jews. Their faults are the effect of ill-treatment that is economic, racial or ideological. In foolishly evoking the field of Jewish finance in *David Golder*, a subject about which she claimed to know all the dramas, Nemirovsky’s naïvety concerning nazi barbarity was still intact. When she employs these worn-out stereotypes she displays more pity than repulsion. There is always a moment at which she expresses her compassion through a character who says,

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<sup>7</sup> Ralph Schor, *L’Antisémitisme en France dans l’entre-deux-guerres*, Complexe, 2005, p. 149.

<sup>8</sup> *Les origines de l’antisémitisme moderne*, Presses de la Renaissance, 2005.

“Oh, poor Dario . . . it’s not his fault if you’ve given him this blood.” Is it Shylock’s fault, this classical cliché of antisemitic persecution, that he is a usurer? Doesn’t he bleed like all humans? Nemirovsky borrows these stereotypes only to reconstitute them. The figure of the arriviste “wog” in her theatre develops more inconsistencies. In the same way that Golder is prepared to ruin himself for his daughter and die in peace, so Asfar only accepts the sale of his soul to sustain his family, although he forgets this. Modelled as they are on caricatures, Golder and Asfar are no less shaped by their humanity, suffering and beauty. Asfar helped the poor, young Mlle Aron by making her his secretary. He betrays his principles to save his son from the curse of poverty. His damnation is a sacrifice. What is more, Asfar does not merit scorn. He *is* scorned. He is famished, hungry for distinction, esteem and understanding. Though racism was the decor of her time, Nemirovsky did not hesitate to bring to her stage aspects of human motivation found, usually, in so called psychological novels.

Just as there are a hundred ways of being antisemitic, there are a hundred ways of avoiding it. One of these is not to surrender the Asfars and Golders to the xenophobes. People, however, couldn’t accept the fact that Nemirovsky showed so little identification with Jews. This became an additional prejudice. People believed Nemirovsky’s lack of identification translated as “self hate”. But disregarding the fact that no-one is obliged to venerate themselves, Nemirovsky did not see herself in this way. The picture people formed of her was the highly distorted image mirrored in newspapers, novels and satirical tracts all over France. As depicted by Nemirovsky, in *The master of souls*, Asfar doesn’t come out badly. It is society, in its hypocritical sincerity, compassion and scorn, which reduces Asfar to insignificance. It is French society she found fault with. Asfar himself makes this point; he is not “a wog” but “what people call a wog.” It wasn’t

for nothing that Irene Nemirovsky read “*The Portrait of Dorian Gray*” when she was fifteen. The theme of the hateful, mirrored self-image runs through all her works, ranging from Golder observing the stark reality of his physical degeneration reflected in the mirror in his railway compartment, to Asfar terrified as he observes his “dark, anxious face, his pointed ears and long teeth” in store windows. Is this self-hate or hate of what others perceive you to be? If *The master of souls* is the portrait of how Nemirovsky saw herself, this is because she moistened her pen in the ink of her future persecutors.

*The master of souls* is a story and it uses story-telling methods. Asfar is a “wild beast lost far from his forest”, and “a sorcerer”. This story is also about a man turned wolf, a hybrid the press called “incapable of assimilation”, the first step towards a slow dehumanisation. He is the kind of man whose roots cannot be extirpated. Raised with hope in western civilisation, Irene Nemirovsky’s heroes always return to their home in the east, just as Clara, in dying, believes she has returned to her father’s house. *The master of souls* could have begun with these words, “Take an harassed, famished beast, with its female and little ones to feed and throw it among tender sheep in a fold set on a verdant pasture . . .” Could *The master of souls* be a satire of “middle-class scorn”, of this France no longer the welcoming mother of the orphans of this world? On the second of February 1939, The Catholic Church welcomed Irene Nemirovsky into its fold, but the State refused to naturalise her, she whom Robert Brasillach, the child monster of antisemitism, had proposed as a model for French women authors.

“Pointless European play-acting!” This novel is a response to Western deception. Shylock observes, “If you treat us badly we will be revenged.” In the following pages, society women and the rich are cruelly portrayed. They are depicted as ignorant, arrogant, greedy, uncommunicative,



duplicitous and ready to ambush the unsuspecting. Irene Nemirovsky had found in psychoanalysis, whose precise aim is to expose “the mind’s shameful deposits”, one of the themes of her novel, the essential and universal need for independence and self-respect. Just as Asfar has been nourished on treacherous language, (“But you’re almost one of us!”) so, humiliated and wounded, he revenges himself in false promises. When Asfar confesses to Sylvie he sees her as so much above him and out of reach and also tells her he sometimes hates her but more often loves her, is not this Irene Nemirovsky speaking to France?

The publication of her serial was completed in August 1939, a few days before France went to war with Germany. Did the publisher, Albin Michel, have in mind issuing it in a single volume? For the moment, he thought it more urgent to assure her of his support in these “disturbing times”. Being of Russian and Israelite heritage this fact could create problems for her. In April, 1940, before the German offensive, there appeared her literary testament, *The Dogs and the Wolves*. Once again, Irene Nemirovsky depicted in strong tones not French Jews but those from “the East, the Ukraine and Poland”, the kinds of Jews described in the press as “wild”. Aware of the hate that hounded the Jews but thinking herself unaffected in this regard, she nevertheless decided to include this warning: “Why does a people refuse to be seen as it is, with its good and bad points? I think certain Jews will recognize themselves in my characters. They may, perhaps, hold this against me. But I know I’m telling the truth.” Six months later Irene Nemirovsky was forced by the first Law on Jews to publish her short stories under a false name. In the two novels she was then finishing and, in the one she was never to finish, Jewish characters no longer appear. At a time fascinated by caricature, subtlety was no longer appropriate. On the fifteenth of July, 1942, Irene Nemirovsky’s last short story was published in the Pétainist weekly *Present*.

Two days previously she had been arrested and transferred to the transit camp in Pithiviers. Her disillusionment is transparent. She wrote: “Look at me. I’m alone like you now but I did not choose or seek this solitude in which I am humiliated and bitter, the worst kind of solitude, the result of desertion and betrayal.”<sup>9</sup> In November 1942, Irene Nemirovsky’s husband, Michel, who had not heard from his wife for well over three months was re-united with her in a place more distant than he had imagined. This place was Oswiecim in Poland, better known under its German name, Auschwitz. Where now were the wolves, where now the barbarians or the savages?

In June 1942, Irene Nemirovsky wrote: “My God! What is this country doing to me?” a cry from the heart echoing Asfar’s poignant appeal: “Yes, all you who look down on me, you rich, fortunate French, what I wanted was your culture, your ethics, your virtues, all that is greater than me, different from me, different from the mud I was born in!” Irene Nemirovsky was not born in poverty, but it is fair to say she desired France’s gratitude for her writing talent. This France with its terrified snarl haunted by the spectre of “The Other” and depicted in her dazzling novels some seventy years later.

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<sup>9</sup> Denis Mérande [Irene Nemirovsky], “Les vierges”, *Present*, the fifteenth of July 1942.

# **The Master of Souls**

**Irène Némirovsky**

## Chapter 1

“I need money!”

“I’ve already said no.”

Dario vainly forced himself to stay calm but whenever he was emotional his voice became shrill. He gesticulated. He was of middle-eastern appearance, anxious and with the look of a hungry wolf. His features were those of an outsider.<sup>10</sup> It was a face that seemed to have been quickly moulded by a hand gripped by fever.

He cried out furiously:

“I know you lend money! I know it!”

Everyone said no when he asked humbly. He would have to try other tones. Patience! He’d know how to employ guile and threat turn by turn. He would shrink from nothing. He’d beg or grab the money by force from the old usurer. His wife and new-born child had only him, Dario, in this world to sustain them. She shrugged her broad shoulders.

“Yes. I lend on security! What’ve you got to offer me?”

Ah! That, that was better. Dario had been right to hope. Occasionally the person you’re soliciting answers ‘no’ but his look says ‘yes’. Ask again. Offer her a service, a kindness, co-operation. “Don’t beg me. It’s useless.” Bribe. But what could he give her? Here he owned nothing.

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<sup>10</sup> Nous avons choisi de traduire « étranger » dans le contexte du roman comme « outsider ». Le Nouveau Petit Robert(2008) dans la troisième partie de sa définition décrit « étranger », qui n’appartient pas ou qui est considéré comme n’appartenant pas à un groupe familial ou social. Tout le long du roman Dario Asfar se voit exclu de la société française.

This woman was his landlady; he had been living for four months in a vacant storey of the small house she had converted into a *pension de famille*<sup>11</sup> for immigrants.

“Who doesn’t need money?” she said. “Times are hard.”

She was fanning herself. She wore a dress of pink material. Her huge, ruddy face was impassive. “A dreadful creature!” he thought. She made a move to get up and he threw himself towards her.

“No! Wait! Don’t go!”

What else could he say to her? Beg? Useless! Haggle? How? He’d forgotten. Educated in Europe, he, Dario Asfar, little Levantine from ports and hovels, believed he’d acquired feelings of shame and honour. Now he had to ignore fifteen years spent in France, this French culture, this French doctor’s title torn with difficulty from the West, not as you receive a gift from your mother, but as you steal a stranger’s piece of bread.<sup>12</sup> Useless European games! They hadn’t fed him. His stomach was empty, pockets empty, holes in his shoes, in Nice, in 1920, thirty-five years old, just as in his youth. He thought bitterly he didn’t know how to manage these new weapons: dignity and pride and he’d have to resort to pleading and bartering—the old, tested know-how.

“Others are in a horde and trained and led,” he thought. “I’m alone. I hunt alone for my wife and little one.”

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<sup>11</sup> Partout dans le roman, nous employons, dans la mesure du possible, les expressions ou les termes français, soulignant pour le lecteur le fait qu’il lit la traduction d’un roman français. Comme le dirait Venuti, c’est une expression de la résistance à l’invisibilité du traducteur.

<sup>12</sup> Il est important de conserver la violence d’arracher. Pendant les années trente il fut rendu extrêmement difficile pour les étrangers de gagner accès aux facultés médicales en France. Némirovsky écrit dans le brouillon du *Maître des âmes* que dans ces facultés il y avait un *numerus clausus* limitant à deux pour cent leur inscription.

“How do you expect me to live?” he exclaimed, “no-one knows me in your town. For four months I’ve been living in Nice. I’ve sacrificed everything to come and set up here. In Paris fortune was at my door. All I had to do was to wait.” (He was lying. He wanted to convince her at any price). Here I treat only Russians. The only people I know are famished emigrants. Not a Frenchman calls me. No-one has faith in me. It’s my face, my accent, I don’t know what,” he said and as he spoke he ran his hand through his jet-black hair, across his brown cheeks and over his eyelids with their long eyelashes, like those of a woman which half-hid his bitter and feverish eyes. “Trust can’t be forced, Marthe Alexandrova. You’re Russian, you know what it’s like living apart. I’ve got a French medical degree, I’m used to living in France, I have French citizenship but I’m treated like a stranger, and feel a stranger. You’ve got to be patient. I’ll tell you again. You’ve got to be patient. You can’t build trust by force. It has to be cultivated and patiently earned. But in the meantime you’ve got to live. It’s in your interest to help me, Marthe Alexandrovna. I’m your tenant. Already I owe you money. If you turn me away you’ll ruin me. What’ll you gain by doing that?”

“We’re poor immigrants as well,” she said, sighing. “Times are hard, doctor . . . What can I do for you? Nothing! ”

“When my wife returns here, on Monday, Marthe Alexandrovna, still weak, with a new-born baby, how can I feed them? God protect them! What’s to become of them? Lend me four thousand francs, Marthe Alexandrovna, and ask what you want in return.”

“But what security can you give me, poor wretch? Do you have any securities?”

“No.”

“Jewellery?”

“Nothing. I’ve got nothing.”

“People always leave me some guarantee, a jewel, a silver table setting, a fur. You’re not a child, doctor, you understand that I can’t oblige people for nothing. Believe me, I’m sorry about it. I wasn’t born to follow the pawnbroker’s trade. I’m *générale* Mouravine,<sup>13</sup> but what can you do if that’s where life takes you?”, she said, placing her hand at the cleft of her breasts with a gesture which would have been applauded when she was a young actress in the provinces, for the old general had married her only in exile, after having recognized the child he’d fathered with her.

She moved as if tightening an imaginary necklace around her neck, white and thick.

“We’re all being drowned in poverty, doctor, dear doctor. If you knew my life!” she said, employing the tactic common to all who are being solicited and which to better refuse money, turn towards themselves the pity they are capable of. “I work like a servant. I’ve got to look after the general, my son and daughter-in-law. Everybody comes and wants my help and I can’t ask for anyone’s help.”

She took the pink cotton handkerchief tucked around her belt and wiped the corners of her eyes. Her face, ruddy and heavy, worn by age, but where still remained, in the line of the nose small and thin, curved like an eagle’s beak, in the shape of the eyelids, the vestiges of a ruined beauty, was awash with tears.

“My heart’s not made of stone, doctor.”

‘If she keeps on crying she’ll chase me away’, Dario thought despairingly.

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<sup>13</sup> Nous avons conservé cette particularité du français où la femme prend le titre militaire de son mari. Selon Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé, « L’appellation Madame la Générale naquit sous la Révolution après la disparition des titres nobiliaires ».

Each of Dario's thought gave rise to a flood of memories. When he thought, 'We'll be thrown out. We'll have to leave. We won't have a place to rest our heads. We won't know where to go,' the images rising up were born not of his mind alone but also of his flesh which had felt cold and of his eyes, raw from tiredness at the end of a long night's aimless wandering. On more than one occasion he hadn't known where to sleep. He'd wandered through the streets. He'd been shown the door of the hotels. But all that, which had seemed normal in childhood, in adolescence, in the first miserable years of study, seemed now degrading to which death would be preferable. Certainly, Europe had spoiled him.

He looked at the apartment and furniture. Three basic rooms above the *pension de famille*, red tiling barely covered by thin carpets; in the sitting room, two chairs upholstered in sun-faded velvet; in their room a large, beautiful French bed where they slept so comfortably. How he loved all this!

He thought of the child they'd lay in the small pram on the narrow veranda. The wind off the sea would reach him, blowing above the roofs along the rue de France; and he'd hear the shouts:

"*Sardini, belli sardini!*" rising up in the morning from the nearby market. His lungs would draw in the bracing air; later he'd play in the sun. He had to remain and get the money out of this woman. Turn by turn, anxiously, angrily, hopefully, he looked at the walls, the furniture and the *générale's* face. He pursed his lips and believed he was impassive but his eyes, uneasy, expressive, desperate betrayed him.

"Marthe Alexandrovna, will you ruin me? Four thousand *francs*, you'll find four thousand *francs* for me. Wait for the quarter's rent I owe. Don't turn me out. Wait a year. In a year what



can't I achieve? With four thousand *francs*, I can dress decently. Right now, do you think I can get past the entrance to a first-class hotel? Who'll let me in? I ooze poverty . . . Page boys in Nice, Cannes and Cimiez have promised to have me called if a doctor was needed. Just look at these shoes that let the water in, look at this jacket," he said, pointing to the material shining in the sun. "I'm talking to you in your own interest, Marthe Alexandrovna. You're a woman, can't you recognize someone who's enterprising, strong-willed and courageous? Four thousand francs, Marthe Alexandrovna, three thousand francs for God's sake!"

She shook her head.

"No."

She repeated in a lower voice: "No" but Dario was listening less to her words than to the tone of her voice. The words meant nothing, only the tone mattered. . .

Had she murmured 'no' impatiently? Had she cried it out angrily? If her refusal was really final, without appeal she'd cry out furiously and quickly get rid of him. This 'no', this gentler tone, these tears and yet, the hard look in her blue-green eyes growing still harder, insistent and sharp, that meant it would be a question of bargaining, and bargaining was nothing to be afraid of. As long as it was only a matter of dealing, talking or buying and selling, nothing was lost.

"Marthe Alexandrovna," he said, "isn't there anything I can do for you? You know I'm discreet and trustworthy. Think about it. You look disturbed, Marthe Alexandrovna. Have confidence in me . . ."

"Doctor," she began.

She stopped speaking. Through the thin flooring boards there came the sounds of the *pension de famille*.<sup>14</sup> There lived, quarrelled, wept or laughed the immigrants eating into the last of their money, hating or loving one another. You heard voices, the quick, urgent footsteps of young girls and the weary, aimless tread of the elderly within the pension's depressing walls. What scheming among them! What dramas there must be! The *générale* was ignorant of nothing, certainly . . . She needed him. He wouldn't shy away from anything in the world. He felt the internal panic which invades the consciousness like a rogue wave. Above everything, live! Perish the scruples, the cowardly fears! Above all conserve energy, nourishment, existence, wife, the beloved child!

Madame Mouravine sighed heavily.

"Come closer, doctor . . . Doctor, do you know my son's wife, Elinor, that American he married? Doctor, a desperate mother's talking to you . . . they're children. They've done something stupid, mad . . ."

She crumpled her handkerchief in her hands and wiped her forehead and lips. The sun, on the verge of setting, shone an instant above the roofs and penetrated the room. It was one of the first days of a stormy spring. The *générale* was very hot, gasping a little and appeared more human filled with anger and fear.

"My son's a child, doctor . . . Her, I believe she's a very experienced woman. But that's the fact of the matter. They haven't said anything to me until now. Doctor, we can't allow ourselves to have another hungry mouth to feed . . . I'm sinking under the weight of all those

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<sup>14</sup> Nous avons fait remarquer, dans notre chapitre sur le style de Némirovsky, la fréquence des inversions et notre volonté de les conserver. Dans ce paragraphe il y en a trois.

clinging to me and expecting me to feed them . . . Another child, doctor? Doctor, it's impossible.

...”

## Chapter 2

At the Hospital Sainte-Marie Dario's wife, Clara, her child near her, was lying in bed in a small, clean room the window half-open, a warm blanket over her legs.

When the nurse asked if she was all right, Clara's eyes turned to her in gratitude; she smiled as she looked at the nun's cornet and answered with shy pride:

"How could I feel bad? Don't I have all I need?"

It was night and the doors were being closed. She hadn't seen Dario since the previous evening but was still hoping he'd come; the nuns knew he was a doctor and let him in outside official visiting hours.

She was disappointed that Dario hadn't let her be admitted to the public ward. She'd never had women friends, never been close to another woman. She was unrefined, fearful . . . In these foreign towns everything astonished her. She'd learnt to speak French with difficulty. Now she could speak the language but with a bad accent. She'd got used to being isolated. When Dario was with her she didn't need anyone else. Here, her child ought to have been enough but occasionally she felt the need for a woman's company. She heard women laughing in the common room . . . It would be enjoyable comparing her child with others. No other child could be as beautiful as hers, her son, her Daniel, nor able to suckle as quickly and as strongly, nor have a body so well-formed, and with such supple little legs and such perfect hands. But Dario wanted her to have a private room, comfort, calm and luxury. Dear Dario, how he spoiled her! . . . But did he think he could deceive her? Couldn't she guess his life was difficult? Didn't she know how

to recognize the weariness in his jerky movements, in his voice, in the rapid gestures of his trembling hands?

The birth of the child filled her heart with peace. She didn't know why; she no longer felt disturbed. She was too grateful to God to keep feeling anxious. She would lean slightly out of the bed occasionally and draw—closer, ever closer—the cradle—holding it against her. She couldn't see her child; she could hear him breathing. She'd gently turn her aching body on its side. She forgot the cradle and crossed her arms over her breasts where the milk, rising, at this time in a tide, beat with a rapid pulsation like that of fever. She was so slight that her hips, breasts and thin knees scarcely raised the sheet. Her face was both too young and too old for her age; she was more than thirty. Certain features—the forehead, small and rounded, without wrinkles, the eyelids unblemished, the smile with its white teeth, regular, magnificent, her only beauty, were those of a pretty young girl or an adolescent, but some sparse locks in her curly hair, badly arranged, were greying; the brown eyes were sad, they had shed tears, kept vigil, seen death on loved ones' faces, waited in hope and looked on with courage; her mouth at rest was weary, innocent and sorrowful.

After the last visitors had gone, the small trolleys carrying light meals, rolled from door to door. The mothers feeding their child were getting ready for the evening feed. The wakened children were crying. The nun came into Clara's room, helped her to sit up in the bed and placed the baby in her arms. She was a strong woman. Her face was heavy, chubby and pink.

For a moment, both looked in silence at the child whose soft, warm head was moving from side to side, crying a little, searching for the breast but soon he settled down and they heard

the gurgle produced by a satisfied baby, content, who's sucking milk and going off to sleep. They began to talk in a hushed voice:

"Hasn't your husband been to see you to-day?" the nun asked in the sing-song Nice accent.

"No," Clara said somewhat sadly.

She knew he hadn't forgotten her. Perhaps he hadn't had money for the tram fare? The hospital was quite far from the town centre.

"A good husband," said the sister stretching her arms out towards the sleeping child.

She wanted to take him and weigh him but his eyes opened immediately and he moved his hands. Clara held him close.

"Leave it. Leave him. He's still hungry."

"A good husband and a good father," said the nun. "Did they have everything they needed? Was there anything they wanted?" These were the questions Dario asks me every day. "Oh, he loves you . . . Enough now!" she said, taking the baby from Clara's embrace.

Clara let him go but only after an instinctive movement to keep him with her which made the sister laugh.

"You're feeding him too much. You'll make your child sick."

"Oh! no *madame*," Clara said—she used '*madame*' because she couldn't accustom herself to address as 'sister' the nun who was looking after her, "but I'm happy to give the baby as much as he wants. My first baby died because I didn't have enough milk to feed him or money to buy milk."

The nun gave a slight shrug with an expression of cordiality, compassion and scorn which meant: "You're not the only one, come on, poor little thing! I've seen poverty . . ." At the nun's

gesture and look, darting from under the cornet, Clara felt bitterness and a certain shame, inseparable from misfortune, desert her. She had never spoken to anyone about her first child. She said quietly and quickly:

“Before the war my husband left me alone in Paris. He set out for the French colonies. He hoped to work there. Neither travelling nor separation frightened either of us; we’re both outsiders. He told me, ‘Clara, I’m going. We’ll die of hunger here. I haven’t got enough money for your fare. You’ll come later.’ The ship had hardly left when I became ill and I found out I was going to have a child. I had no money. I had lost the small job which allowed me to live. Later on, people said: ‘You should have applied here and here.’ But I knew nothing. I didn’t know anyone. The child died, almost from hunger,” she said, lowering her eyes.

She was feverishly plaiting her shawl’s woollen fringe.

“It’s all right. It’s all right. This one’s going to live,” the nun said.

“He is beautiful isn’t he?”

“He surely is.”

The nun put her hand under Clara’s blanket.

“Your feet are frozen, dear. I’ll get you a warmer. Cover yourself up well. The bad days are over. Your husband’s back and he’ll take good care of you.”

“Oh! But,” Clara replied smiling weakly. “I’m not a little goose any longer, I’m old. I’ve been in France for fifteen years. I will not be afraid any more. At that time, I was lost. I was . . .”

She suddenly stopped speaking. What was the good of talking about it? Who could really understand her? The nun must have cared for a good number of unfortunate girls who had left their village dying of hunger on the streets of Nice but Clara couldn’t stop herself believing that

for her things had been worse. She had come from so far away and every stone seemed to push her away, every door and every house seemed to say: “Go away. Go back to your own kind, outsider. We’ve got our own misfortunes to deal with.”

The nun slid the warmer under her feet, smiled at her and left.

“I’m off to get you some dinner,” she said standing at the door. “Here’s your husband, sweetie!”

Clara raised her arms off the bed.

“Dario, at last!”

She grasped his hand and pressed it to her cheek and lips. “I didn’t think I’d see you this evening. Why did you come? It’s so late. You’re so tired,” she said.

Although he hadn’t said anything, she knew he was harassed. Dario was sitting on the bed. She wrapped her arms around him, hugged him with all her strength and rested her head on his chest.

“Are you well? What about the child? Has anything happened? Anything bad?” he asked.

“No. Nothing. Why?” They were speaking in French, Greek and Russian, mixing the three languages. She stroked his fingers.

“Why, darling?”

He didn’t answer her.

“Your hands are trembling,” she said.

She didn’t question him any further. She held Dario’s hands in her own and gradually their trembling stopped.



He repeated anxiously:

“Are you comfortable?”

“I’m as happy as a queen. I’ve got everything anyone could want, but . . .”

“But?”

“I’d like to be home, to be back with you as soon as possible.”

She regarded the face, weary and frantic of her husband, his crumpled clothing, the necktie badly knotted, the jacket which hadn’t been brushed and where there were buttons missing.

“Is what you told me really true, Dario? You really do have lots of patients and don’t need anything.”

“It’s true,” he answered.

The nun came back carrying the tray.

“Eat,” she said. “Look at this delicious soup. Eat it quickly or it’ll get cold.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“You’ve got to eat to make good milk.”

Clara swallowed a few spoonfuls which Dario fed her, laughing as he did so. Her appetite picked up and she finished the light meal.

“And you. Have you eaten?” the nun asked.

“Yes.”

“Before coming here?”

“Yes.”

“Is that why you’re late?”

“Yes. Now are you convinced?”

The nun smiled. Dario picked from the tray a piece of bread she had not eaten,<sup>15</sup> hid it in his hand.

So as not to tire Clara, someone had pinned a piece of blue paper around the light. The room was in half-darkness, but she saw that secretly he was greedily eating the piece of bread.

“Are you still hungry, Dario.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Dario, you haven’t eaten! . . .”

“What put that idea in your head?” he asked in a soothing tone, “be calm, Clara. Don’t get yourself upset. All anxiety is bad for the child.”

Holding his breath, he leaned over the child.

“Clara, he’s going to be fair!” he exclaimed.

“No, it’s impossible. We’re both so dark. But our parents? . . .”

They both made an effort to remember. Dario, very early, had been an orphan. Clara had run away from the family home at fifteen to follow this vagabond she loved. From the depths of the past, as you see silhouettes scarcely distinct, at the end of a long road, when comes the night, there suddenly appeared pale faces,<sup>16</sup> half obscured; a woman, old before her time, her head covered in a large, black shawl reaching down to her eyebrows; another woman, another ceaselessly drunk, with open mouth shouting curses and insults at a delicate and terrified child; Clara’s father, with his lined forehead, his long, grey beard falling on to his chest; Dario’s father,

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<sup>15</sup> C’est ici un exemple de l’asyndète syntaxique qui apparaît assez souvent dans l’œuvre de Némirovsky pour la considérer comme une caractéristique de son style.

<sup>16</sup> De temps en temps nous avons choisi d’employer un postiche pour éviter la gaucherie d’une inversion en anglais. En l’occurrence nous avons employé « **there** » avec le verbe « **surged** ».

the Greek, the miserable travelling salesman. Dario remembered his father best: he, himself, was his father's living image.

“Our parents were dark like us.”

“Our grand-parents?” Clara asked.

“Ah! Them . . .”

They were unknown. They had remained in their birth-place; in Greece, Italy and Asia Minor while their children had left and swarmed far off. For the generations born of them, it was as if they had never lived. Perhaps, one of them, among these long-gone Levantines, had had, in his cradle, this fuzz of blond hair and this light skin. Perhaps! . . .”

“Clara! How can you know your grand-parents? You're taking yourself for a French bourgeois.”

They smiled. They understood each other. They were one not only in the flesh, in mind and in their love but born in the same Crimean port, speaking the same language, they also saw themselves as brother and sister; they had drunk at the same source; they had shared life's bitter bread.

“The Mother Superior came to see me when the child was born. She asked if the family was happy. Dario, in the neighbouring rooms at visiting hours I hear grand-parents and aunts exclaiming, ‘He'll look like his grandfather, his cousin John or your uncle dead in 1914.’ I've never heard anything like that until now. They bring small packets done up in ribbon in their hands. The nun said they're bibs, little dresses, rattles, jackets . . . and those jackets you sew out of old sheets . . .” she said in a low voice.

She was tired. She spoke quietly, stopped and breathed with difficulty. She couldn't find the words to express her astonishment and wonder when she imagined these families leaning around a cradle, these sheets worn out by the contact of bodies, night after night, for a whole lifetime, these sheets from which you make jackets, nappies for a new-born child.

"I told the nun who's looking after me: 'We don't have any family. No-one cares about us. No-one will rejoice at the birth of this child. No-one cried at the death of the other one.' She listened but didn't really understand."

"How could you expect her to understand?" Dario asked, shrugging his shoulders.

Dario was concerned at Clara's weariness and anxiety. He wanted her to be quiet. But, as they were talking, she drifted off to sleep with her forehead resting on his arm. The nun entered and quietly closed the shutters and window. At Sainte-Marie there was a general fear of the night air.

Clara's suddenly opened her eyes and she stammered in an anguished tone:

"Dario, are you here? Is it you, really you? Will the child live? Will he be well looked after? He won't need anything? He'll live, won't he?"

She repeated: "Will he live?" and was fully awake. She smiled.

"Dario, darling, forgive me. I'm dreaming. Go. It's late. Till tomorrow. I love you."

He bent over, kissed her. The nun, scolding him good-naturedly, pushed him to the door. It was after eight o'clock. People were lighting, in the corridors, the small blue night lights which replaced the day lights and, from place to place, under the numbered rooms where lay the surgical patients, the very ill, a nun was placing signs which read: "Silence."

Outside, it was a beautiful spring night, and Dario drew in the aroma familiar since childhood, ubiquitous from the Crimea to the Mediterranean: jasmine, pepper and the sea-wind.

### Chapter 3

The *générale* had promised the money for the next day. This evening Dario still had nothing. He walked from the clinic to his home. In front of his door, he saw a woman trying to make out the house number, poorly lit by the gas lamp. She was bare-headed; she was wearing a shawl on her shoulders. She was breathing quickly; she seemed impatient and anxious. When she saw Dario, she asked:

“Does a doctor really live here?”

“Yes. It’s me,” Dario answered.

“Can you come straight away, doctor? It’s about my employer. It’s very urgent.”

“Certainly. I’ll follow you,” Dario replied, hope filling his heart.

They took a few steps along the deserted street. As he walked Dario adjusted his tie, ran his hand through his thick hair and felt with some concern his poorly shaven cheeks.

The woman stopped suddenly; she hesitated, came up to Dario and looked at him closely.

“Are you really Doctor Levillant?”

“No,” he said slowly, I am a doctor just the same but . . .”

She broke in.

“You’re not Doctor Levillant.”

“He lives further down at number 30 in the same street; if you don’t find him,” Dario said grasping the woman’s sleeve as she started off, “I’ll be home all night. My apartment’s on the first floor of the *pension de famille* called Mimosa’s House. I’m Doctor Asfar.”

But the woman had already gone. She had run across the street. She was ringing at a door that was not Dario's. Dario went back home.

If his name was Levillant, Massard or Durand, what a dream! Who could have confidence in him, Dario Asfar, with his wog's face and his wog accent? This doctor Levillant, a neighbour, he knew. How he envied his grey beard, his good-natured and calm air, his small car and attractive house.

He slowly climbed the stairs shared by the *pension de famille* and his dwelling. His thoughts turned to Clara and his child, his happiness, his only loves. He had a son, he, Dario! He sought in his heart what chance, what god to implore, whom to ask to protect his son. But he didn't feel the pride natural for a father. He was anxious and overwhelmed. Ceaselessly, in a movement familiar to him, he was continually stroking his face. He wouldn't want to transmit to his son his tortured features, this dark skin nor this soul.

He went in. He didn't feel at ease. He didn't feel at home in this house. Nowhere yet had he felt at home. He turned on the light and sat down. He was hungry. Since morning he'd been pursued by hunger. The small piece of bread he'd eaten at the clinic, far from appeasing it had increased his desire for food. He opened the cupboard, the table drawers knowing perfectly well he wouldn't find meat, bread, money.

Again and again he paced before a small wall mirror, ashamed of the sidelong reflections cast by the mirror, of his pallor, of the bitter and desperate fold of his lips, of his thin trembling hands.

"One night is quickly passed," he said in a low voice, reassuring himself, forcing himself to make fun of himself. "Is this the first time you've been hungry, Dario? Remember the past."

But the memories added to the present an echo and a prolongation of distress almost unbearable.

“How spoilt I am,” he thought scornfully. “I know I’ll eat to-morrow. Why doesn’t that satisfy me? In the past . . .”

But in the old days he knew he was only a wretched, little prowler able to beg, able to steal (he thought of the the wagon loaded with watermelons he’d overturned with other children of the port and how he had run off, pressing under his shirt, against the bare skin, the watermelon smooth and fresh . . . ). He still felt in his mouth the taste of this pink flesh and between his teeth the crackle of the black pips, the forays into the markets and the raids on the gardens . . . He smiled and groaned loudly.

Now he could no longer ask for the cost of a meal, nor borrow a few *sous* to buy a piece of bread. He was prouder, more demanding and more cowardly. Above all, he must save face, maintain the look of well-being, of a comfortable situation whatever the sacrifice or whatever the lie. (So, since his wife had been in hospital, tired occasionally of hoping vainly for patients behind his closed door, he’d set out for a walk in the country, his instrument case under his arm to throw people off the scent.)<sup>17</sup>

During these last days, so difficult, he hadn’t even dared to get money, as he used to do when a student in Paris, by selling such and such an article. He could’ve done so. He did have a few books but it seemed that all the inhabitants of Nice would recognize him. It was a country town; the housewives gossiped among themselves, the concierges lay in ambush, from morning

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<sup>17</sup> Le texte français se lit ici « pour donner le change ». Nous avons fait remarquer notre désir de conserver les idiotismes dans la mesure du possible. Il est impossible de traduire cet idiotisme mot-à-mot et nous avons choisi de le remplacer par l’équivalent anglais.



onwards on their door-steps. The local, small shop-keepers followed him with their eyes when he left his house. He even got to the stage of fearing the coachmen's probing and mocking glances, who pretended to sleep in the sun, with a flower in their mouth, waiting for clients, whilst their horses, beside them, twitched their long ears decked with straw. Yes, for sure, everyone here had their eyes on him and would expose him. You weren't lost here, miserably alone as in Paris. Everyone hated, he thought, this poorly dressed man with a foreign accent, this unfortunate, impoverished character. What would it be like if they saw him striding along the town streets, under his arm a bundle of books he was off to sell.

"No. It's impossible," he thought.

The night was calm and somewhat oppressive. He took his coat off, tore off his collar and picked up an evening paper but the print danced before his eyes. His hunger was increasing, hollowing out within him that path in a man's body which reaches to the very interior of his being where sweeps along a flood of thoughts, hateful, desperate, vile. He pictured Madame Mouravine and Elinor in his mind and not only did he feel no remorse but a hard and cynical satisfaction. Perhaps Madame Mouravine had been right. Why should you feel delighted in having brought a child into the world? Would he, Dario, be capable alone of nourishing this child he was so proud of?

On the other side of the street there was a small restaurant. Through its window Dario saw a lighted room, some tables covered in long, white tablecloths. From time to time one of the waiters came to the window and collected prepared dishes, displayed behind glass counters to entice passers-by. Golden loaves, peaches in a basket, a cold lobster bristling with spikes, a round bottle of Italian wine enclosed in plaited straw. A man came strolling along, a woman on his arm,

stopped and with his walking stick pointed to the restaurant's sign. They entered. "They're going to enjoy a good meal," Dario thought.

Dario stood up and pressed his face against the window but it formed a barrier between him and the sight of the food. He opened the window; he leaned forward. He sought to inhale the smell which must be coming from the shining basement window, a delicious odour, certainly of warm soup, of expensive butter, vegetables slowly cooking and browning in a frying-pan and meat as well. But the restaurant was too far away. What he breathed was the scent of crushed flowers rising up to his head and making him feel sick. On a seat, below him, in the darkness a man and woman were kissing. Hunger was mingling in Dario's body with other desires. He craved meat, wine, bread and the woman, those tender fruits on their moss bed, those bare breasts which he guessed were the flash of white surging suddenly from the darkness. But the lovers rose and left; they held each other around the waist as they walked and stumbled as if drunk. Dario cursed in a low voice. Why did others find the taste of life delicate and delicious? For him it was a food that was raw and basic to be sought with difficulty, to be torn away with effort. With a bite, when it was impossible to do otherwise. Why?

## Chapter 4

Clara was due to come home the next day. With the *générale's* four thousand *francs*, Dario had paid his pressing debts, both those which had plagued him since his Paris days and those incurred yesterday in Nice. Now he held his head high. He no longer walked along, head down, hugging the walls, neither at the baker's entrance nor before the delicatessen proprietor enthroned amidst strings of *cervelas* in a shop decorated with mirrors. Lastly, he had bought a carriage for the child, a cradle, and an overcoat for Clara whose only clothes were those she was wearing when she had gone to hospital. Dario had had something to eat and drink. For himself, he had ordered a new suit and paid a deposit and he still had a thousand *francs* left he had placed in a bank.

Finally, his luck having turned, he had received a call the previous evening from a family of young, French civil servants who had arrived in Nice only twenty-four hours before and whose child had suddenly become ill during the night amidst the unpacked luggage and the straw packing of the removal strewn across the floors.

They had welcomed Dario as a saviour. They had listened to him in gratitude, with affection, with respect. Among them, how good he had felt! How gently he had spoken to them! How happy he had been to be able to reassure them, to flatter the mother. (It's nothing, it's only spasmodic croup. Tomorrow it will be gone. What a good-looking little chap! what a strong little fellow! Sleep easy, *madame*. Be assured, *monsieur*. It was only a small matter! It's nothing!)

They had thanked him, accompanied him to the door and turned the stair light on. They had congratulated each other a thousand times on this stroke of good fortune, on the luck they

had had in finding in this way, in their panic and in an unfamiliar town, a doctor so expert, dedicated and polite. Dario had thought:

“So is it really true the bad times have gone? They appear unforgettable and off they go so quickly! Why did I despair? Why did I act badly?”

Happiness made him virtuous. Elinor had stayed in bed for forty-eight hours and was now wonderfully well. She was a tough American. She was no novice, for sure . . .

Dario had dined and was sleeping. This night was the end of the carnival. Amidst the clamour of the crowd outside his windows and the din of the fireworks displays, he didn't at first hear the knocking on his door. The shouts at last reached him. He opened the door and saw on his doorstep the *générale*, her hair in disorder, breathless and wearing a scarlet, silk shawl over a long, stiff dress, in the old style, which fell to the ground.

“Come quickly! Come quickly! Doctor! In the name of God, my son's killed himself!”

He quickly dressed and went down behind her. In the *pension's* lounge-room, the *générale's* son, a tall, thin young man, stooped, badly shaven who had the haughty and stupid expression of a greyhound, had cut his wrists with a pen-knife, was losing blood and lay stretched out on a settee of grey twill. The young man was Elinor's husband and she was the only family member not present in the room. All the occupants of the *pension de famille*, woken up, were gathered in a circle around the settee. Blood-soaked napkins lay on the floor; basins full of water were sitting on the furniture. The settee, converted into a bed at night, had been dragged to the middle of the room, its sheets, soaked in blood, were torn off and thrown into a corner. The penknife the man had used, still open, was lying on the ground as well and at any moment someone would walk on the blade and with a yelp of pain would kick it well away; the onlookers

were so interested in the drama that was being played out before their eyes that no-one thought of picking it up. With real Russian extravagance, they had turned on the light not only in the room which was lit by a grand, antique, three-tiered chandelier covered in dust but on tables and even in the adjacent rooms, wherever there was a lamp. The windows were shut; people were suffocating. Women, half-clothed, surrounded Dario. One of them, a tall, thin woman with sunken eyes, in a night-dress, a gauze veil floating on her long hair, a lighted cigarette in her mouth and bare-footed, was repeating in a commanding voice, while pulling Dario's sleeve:

<sup>18</sup>“We’ve got to get him into his room.”

“No, princess, you well know it’s out of the question,” another woman cried out. “He doesn’t have a room. His room is rented to the the *baronne* who’s sleeping with a Frenchman!”

“We’ve got to get them up.”

“A Frenchman? He won’t get up. Could a Frenchman understand?”

The *générale*, supported by her mother-in-law, an old woman in a loose blouse of black wool, with grey hair, and a sagging, trembling jaw, had gripped the divan’s woodwork with both hands and refused to let go. Her husband was sitting in a corner, on a chair, pressing his bulldog against his chest. The *général* was a little old man, thin and pale, his chin decorated with a small goatee. He was noiselessly crying, pressed tight against the dog that was making long, mournful howls.

“That’s a death howl!” shouted the *générale*. “My son’s dying! He’s going to die!”

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<sup>18</sup> Nous avons fait remarquer, dans notre chapitre sur le style de Némirovsky, la fréquence des descriptions où les yeux de Némirovsky parcourent une scène ou un visage sans aucune séquence rationnelle. Nous avons ici un bon exemple où le sujet, « One of them » est séparé de son verbe, « was repeating », par l’intercalation d’une suite de syntagmes adjectivaux.

“Move away!” Dario said but no-one was listening.

“Marthe Alexandrona, calm down. For the love of Christ control yourself!” a woman cried out in a voice quivering with hysteria. “You must keep calm!”

“Where’s his wife? Where’s Elinor?” Dario asked.

“She’s killed him!” The *générale* cried out. “It’s that little good-for-nothing’s fault, that low class whore, that American woman he picked up in the gutter. She went off this morning and deserted him. He wanted to kill himself for her!”<sup>19</sup>

“What a sin! What shame!” sobbed the old lady in the black blouse. “Mitenka my darling, grandmother’s darling! He’s going to die! I’ve seen my husband and two sons die from Bolshevik bullets, Mitenka, my only love in this world.”

“I used to tell him: Don’t marry her . . .” the *générale* moaned, her contralto drowning out the tumult. “Mouravines don’t marry Chicago streetwalkers. As if I didn’t know where she came from. She slept with everyone in the town before he took her on. An American as hard-hearted as a rock. How could she possibly understand a soul like his? Mitenka! Mitenka!”

Mitenka, however, thanks to Dario’s care had opened his eyes. The two women, on their knees in front of him, were covering his hands in kisses. Dario threw open both windows; the air in this enclosed room was unbreathable.

“Shut the window!” the grandmother shouted. “He’s naked. He’ll catch cold!”

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<sup>19</sup> Nous avons souvent été tenté de souligner en italique un adverbe pour décrire le ton dont un personnage parle parce que, pour la plupart, Némirovsky emploie les points de suspension pour suggérer le ton émotionnel, laissant au lecteur la liberté de l’interprétation. Ici, par exemple, de toute évidence, la *générale* débite « her » avec beaucoup de mépris. Par fidélité au texte nous avons rejeté l’italique pour « her » ici, et, le cas échéant, partout dans notre traduction. Dans *Le maître des âmes*, surtout, Némirovsky, emploie, presque à l’excès, les points de suspension.

The younger women who had occupied the stage till now, entering and leaving the room, bumping each other, panic-stricken at the doors, spilling the water from the bowls they carried, were reassuring her.

“No, Anna Efimova! He needs air. Fresh air is necessary! Fresh air isn’t dangerous!”

“So cover him up! Cover him up! See he’s fainting again! He’s trembling! Shut the windows! Shut the windows!”

“Don’t do that! Open them! Open them wider!” the women shouted

Dario, weary of saying, “Move away. Leave him alone!” grasped the *générale*’s wrists and pushed her into an armchair.

“She’s fainted!” the women exclaimed. “Water! Water!”

The *général* finally lifted his head which he had hidden in his bulldog’s coat.

“Doctor! Save him, doctor!”

“Don’t worry, *général*, his injury is only slight.”

“Doctor! Save him!”, the *générale* shouted and, breaking free of the arms restraining her, she again flung herself at the foot of the settee and, grasping Dario’s hand, smothered it in kisses. “In the name of your wife! In the name of your new-born child! If I live a hundred years, I’ll never forget! He’s my son!”

“But it’s nothing. His injuries are minor, leave him alone and in twenty-four hours there’ll be no trace of them,” Dario advised.

“Mother!” the patient murmured.

And then burst into tears.

“Elinor!”

“My child! Mitenka, my darling!” the grandmother cried out and tears, the little, rare tears of old age appeared in the corners of her eyes and flowed down her cheeks. “Bless you, doctor. You’ve brought him back to life.”

“Is he saved? Swear to me, doctor. Is my child saved?”

The *générale* suddenly flung herself at her son, gripped his shoulders, shook him, her eyes sparkling in fury.

“Miserable, little imbecile! So you didn’t think of your mother? Of your father? Of your poor grandmother? Killing yourself for a slut! Killing yourself for a streetwalker, for a cursed American!”

The women bustled about again.

“Marthe Alexandrovna! Stay calm! You’re killing yourself. And him! Look at him! he’s turning white . . . Doctor, doctor, a sedative for the *générale*!”

“Mother, I can’t bear your reproaches,” Mitenka sobbed, but I want Elinor,”

“She’ll be back, my darling, she’ll be back,” said his grandmother.

“Be a man, my son,” the *général* murmured, clenching so hard, in his emotion, the dog’s head, that it let out a heart-rending yelp.

“If she comes back,” the *générale* shouted, “I’ll chase her away. I’ll strangle her with my own hands! I’ll throw her back in the gutter where she came from! A whore I treated like my own daughter! Everything I did for her! I saw a lot of things. I shut my eyes . . . for Mitenka! I did the cooking, me, *générale* Mouravine, I put out the garbage bin, I made this cursed American’s



bed.<sup>20</sup> I paid four thousand *francs* to . . . but that money I want back! You're going to give it back to me!" she said, suddenly, turning furiously towards Dario. "Tomorrow! No later than tomorrow! I want the money I spent on this girl!"

Fortunately she immediately collapsed, unconscious, at the feet of the injured Mitenka who had again fainted.

Dario made the most out of the situation to at last get the women to leave.

Now that he was alone, he carried the *générale* into the neighbouring room and threw a basinful of water in her face. The *générale* came to.

"Doctor! I won't accept my daughter-in-law's debts," she said, as soon as she opened her eyes. Please settle immediately what you owe me."

"Are you mad?" Dario cried out in turn. "Is it my fault if she's run off?"

"No, it's not your fault but it will not be said she killed my son and got four thousand *francs* out of me! Do you know what it means to us, four thousand *francs*? To get them for you, I had to sell a friend's engagement ring and her holy icons she'd left with me as guarantee for a loan. She was crying, she was kissing my hands, she was begging me to wait a week. I reduced to despair a childhood friend for that woman. And the child wasn't even Mitenka's, no doubt!"

"That's what she seems most sensitive about," Dario thought, barely stifling a nervous laugh. "The child she killed wasn't Mitenka's!"

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<sup>20</sup> Encore un exemple de l'asyndète syntaxique.

“Me, I haven’t got any money either! Give me time to earn it. Where do you want me to find the money? I’ve paid my old debts. I’ve got a thousand *francs* left and my wife and baby are coming home from the clinic to-morrow! Besides, the money is mine! I earned it!”

She sniggered.

“Are you going to say how?”

“And you?”

“So it’s blackmail?” she exclaimed furiously.

“I understand only one thing: no-one pays me. Everyone in this house is sponging on me. My husband, the poor wretch, can’t earn the food he eats and my son’s hardly better! I work for them without a moment’s respite. Me, *générale* Mouravine, me an *artiste*! This money, my heart bled to give it to you! But I had to do it! For Mitenka! And now that woman’s run off and I’ve got to keep on living, knowing that you and you wife are pampering yourselves at my expense. Listen hard, doctor; we’ll keep secret, each of us, this family story but if I’m not paid by tomorrow you can get out and go elsewhere. But since you owe three months’ rent, I keep everything you own. I’ll keep your bags and the whole town will know, to your shame, you’ve been thrown out of my house!”

Dario saw in a flash his reputation ruined, his future lost. He expressed not one cry of revolt. His life had not prepared him for rebellion but for perseverance, for patience, for effort ceaselessly disappointed, ceaselessly renewed, for manifest resignation which increases and concentrates the mind’s strength. He said:

“That’s enough, Marthe Alexandrovna, you’ll have your money to-morrow.”



## Chapter 5

Dario knew that the *générale*, like every woman used to ruling like a despot over a terrified family, would never stop to consider whether a thing was logical and possible, but would demand her due with mule-like stubbornness and would succeed in obtaining it. He had to get the money this very day.

Since the early hours of the morning, he'd been out of his bed where he'd tossed and turned all the rest of the night without sleeping. He had to go out as soon as possible; the whole day would perhaps be spent in approaching people. The longer the day, the greater were his chances! But, in reality, at the very moment he was leaving his home, he still didn't know who he could turn to. His mind seemed suddenly to have become surprisingly powerful and nimble. It leapt out in all possible directions, mentally seeking a way out, exploring in an instant all the paths, like a beast pursued by a hunter.

He thought of the young public servants' child he had cared for. No, that was impossible. "And if they let themselves be moved," Dario thought, "one day they'll gossip. Who'll believe in me, after that? Who'll call me? Who'll trust me with their life?" The same words formed over and over again in his mind: "Not a *sou*, a wife recovering from child-birth, a new-born baby and money to find before midday if tomorrow and the days following on I want to live. Who'll help me? Who?"

He then thought of Ange Martinelli, whose son he was treating. Ange was the headwaiter at the new luxury hotel built near the casino. His own home was in Nice, behind the church of *Sainte-Réparate* and there his son lived. This young twenty-year old was ill and Dario had been

called in by the father, in desperation, just as people resort to a faith healer, a sorcerer when they feel totally abandoned. It was Dario's only hope because Ange was rich.

It was too early to call on him. He stopped under the arcades. The smell of crystallized fruit coming from a basement window, in Vogade's, caused his heart to jump. Would the day come when he'd be dying of hunger again, when he would breathe in the odour of food like a ravenous animal?

The road was bordered by shops with doors inset with mirrors and each showed his reflection—his anxious and gloomy face, his pointed ears, his long teeth. He hated himself for looking like all those vendors of carpets, glasses and dirty postcards already hanging about from *Masséna* square to the *esplanade des Anglais*. This life of uncertainty, of expedients, certainly was his lot destined from childhood, as for them, this Levantine rabble, his brothers. So was there nothing which made him different? How much he resembled them in his facial features, his accent, his thin back, his glinting wolf's eyes.

At last he arrived at Marinelli's. In the dreary old house in the shadow of *Sainte-Réparate* Martinelli occupied a very modest apartment.

"He's a top chef," Dario thought bitterly. "He's rich but this is how he'll always live. A pine dresser, cheap wine, *friture du Var* in a chipped salad server. But as for me . . . I've got to bluff, I can't show my poverty,<sup>21</sup> I need furniture, decent clothes, a facade, an appearance. A headwaiter can allow himself to be straight-forward."

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<sup>21</sup> . Nous avons là encore un exemple de l'asyndète syntaxique.

He rang. On a landing shared by two apartments, a bare-legged girl was directing the water flowing from an ornamental fountain over a bright red fish she held in her hand. Dario cast a sharp, excited look in her direction. His desire for women invaded him quickly at times, at the hardest moments of his life, as if all the dregs, at the bottom of his soul, rose up then to the surface.

Martinelli opened the door for him.

“It’s you, doctor. Come in.”

“How did the night go?” Dario asked.

“Still the same. He was feverish. He was disturbed. This morning it’s dropped to thirty-seven.”

“He’s not spitting any blood?”

“No.”

Martinelli was in shirt sleeves. He was a fine stamp of man, face huge and ruddy, very black hair, eyes extremely alert; a rapid look slid from under the half-closed eyelids, a look attentive and bold, in a flash, common to all chefs, whether serving the highest army ranks or in the kitchens, which must see everything, weigh up everything, forget nothing. He seemed to read Dario’s thoughts on his face. He asked:

“Did you have to come to see him to-day, doctor?”

“I thought that it was preferable,” he answered.

Martinelli took him into the dining room.

“He’s asleep now. Can you imagine what my life’s like? I’m exhausted. The *Or et Argent* yesterday. The *Perles*’ gala, to-night. I’m working like a slave and no-one supports me, and this little one . . .”

He pursed his lips tightly.

“This little fellow . . . Such a fine future! Head cook when he wants it! He has the gift, the genius for cooking and so gentle, so affectionate . . . But I suppose he’s done for . . .”

He looked at Dario with an expression that was both angry and hopeful.

“At twenty, done for! That shouldn’t be allowed,” he exclaimed in a voice, muted and anguished. “You’ve got to save him, doctor! Try again, try anything,” he murmured.

You could hear the patient coughing.

“I’ll cure him,” Dario said, “I swear it. “You can see he’s doing better yourself. There’s a noticeable improvement. He’s young, he’s well cared for. Don’t give up hope.”

Dario spoke at such length and so convincingly that the head waiter gratefully acknowledged, “I’ll never be able to thank you enough for your good care.”

‘It’s the moment,’ Dario thought, his mouth dry.

He said in a low voice,

“I’ve come to beg for something too. Lend me some money, Martinelli, save me!”

No, that wasn’t what needed to be said. What was the good in begging for pity. Nothing for nothing! He knew. He’d lived long enough to have learnt this and never to forget it.

“I know money’s money. But can’t you back me? You bet on the races, I know. Think of me as a horse that could return double or triple for what you’ve risked on it. I’m healthy, young, have my degrees, my knowledge, my profession. I’m a good doctor. You know how well I’m

looking after your son. I'm not known here. I'm surrounded by Russian migrants who take up my time but don't pay up. I have some patients, nice people. They have confidence in me. They'll keep me but I can't ask them for money, not yet. A doctor asks for his fees twice a year and that's allowed, respected but to appear in a hurry, display your poverty. No way! That deeply offends people, this lack of propriety, this indecent impatience but I, however, have nothing, still nothing. This morning, I've got to settle this morning a debt for four thousand *francs*, but even that won't be enough . . . Listen, Martinelli! Bet on me, wager on me! Lend me ten thousand *francs*, but give me a breathing space for a year to pay you back and charge me all the interest you want! You tell yourself: "In a year, he'll be in the same situation", but that's impossible! I have strength, hope, courage.<sup>22</sup> It's not my fault that I've taken so long to succeed; I started from such a low base. Have confidence in me. A year. I'm only asking you for a year. What I can do for you? Think about it. I can be useful to you. Help me and if needs be you'll find me the most devoted . . . the most discreet of friends . . . Help me!"

Ange, nevertheless, listened without uttering a word. This impassive mask, impenetrable, of the man from whom you ask money or a service, and who'd let you die in front of him without making a move to save you, you had to get used to it and no longer be fearful of it! <sup>23</sup>He had to work out by what tricks, by what insistence you eventually manage to overcome these minds.

In begging the way he had, Dario had demeaned himself in vain. Salvation lay elsewhere. He managed to calm down. The expression on his face changed. He adopted a dignified air, of

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<sup>22</sup> Un exemple de l'asyndète lexicale,

<sup>23</sup> Nous avons fait remarquer dans notre chapitre sur le style de Némirovsky, la fréquence des phrases qu'elle emploie qui ressemblent à celle-ci, où pour obtenir l'effet de suspens elle situe le verbe principal à la fin d'une longue phrase, lequel est précédé par de nombreuses propositions subordonnées.



indifference. He finally found that expression alert but inexpressive which forms like a screen between doctor and patient.

“Let’s not discuss it any longer. If you don’t want to do me this service, I’ll be forced to leave Nice and listen hard, Martinelli, if there’s anyone in the world who can save your son it’s me. He was facing death. He’s improved and he’ll improve even more. His fever’s dropping. He’s putting on weight. He’ll be out of bed soon and you’ll see your son cured. But if I leave, if you let me leave, and if later on . . .”

“Shut up!” Martinelli said in a stifled tone. “You’ve got me thinking, but . . .”

“But, however, you, you’re<sup>24</sup>trembling,” Dario thought. Where nothing is biting, where nothing weakens him there still remains this thought—take him with hope but attacking an enemy where he isn’t vulnerable is pointless,” Dario thought. “I’ve got one trump left, his hope for his son’s recovery!”

“Good-bye, Martinelli.”

“Hang on, for God’s sake, you . . .”

From this moment, Dario felt a sense of peace; he’d get what he wanted. He would again feel linked to a future. In a year, his situation could be just as hard, but for now he had won. He’d have his ten thousand francs.

Martinelli made him sign a cheque for the 31st of March of the following year. In a year, if Dario hadn’t paid, he’d be prosecuted for writing a cheque which could not be met, but those

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<sup>24</sup> C’est la seule fois que Dario tutoie Martinelli. dans ce chapitre. Ceci souligne son mépris de Martinelli. Nous avons tâche de souligner le dédain de Dario par la répétition de « you ».

who've only lived from day to day ignore foresight, a virtue of the rich, of the fortunate. Dario signed.

## Chapter 6

It was the time, at the end of the night, when gambling comes to an end; in Philippe Wardes' view, the best time. During the last wagers in a game, winning and losing, by the very enormity of the amounts involved, no longer excite greed, despair or envy, virtually cease to exist. The body no longer feels hunger, or tiredness; the mind is freed of anxiety. Happiness is gained.

At the extreme limit of nervous resistance there forms a zone of calm where the gambler both wagers and dispassionately observes himself play, in deep peace. Wardes sensed this calm. He knew his massive head, fine and upright, sat straight on his shoulders, he wasn't craning his neck, his self-control was not lost, his hands, small and chubby, woman-like, were turning the cards over without trembling.<sup>25</sup>

By his audacity, courage and invulnerability, he reigned.<sup>26</sup> The pleasure in risk-taking, for a long time, had been lost, a vulgar pleasure, food for mediocre minds. For him, there were no

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<sup>25</sup> Au début du chapitre 6, Némirovsky commence à rendre un certain hommage à Wardes. Il y a un changement de registre qui devient plus élevé, plus analytique. L'auteur doue Wardes d'une certaine majesté nuancée. À la page 73, Némirovsky le décrit pendant qu'il joue au casino comme si un dieu l'habitait. Elle écrit : « ce demi-dieu qu'il avait hébergé en lui pendant des heures ». Ce thème de la puissance et de la majesté va de pair avec la description de Wardes à la page soixante-treize qu'on pourrait prendre pour celle d'un empereur romain. Cette image de Wardes est soutenue par les choix lexicaux qu'elle fait « noble », « bouche impérieuse » Le troisième paragraphe du chapitre 6 commence, « Par son audace, son courage, son invulnérabilité, il régnait ».

<sup>26</sup> Il est intéressant d'observer le registre de l'ouverture de ce chapitre. Comme le psychologue, Némirovsky examine de très près les émotions du joueur. Son père fut joueur invétéré.

risks. He knew he was going through a lucky streak. He knew he was going to win. In fact, each wager was successful. It was always like this when came the dawn: at the moment when disperses the rough crowd of gamblers without hope, without virtue, he who had scorned friends' advice, the cowardly appeals of prudence (what had they kept saying, his solicitor, his wife, his doctor? "You're ruining yourself. You're killing yourself!" All tosh! Let them have their say), he had finally reached his reward. Superhuman moment, when the creature measures his powers and feels nothing will destroy him, nothing will stop him. The cards obeyed him. His heart beat was as regular and calm as a child's. With the feeling of security that might sense a sleepwalker at a roof's edge, he continued the game and blind luck served him. Another hour, another moment! He no longer had a body, neither weight nor human warmth. He could have flown in the air. He could have stood on water. He guessed what the cards were in his hand, before seeing them, before holding them in his fingers. The only irritation was this relentless brightness, opposite him, that lamp, white and brutal that hurt his eyes. He made an impatient movement and, like the sleep-walker who in a terrified movement draws back from the edge of the abyss, Wardes recovered. He quickly saw around him that the last gamblers were throwing their cards away, the curtains were being drawn and the morning sun was entering through the windows opening onto the harbour.

That was it. The evening had been over for a long time. Unbalanced, dazzled, trembling,<sup>27</sup> his mind was reconstituting a weary, leaden body, bathed in sweat and dying of thirst

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<sup>27</sup> C'est un exemple ici de la fréquence chez Némirovsky de l'emploi de trois adjectifs après un substantif, effet que nous avons souligné dans notre chapitre sur le style. En règle générale, le trio occupe une position postérieure. Lorsque Némirovsky situe le trio antérieurement l'effet est d'attirer l'attention du lecteur par la nouveauté de l'usage. On remarque aussi l'asyndète lexicale.

and he recovered the memory of all the money lost before his lucky streak. He suffered from it; this unbridled gambler, in the ordinary run of life, was “close to his *sous*”<sup>28</sup> as his workers would say. There was nothing in common between this great car manufacturer, for whom gambling was both a need for publicity and a tyrannical habit, and this demi-god he had harboured within him for a few hours but which had now deserted him, leaving him feeling weak and defenceless. A fierce and free spirit had abandoned him. He felt the accustomed ache at the base of his neck, the shooting pains, the soreness in his lower back and the bitter taste in his mouth, damaged by forty years of smoking and drinking.

However, he picked up his winnings, put them in his pockets, leaving a tip for the Sporting Club workers. He descended the casino’s steps and the voices of Monte-Carlo croupiers, page boys and prostitutes formed around him the choir he was accustomed to.

“He’s incredible. What guts . . . How does he keep going like that? Did you see him yesterday? To-day he’s winning what he wants. Yesterday he was losing. How he keeps his cool . . . <sup>29</sup>What wealth . . . There’s no-one in the same class. He’s one of France’s greatest industrialists right now . . .”

He listened to them and again drew in with pleasure these faint whiffs of incense. At certain times of weariness, weariness in his case that wasn’t uniquely physical but seemed to flow as far as his very soul, praise alone could calm him. Words of approval were support and assurance, the only reality in a world of appearances.

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<sup>28</sup> Nous avons traduit l’expression française mot-à-mot conformément à notre désir de conserver la francité du roman.

<sup>29</sup> Rares sont les occasions où Némirovsky emploie l’argot. Ici l’argot convient au niveau socio-économique de l’ouvrier.

A prostitute who was leaving the casino behind him, in evening dress, her make-up beginning to run, passed nearby and as she gave him the last wink for the night—provocative, charged with an ultimate hope, just as the disappointed fisherman casts, once again, his hook into the river, and already standing on the bank, already set to leave thinks: “Who knows?” In a whisper she said, with an impudent laugh and in a modest voice:<sup>30</sup>

“You’re a good looker!”

He thrust his chest forward again, threw back his head, large but of noble form. He had the stature and the muscles of an athlete, thick, black hair forming three spikes at his forehead and temples, a terrible mouth, imperious, with thin, compressed lips, pale in appearance, dark pouches under the eyes, and his regard never fixed on anyone, but unceasingly drifted away, turned aside, impatient, as if alerted by some troubled search, while gently beat with a slight and uninterrupted pulsation his left eye-lid.

Wardes motioned the girl to follow him across the road as he headed to his hotel. His official residence was *La Caravelle*, a house some distance from Cannes, but whilst his wife and son lived there he himself occupied an apartment in a hotel, in Monte Carlo, and only left it to go to the casino.

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<sup>30</sup> La phrase qui commence par « fille » et finit par « voix » occupe tout le paragraphe et se lit ainsi :  
« Une fille qui sortait derrière lui du casino, en robe du soir, le fard commençant à couler sur son visage, passa près de lui et, en lui lançant la dernière oeilade de la nuit—provocante, chargée d’un suprême espoir, comme le pêcheur déçu jette encore une fois l’hameçon dans la rivière, déjà debout sur la rive, déjà prêt à s’en aller, et pense : « Qui sait ? » —, elle dit à mi-voix, le rire impudent et la voix humble :

« Et beau avec ça! »

Pour le traducteur qui cherche à traduire pour assurer l’aisance de lecture les problèmes qui se relèvent de cette phrase sont ceux de l’anaphore et de la cohérence. L’antécédent du pronom « elle » est « la fille » mais la distance entre ces mots est si comblée de toute une série de syntagmes, de propositions et même d’une longue comparaison que lorsque le lecteur lit « elle dit » il doit hésiter pour se rappeler le sujet de la phrase. Le sens est encore compliqué par la proximité de « elle dit » après “Qui sait? ». Le syntagme « elle dit » se rapporte à « passer près de lui et . . . elle dit ».

From the Sporting Club emerged the last gamblers, the old guard. It was the time when weary people, the little prostitutes, the flower sellers and the messenger boys from the club at last disperse and head for a well-deserved rest. Children could be seen appearing in their perambulators, and housewives with a bunch of violets sitting on the cover of their food basket. Wind and glare were hurting Wardes' eyes. He was tottering. As he climbed the hotel steps, it seemed that at each movement his knees were about to fail and give way under him. He went in with the woman.

The shutters in his apartment were closed and the heavy curtains drawn. A zone of silence surrounded certain apartments in the hotel protecting the clients' precious sleep, a sleep which extended late into the day. On the table he found a telephone message from his wife. But he didn't reply. She was used to it.

He locked his winnings away and came back to the girl waiting for him. She was delighted: picking up Wardes was a good catch. She was a woman of slight build who liked work well done. "He'll get his money's worth," she thought, with the feeling of personal satisfaction afforded the conscience by excellent intentions: "Be distrustful however. The richer he is, the meaner he'll be," her mother had often told her.

But he didn't ask for much. Soon she was sleeping. Alone.

Wardes, however, had really looked forward, this night, to the sleep which he had missed in Paris and in his home in Cannes. Here, after gambling, occasionally, when he least expected it, when he was resigned to sleeplessness, when he again thought: "I don't sleep. I won't sleep," here he was sinking, drifting downwards into cool and empty darkness, here he would die and finally return to the light quite astonished to have been able to sleep.

He sighed deeply, gripped the pillow, put his arms around it as you hug a friend or as a child in a nanny's arms, looking for the freshest spot on the cold material of the pillow, shaping it in his hands, nudging it with his forehead and cheek, tightening his eyelids, waiting patiently, hoping for a miracle.

But sleep eluded him.

He turned on his side, lifted himself up groping for the ice-cold bottle of Perrier and poured himself a drink. There was always a bottle of mineral water set on his bed-side table; because his throat was constantly on fire. He drank, he threw the pillow onto the floor, he stretched his head flat on the bolster, semi naked, his arms crossed on his chest as in his childhood. Bad memories for him, childhood ones . . . the gloomy house in Dunkirk where he had been born, the noise of rain on the window panes, his lofty, ice-cold room where his father forced him to sleep . . . he was the son of an industrialist from the north, a Belgian and of a Polish mother who had abandoned his father to run-off with a fellow Pole; the lover was a musician in a small, provincial theatre troupe; it had played in Dunkirk on tour. The cheated father hounded and severely chastised the guilty mother through the innocent child. In that dark, spacious country room, in its large bed that creaked and groaned at each movement he made, Wardes developed the horror of being alone, the need to have someone by him during the night, it didn't matter who, a living creature, a woman or a dog but one he could wake and throw out when its presence, its body, its breath, he suddenly found repugnant.

She slept, the woman he had picked up off the street and put to bed near him. She was heavy and motionless beside him, like a stone.

He forced himself as well to remain absolutely still. He was sleeping and he was going to sleep; he felt sleep flowing towards him like a deep freshwater stream soaking into his veins, washing away a hard core of fear, anger and anxiety which had formed deep within his being;<sup>31</sup> he smiled; already, were passing through his mind confused images: He saw again the green carpet in the gaming room, lights now growing larger, now receding into the distance and pale faces directed towards him. He watched them one after the other, didn't recognize them and thought: "I must be sleeping. Because they are strangers I see, that really means they aren't memories, only visions and dreams."

And suddenly he woke as if someone had shaken him by the shoulder. He stood up, sat on the bed, turned on the light, looked at the watch he'd thrown near the bed together with the change, a cigarette lighter, a handkerchief and his keys. He had slept only for a few minutes, five or ten at most. Just for a moment he hoped the watch had stopped, but no! Sleep had deserted him and would not return. For a few seconds he didn't move. How fast his heart was pounding! He listened to its rapid beat and thought:

"No! No! It's impossible! I won't be able to bear this torture any longer . . . this insomnia . . . I'll die . . ."

But thinking of death was terrible. Thinking about death was more terrible than death itself. He quickly threw off the blanket, got up; he went to the bathroom, he bathed his face and

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<sup>31</sup> Lorsque Némirovsky emploie le langage figuré, il est presque toujours rythmé. Le français se lit ainsi : « Il sentait le sommeil couler vers lui comme une eau douce et profonde, s'insinuer dans ses veines, dissoudre un noyau dur de crainte, de colère et d'angoisse qui s'était formé à l'intérieur de son être ». De plus, ce rythme est souvent accompagné d'allitérations ou d'assonances qui font trancher le sens de la métaphore ou de la comparaison. En l'occurrence, Némirovsky emploie dans cette phrase la consonne fricative « s » dans « comme une eau douce et profonde, s'insinuer dans ses veines, dissoudre . . . ». La répétition de cette fricative induit un air de tranquillité, de paix. Dans notre traduction nous nous sommes évertué à retenir ces caractéristiques.



chest in cold water. He turned on all the lamps on his way and regarded despondently, in each mirror, this face no-one would recognize as his, modelled by weariness and loneliness. These terrified eyes and this quivering mouth, was that Wardes, the good-looking Wardes?

It was easy to boast of his exceptional nervous vigour, to say to his subordinates, "Come on, I don't know what sleep is any more. I'm no sicker. While you're all sleeping, I'm working."

This night again, courageously, he thought, "If I can't sleep, I'd better toil on."

He picked up his files, sat down at the ridiculous woman's writing desk, located in the tiny salon adjacent to his room, he made notes on two pages and then let them fall. Unfortunately, work was impossible. He couldn't manage to fixate his thought on the pages he was reading. His thought slipped away, escaped him, pursued independently and without any concern for Wardes' superhuman efforts its own path, already a thousand times travelled. His insomnia induced a state of anxiety which firstly merged into a strange uneasiness, a dark mood and then into an inward turmoil which invaded his being, leaving him shaking and defenceless, then by fear. What was he afraid of? Anxiety was stifling him. Now his eyes were hurting; He imagined a rush of blood to his retinas, his power of sight diminished, being handicapped, blindness. He imagined it with such force that before his gaze lights split in two, expanded, fused and disappeared. He smoothed his hand across his eyelids.

"This isn't true. It's impossible. Why am I frightened? It's impossible. I might just as well believe all this as be terrified of the roof half-opening or the walls crushing me."

He turned slowly at last towards the mirror. What was he going to see? No doubt, swollen eyes, his eyes would be swollen, gorged with blood, flowing like tears? But no! Nothing! His

eyes were raw from lack of sleep and the irritation caused by the smoke in the gaming room. He saw them in the mirror, swollen by fear but intact.

A little later, he thought this smoke was not only damaging his vision but his lungs. He was breathless. He gasped when climbing stairs, he who in times past could beat all his friends in a race. He was killing himself. He had a bad heart. He was burning the candle at both ends.<sup>32</sup> Another year, six or seven months and he'd fall ill, and he . . . But here, his mind balked; it shied away like a terrified horse. Fear of death was an opened door to what he most feared in this world: pure terror, without cause, against which the mind exposed and trembling can defend itself only by an effort desperate but vain, by an act of violence, of madness, by a shriek, by a murder . . . he raced from the room in one leap, opened the window. It was broad daylight. That saved him. He couldn't have borne night, silence and profound darkness. How beautiful everything was, friendly in the midday light! The wind blowing from the harbour soothed him. Now, the crisis over, he moved to close the shutters, drew the curtains and to sleep.

He went back to his bedroom, threw himself onto his bed but it was now too late. He had surrendered his mind to its demons. They had penetrated his mind by virtue of his insomnia. They were mocking him. They were passing him to each other, like a ball. They were hastening his anxiety towards murderous exasperation. He was lost, defenceless, alone, adrift. As a child he used to wake up in the night, and little by little his panic would become such that only hysterical appeals, wild shrieks could set him free. He shouted then, knowing his father would come and thrash him.

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<sup>32</sup> Fidèle à notre vœu de conserver le langage figuré, nous avons traduit cette locution mot-à-mot.

He needed to drink again; the bottle was empty. He grasped another one ready in an ice-bucket on the table. He made the cork hit the ceiling. At the noise, the woman woke up, spoke to him. He said nothing in return. Then she stretched and smiled. This movement of pleasure, this well-being . . . He could have cried in envy of the simple pleasure and obvious sense of well-being. He lay down beside her. Oh! To sleep, lose awareness, drowse if only for a few moments. Hold in check this wild beast ready to spring from his heart! . . . He felt it rising up in him with terrifying force, this sinister fury, almost insane.

The woman turned over and went to sleep again. Her breathing was uneven, rapid, high-pitched and accompanied occasionally by the wheeze of a lingering chest infection. Wardes' exasperated hearing picked up these low moans. He waited, listened, waited again, sniggered at each successive moan and sighed venomously, "Bitch!"

It was then he woke her, threw her out of bed. She cried out.

"What's the matter, darling? Are you sick?"

"Get out!"

"What? I didn't say anything. I'm not a dog. What do you mean, 'Get out! Get out!' I haven't done anything. It's not as if I stole your money or anything. Besides you haven't paid me."

She was quickly getting dressed. She had on a pink silk chemise embroidered with black butterflies and on her back and shoulders the marks of snap-fasteners. Wardes burst out laughing, took a step towards her. His face was so terrifying that the woman put her elbow against her cheek, like a child wanting to avoid a smack. He could see she was frightened and he was happy about this; his heart was beating more freely.

“Faster! Faster!”

He was enjoying driving her into even greater panic. He kept on throwing her clothes at her legs. Disgusting, this whore, this poor weary flesh. She had slept in his bed. She disgusted him.

“The last time I’ll let them stay afterwards,” he thought.

But he also knew he was afraid of being all alone.

He threw the money at her. She picked it up. Now he said nothing more. Suddenly she burst out in insults. He picked up the bottle and flung it at her head.

He fell next into a half faint which was part real and part feigned. At times he could hear and see. He recognized the woman’s shouts. He saw the hotel manager come in and shortly after Dario who had been recommended by Ange Martinelli. He was aware of the care that was being lavished on him but at other times his ears were full of the sound of bells. Then everything was melting away around him. Alone remained, deep within his being, a sound muted and rhythmic he listened to in stupor until the moment he realized it was his own over-taxed heart beating this way.

He came to. He was alone with Dario.

“Who in the world had the strange idea,” he thought, “to fetch this unknown little doctor with his foreign face and accent, this wop<sup>33</sup> shabbily dressed and badly shaven?”

He abruptly pushed him away.

“I’m all right now . . . I don’t need a thing. Please go.”

But Dario said—and suddenly he seemed to Wardes less ridiculous,

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<sup>33</sup> Selon Le Petit Robert 2008 :Métèque : Étranger dans la Grèce antique, domicilié dans la cité, protégé par la loi et soumis, d'une façon générale, aux mêmes obligations militaires et fiscales que les citoyens sans être admis, toutefois, à la citoyenneté. B. "P. ext., péj. Personne, souvent étrangère, dont l'aspect exotique, l'allure, le comportement n'inspirent pas confiance.

“This isn’t the first time is it?”

A faint shudder spread across his features. He didn’t reply.

Dario murmured, watching him.

- “It’s a feeling of deliverance people wouldn’t find too highly priced.”
- “Doctor . . .”

Dario bent towards him, ready to listen to his confession, to advise and help.

“What’s to be done, doctor?”

But then, Dario became frightened; this man was too rich. Dario had been called to look after the injured girl and treat Wardes who had been quite deeply cut as, bare-handed, he had picked up the shards of glass from the bottle he had thrown, but he wasn’t Wardes’ personal doctor. He feared wounding feelings, setting himself up as a rival to some medical shining light. He hesitated:

“Have you ever consulted a specialist in nervous disorders?” he asked.

Wardes made no answer. Dario had looked away.

“The person you were with isn’t badly hurt,” he said.

“I know. While I was hitting her, I was careful not to touch her eyes or throat.”

“What’s your own doctor got to say?” Dario asked.

Wardes answered in a sour tone.

“He says, ‘Don’t gamble. Don’t smoke. Be chaste, patient, restrained’. One idiot advised me to retire in the country and look after my garden. If I listened to them I’d have a different nature and body. Then they’d be no use to me. I don’t need them.”

“Nevertheless, sir, you must choose between leading an undisciplined life, a danger to your body and mind or a life satisfyingly fulfilled, but . . .”

Wardes turned his weary face away, bored.

“I’ve heard all that,” he seemed to say. “Above all, it’s old, rehashed, useless, especially useless . . .”

“How much, doctor?” he said loudly.

He paid Dario and Dario left.

## Chapter 7

Dario, from the time he owed money to Martinelli, had been protected by him. Not only had the head waiter recommended him to certain of his clients but, in addition, he pointed out those who could pay.

That night, Dario went to spend a few hours in a bar on *la place Massena*. Here, for a few francs, a drink, a packet of cigarettes, the small page boys from the hotels in Nice would willingly point out the accidents or fights occurring in neighbouring businesses. Here he would find messages from Martinelli:

“Such and such a time, room, client.”

He would then leave for Monte-Carlo. It was the hour women were going home to have a bath and rest before dinner, and suddenly they feel old, weighed down and weary.<sup>34</sup> The doctor can help in the same way as a masseuse or hair-dresser. He can be sure of a good reception. A harmless tonic, a few drops in a glass, they think there's nothing more needed. They'll have a good night. No insomnia. No dreams. No memories. Others hope their years will fall away, they'll find the desire of their twenties, renewed vitality and they'll forget their life (these regrets, debts, money, worries, lovers and children . . .)

Dario wasn't one of these insensitive people who say, “You've got to look after yourself. You're not all that young, everybody gets old.” Still others, young ones, happy, satisfied made

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<sup>34</sup> Le texte français se lit ici: « . . . elles se sentent vieillies, lourdes et lasses. » Nous avons conservé l'allitération de « lourdes et lasses » dans notre traduction.

him come three or four times in succession over a slight blotch on their cheek or a few wrinkles they had thought were forming, over nothing, to be reassured.

“It’s strange,” Dario thought, modestly drinking a glass of brown ale “it’s strange thinking about the number of people who want to be reassured. One says, ‘My mother died of tuberculosis, doctor. Don’t you think...?’ whilst another asks, ‘You don’t think this lump in my breast is... Please say it isn’t doctor.’ Evidently, they’re clinging to life; it’s sweet to them. And, for the most part, life is good to them. They’ll die in old age. But if their bodies are healthy, precious machines, oiled, polished every day, their souls are sick. A distinguished doctor would frighten them. He’d give them cause for frightening illusions. He’d tell them, just as Wardes was told, ‘No more women, no more gambling, no more drugs.’ Where was the good in that? They don’t want to hear about doing without, but about satisfaction. They want to live a long life but not give up one iota of pleasure. That’s when they call in the little, foreign quack who’ll provide them with tranquillizers, treat their addiction, get them for the night a heart at peace in exchange for a hundred *franc* bill.”

But Dario, since having money, no longer thought only about his patients, or to-morrow’s daily bread. He was at peace, his breathing was better. For three weeks Clara and the baby had been home. The *générale*’s debt had been settled. This time he had paid with one hand and with the other torn up his receipt! Sitting outside the bar with a glass of beer at hand, he appeared meek and retiring, yet he was becoming bolder. He studied the women. But not the prostitutes who were waiting, prowling and wandering under the arcades. (One of them in a jacket of white satin emerged from the shadow of a doorway and looked at him, smiled and beckoned in vain) nor the flower-sellers you could spend the night with on the beach. No! Those he only desired at



rare moments; he wouldn't have followed them. He contemplated elegant women you see with their husbands or lovers, getting out of expensive cars or passing by without looking.

As a child in the small Crimean town where he'd lived, he occasionally came across the wives of officers or wealthy merchants walking through the port and he loved being in their path and then running after them through the shady, narrow streets until they reached the deserted square in front of the mosque where they suddenly lost their proud self-confidence and looked at last uneasily down at him, clasping their handbag more closely to their breast, gathering up their skirts and quickly heading off.<sup>35</sup> But he didn't insult them as did the other urchins, he didn't make fun of them. He walked as long as possible, silently, in their wake. Some were beautiful and their scented dresses left lingering in the air such a sweet perfume . . . He didn't want to frighten them. Later on, he understood what he found attractive about them was their scornful look, their look of cold indifference which bit so voluptuously at his heart.

He sighed as he contemplated the women in the *place Masséna* on this tepid night. The trams rattled. Small strolling orchestras passed by playing serenades. These unknown women, with their beautiful faces, peopled his dreams. He imagined them well-educated, sensitive, refined as much in their manners and speech as in their bodies and beautiful costuming. The ones he saw and treated each day were coarse at heart and, by comparison, humble Clara seemed a queen, but, in spite of himself, his heart beat in hope when he approached a woman beautiful and rich. Each time, he was disappointed.

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<sup>35</sup> On remarque ici la longueur de la phrase et la variété de propositions et de syntagmes, ce que Berman nomme « l'arborescence ».

## Chapter 8

In the small bar where Dario was sitting because the rain, having just fallen in a silvery downpour on Nice, had driven him off the exposed terrace, he saw Wardes enter with a woman.

He hesitated. Should he acknowledge Wardes and greet him? But he saw Wardes coming towards him with outstretched hand. He realized immediately however Wardes was drunk, evident in his ruddiness, almost purple, and in both his unsteady and fixed expression.

“What are you doing here, doctor? You doctors are all the same! You preach abstinence and all the virtues but you yourselves . . .”

He was speaking loudly, hammering out the syllables no doubt fearful that a word passing his lips was slurred and, as always, concealing his deep-seated anxiety behind a mask of bravado.

“You must be doctor . . . doctor?” He groped for Dario’s name but couldn’t remember it.

“Excuse me. I’ve got a bad memory for names . . . and faces as well, but your face is striking. So conspicuously Levantine. I’d pick you out in a thousand . . .” He burst out laughing and thumped Dario on the shoulder. “You took good care of me after that stupid accident, doctor. Come and have a drink.” They both stood with their elbows on the bar. His wife, who had come in with Wardes didn’t join them but walked the length of the room to a table already set at the back. This bar, famous for its excellent *Provençal* cuisine, had over the past few weeks become a fashionable spot but Dario was unaware of this.

Dario looked at the woman; she passed near him and he asked someone:

“That woman . . . is it Madame Wardes?”

“Yes.”

All eyes were on her and people were whispering her name as she passed. She didn't assume the air of feigned indifference like certain women in the public eye who seem to move across a room much as a ship's prow slices through the sea but whose disdain is affected, simulated to increase popularity and inspire admiration. She was aware of the looks being cast in her direction and greeted them with obvious calm and absolute naturalness. She nodded once or twice in response to a greeting and smiled back; but whilst the faces of the other women around her were expressionless, their eyes implored admiration, Wardes' wife seemed to be approachable but distant from them, lost in some secret thought both human and inaccessible.

In silence Dario studied her. She sat extremely erect. She was wearing a black dress; she was bare-headed; she wore no jewels other than a sparkling ring.<sup>36</sup>

"I haven't dined yet," Wardes said. "I only get hungry in the evening. Do you know what the food's like here? You don't? Dear chap, certain of their *Provençal* dishes are masterpieces. You don't enjoy fine food. You don't like to drink either. What the hell do you do with your life on earth, doctor? Besides, doctor, you should adore all that . . ."

"Why should you think that?"

"You have a crease around your mouth, the weary, hungry crease people have who love the good things of the earth."

Wardes again laughed.

"You will come and have dinner with us. I'm inviting you."

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<sup>36</sup> Dans le texte français la phrase qui suit « ring » constitue un *non sequitur*. La phrase se lit, « Wardes et elle sortaient du casino; il était près de minuit.» Wardes, sa femme et Dario sont déjà assis dans le restaurant. L'avertissement de l'éditeur affirme que le texte est celui qui parut dans *Gringoire* en 1939. Nous avons décidé d'omettre la phrase.

“No thank you, I’m not hungry, thank you,” Dario said.

He was dying to accept. He was dying of longing and fear. Never had he been close to a woman like Wardes’ wife. How would he greet her? What about eating? How would he conduct himself with her? His whole being murmured, “I’m not worthy.”

“Oh, come on.”

Wardes stood up and, without looking at Dario went and sat beside his wife. Dario followed him.

Wardes pronounced or rather spat out some introductory words. He had at last recalled Dario’s name. Dario sat opposite them. He forgot to eat as he watched Madame Wardes. He didn’t know if she was beautiful. He had admired women until now who were so different he was astonished to find so much attraction in a weary mouth, almost severe, in rare gestures, in dark hair with a few curly locks already streaked in silver above her forehead. She would have been around thirty, but she didn’t have the artificial beauty of women whose lives seem to have flowed along protected behind a glass case like a dead butterfly; her face had undergone the changes time brings, pain brings. Her skin lacked the smooth uniformity of porcelain Dario was accustomed to. The corners of her mouth and eyes bore the first wrinkles. Her skin, barely made-up, was pale and almost transparent. The other women, heavily painted, had about them the savage brilliance of bedaubed idols. The line of her features was perfect.

## Chapter 9

A few weeks later, and not having seen the Wardes again, Dario was called to *La Caravelle*.  
“I think your fortune’s made, my darling,” Clara whispered in Dario’s ear while hugging him.  
But Dario didn’t hope to find Wardes seriously ill. (A bout of depression, some whim . . .)

He knew *La Caravelle*; he had noticed and admired it from a distance. Built on an elevated site, the house emerged like a vessel’s prow rising above the sea; hence its name. Never had Dario seen anything as opulent and imposing, but that day the pleasant aspect of the terraces and garden struck him. The marble and stone, lit by the sun, had a hue, yellow, warm, soft<sup>37</sup> delighting the heart.

He was immediately taken to Wardes’ room. He was sitting on his bed, slightly bent over, his body propped up with cushions. He was breathing deeply. Occasionally, he lifted his hand to his side with a sigh, hoarse and shaky.

He beckoned Dario to come nearer.

“Lot of difficulty getting you, doctor,” he said, scarcely acknowledging his greeting, and complained, “You’ve been hard to contact, doctor, but it was you I wanted and no-one else.”

“I’m not on the telephone,” Dario murmured.

He took his patient’s hand in his own and held it for a moment: the temperature was elevated. Wardes looked up at him.

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<sup>37</sup> Nous avons commenté, dans notre chapitre sur le style de Némirovsky, une tendance marquée à situer trois adjectifs après le substantif qu’ils qualifient.

“I caught a cold on the train,” he said in a low and unsteady voice. “I arrived this morning. I’ve been travelling in Central Europe. Already yesterday in Paris I was feeling rotten, worn out, but to-night . . .”

“Did it start with a shiver?” Dario enquired.

“Yes.”

At this memory, Wardes shivered again and quickly folded his arms on his chest.

“More than anything, doctor, I have to be on my feet tomorrow.”

“We’ll see about that.”

“What happens the day after tomorrow, I’m not thinking about it, I don’t want to think about it. You must get me on my feet before tomorrow night, for twenty-four hours.”

“If that’s possible.”

“Possible or not, that’s how it must be!”

“Let me listen to your chest to begin with,” Dario asked without replying to what he believed was a sick man’s confusion.

Wardes surrendered his pale, hairless and well-fed body. Dario sounded his chest with great care and recognized that it was a case of pneumonia. He told Wardes, while helping him to button up his silk pyjama top:

“I think, dear sir, it will be impossible for you to get up tomorrow.”

“But it has to be!” Wardes cried out heatedly.

“You run the risk of serious complications.”

“What’s the matter with me?” Wardes asked.

Seeing Dario hesitate, Wardes struck in irritation the side of the bed.

“What’s wrong with me?” he repeated.

“Probably it’s better to let you know so that you don’t commit any rash actions,” Dario said more curtly than he would have wished. “Well, it’s pneumonia. Everything will be all right, I’m sure, but in getting up you could be risking any number of illnesses, ranging from an abscess on your lung to damaging your heart.”

“What you’re really saying is I could die.”

“Yes. Death.”

“Dying doesn’t worry me at all, doctor. I’m an unhappy person and I make those around me unhappy. The sooner I die the better it’ll be for me and for . . . But I must get up tomorrow to go and gamble. I’ll grant you to-night, but tomorrow . . .<sup>38</sup> I feel a lucky streak. You know, it speeds across your life, and you must seize it, cost what it may, for who can say whether it’ll return one day. That’s the important thing. Everything else . . .”

He had spoken very quietly, very urgently, in a halting voice. Wardes seemed to lose consciousness momentarily and then recover.

Dario shrugged his shoulders.

“You don’t know what you’re saying, *monsieur*, forgive me. I can’t take away your illness with a word, with a breath. I don’t do miracles.”

“I’m asking you to drug me for twenty-four hours.”

“What?”

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<sup>38</sup> Il faut noter ici encore un exemple de l’emploi des points de suspension qui laissent entendre que si Dario le veut ou non, Wardes ira au casino.

“One of your fellow doctors, a outsider like you, one day ten years ago did it. I’d caught a stupid illness, but a serious one, like to-day. He gave me an injection, strychnine, caffeine, I don’t know what, that’s your business, the way they dope a horse. The next day I was on my feet.”

“But what about the day after?”

“I can’t remember any more,” Wardes murmured, closing his eyes, “but I’m not dead, as you see.”

“It was ten years ago,” Dario calmly replied. “Besides, my duty . . .”

“Shut up will you!” Wardes cried out. His voice was hoarse and pained. “When I called you I knew the kind of person I was dealing with. I know Elinor Mouravine. Didn’t you know that? You didn’t really know that she’s my mistress?”

Dario didn’t reply.

“I’ll pay you, doctor. I’ll pay you whatever is necessary. It’s a risk for you, I know, but Elinor’s abortion was also a risk. You get nothing for nothing down here, doctor.”

“It’s impossible,” Dario murmured.

“Ah! You’re not saying that in the same tone.”

“No. No, it’s impossible!” Dario’s replied more emphatically while violently shaking his head, but in his heart he thought:

“An injection, no matter what kind, as harmless as I like will settle him down for the moment, give him the hope of getting up to-morrow to satisfy his madness. He’ll pay me what I want and tomorrow . . . Tomorrow, Clara, Daniel and I can leave and I can pay Martinelli as well.”

He said in a low voice, almost against his will, “Don’t tempt me . . .”



Wardes, his eyes closed, stammered, “You must drug me, doctor . . . I’m only asking you for twenty-four hours . . . but I’ve got to have them.”

“But why do you need me, why?” Dario cried out. “If you want to kill yourself, get up, drag yourself to the casino. The devil will help you! Why must I have your death on my conscience?”

He quickly grasped his hat and instrument case he’d thrown on the bed when he entered the room, and ran off, well aware he wouldn’t be able to resist the temptation for long. He hurried to the bottom of the steps, wandered for a short time in the empty corridor; then he saw the servant who’d let him in.

“I need to speak to Mme Wardes,” he said. “Her husband is very ill.”

The servant asked him to wait and he sat on the marble balustrade surrounding the terrace. It was a May evening, with a stormy warmth. The garden was planted with magnificent, old pines, the air was stifling and perfumed. Dario was mopping his forehead and was anxiously watching Wardes’ window.<sup>39</sup> At any rate, Wardes was risking death . . . An organism such as his, worn-out by gambling and alcohol would succumb to illness. Would it be possible perhaps? No! No! Until now he had committed only one bad act, this offence, this crime with Elinor but necessity had forced him, he had been dying of hunger . . . To-day wasn’t the same. “If I go down that path,” he thought, “I’m lost and nothing will save me.”

He saw Sylvie Wardes leave the house and cross the terrace. She was hurrying. She was wearing a white frock. Her face was anxious and pale, but again the strange peace Dario had

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<sup>39</sup> Umberto Eco dans *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* décrit ce qu’il appelle « lingering ». Parmi d’autres significations dont Eco traite celle-ci veut dire que l’auteur, à la suite d’une scène d’une intensité émotionnelle ou dramatique, ralentit le pas par lequel l’histoire se déroule. Nous avons un exemple de cet effet ici. Nous avons allongé la durée de la lecture par l’emploi de « was watching » et de « was sponging » plutôt que de traduire « watched » et « sponged ».

already sensed when near her took possession of him as if she had touched with her soft cool hands a burning forehead.

His agitation ceased. He gave a faithful account of his discussion with Wardes.

“We’ll go up to him,” Madame Wardes said when he had finished speaking.

“Madame, aren’t you afraid? . . . You can’t take care of him. He’s very weak but may go to fearful extremes, dangerous to those around him. He may do anything. Let me send a nurse to help you.”

“We’ll see. Tell me first what care he needs. Anyway, he mustn’t be left alone.”

They entered Wardes’ room. He was resting in a light and uneasy sleep, interspersed by long moans.

Dario wrote down what needed to be done, then said timidly:

“I don’t want to leave you alone with him, *madame*. I’m frightened his anger when he awakes will be directed towards you.”

She smiled.

“When we’re alone, I’m not afraid of him. What frightens me,” she said after a moment’s silence, “are the scenes in front of others, which damage his reputation. Fortunately for him, he can if necessary appear quite differently. This spendthrift gambler is the boldest but also the most prudent business man and some people, I know, believe he plays the role of a dissolute or an eccentric to take care of his publicity. He’s often said the businessman ought to act on the crowd’s imagination in the same way as the music-hall star or the boxer. Lots of people believe it’s calculated on his part and this redeems him.”

She asked in a lower voice:

“Doctor, do you think he’s really . . . sane?”

“He’s on the border between madness and rationality.”

Wardes was opening his eyes. She said quickly:

“Go, doctor. Go. What’s necessary for his initial care will be brought to me, and it’s better he doesn’t see you first of all. Perhaps gripped by fever and weakness, he won’t still remember his reckless request. Leave, but . . . Is there someone waiting for you?” she asked seeing Dario was hesitating. With Madame Wardes Dario had not for a moment the desire to play the over-wrought doctor, gripped by heavy responsibilities; she forced the truth out of him. In answering, he found his humility sweet;

“My time is all my own, *madame*. I’m unknown and have few patients.”

“Then would you be willing to come tomorrow, to-night if I have you called?”

“If he wishes it.”

“No,” she said brusquely. “It’s no longer a question of his whims but of what I want: it’s too serious.”

Her voice, so gentle, had at times an unyielding tenor, both calm and authoritative, which struck him with admiration. “He certainly wouldn’t have admired a defenceless being”, he thought once again.

As she farewelled him she said in lighter vein:

“But I can’t answer for the way he’ll greet you, doctor.”

“I’ll come as soon as you call me,” he said warmly. And he left her.

## Chapter 10

Wardes finally recovered. Dario felt that he had saved him and he was happy about it, although he experienced a dislike for Wardes which at times went as far as being real hatred.

He went to *La Caravelle* twice a day, in Wardes' car. He couldn't stop thinking about the money he'd earn as a result of Wardes' recovery but was ashamed of his greed and secret calculations. Shame and desire were what he experienced most keenly at this period of his life! Shame in being irreparably what he was, desperate desire to transform himself, to change his looks and state of mind.

How he admired Sylvie Wardes! How he prowled at the threshold of her wealth, dazzled by qualities known only by name until now: dignity, unselfishness, an exquisite politeness, pride which conquers evil by ignoring it. "That's what he'd come to gain in Europe," he thought. "That, not only money and success, not only a broader existence, good beds, warm clothing and meat every day. Yes all of you who despise me, rich French, you fortunate French, what I wanted was your culture, your morality, your virtues, all that is above me, different from me, different from the mud I was born in."

And here at last he saw a living woman like the one in his dreams!

He was nothing in her eyes, and he felt it so painfully that he forbade himself to think of her as a man thinks of a woman; occasionally a physical desire, loving, intense mounted in his being as rises burning heat from a covered fire. He was no more capable of ridding himself of his secret lust than he was of ridding himself of his breath, his blood, his vision but it surged up only in bitter draughts and it horrified him.

One day Wardes had kept him with him a long time; it was late, Sylvie asked him to dinner.

He said in spite of himself in a low voice:

“I don’t dare.”

She didn’t ask why. She guessed it was his fierce timidity, she seemed to read his heart. She asked only:

“Is there anyone waiting for you?”

Clara was waiting for him. What would she say?

Ah! She’d be happy. It was a leap forward for him, an extraordinary opportunity. The Wardes in his and Clara’s imaginations were of an incredible rank.

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” he had proudly said to Clara, “if I found out she was of noble birth.”

He accepted, recalling evenings in his youth when he used to read Balzac, lying down beside Clara, under a thin blanket, shivering in spite of the warmth of the body near him, in the room without a fire and imagining a brilliant life and delicious passions. And now he had entered a wealthy house and was to dine at Sylvie Wardes’ table!

He was aware of being poorly dressed, badly shaven; this shame didn’t desert him.

“But this is too serious,” he thought. “Too profound to abandon myself to shame. Too unhopd for . . . Could I believe one day, I, Dario Asfar, would be received here like an equal? Like a benefactor? Because I’ve saved Wardes. Maybe this is just the beginning of an honourable career, untroubled in effect, the kind of career I dreamed of when I left home, when I sought fortune in an unknown world.”

He followed Sylvie Wardes to a ground floor room, a small dining room with the window open. The twilight was subdued and warm.

Dario looked at the table and marvelled at everything: the flowers, the fine plates, the four earthen-ware statuettes of women dancing with fauns forming the centre-piece, the plain, delicate table linen, the unobtrusive service, Sylvie Wardes' slightest movements.

He ate little, but the wine he wasn't used to, a wine luke-warm and heady whose brand he didn't even know, went straight to his head and he felt deep confusion, an extraordinary happiness at this early stage of intoxication in which everything appeared joyful, pleasant where the tongue is mysteriously loosed and where the most inaccessible of hearts shudders and half opens.

"How beautiful everything is," he said softly.

He caressed the fine crystal glass in his hands,<sup>40</sup> observed it in the light and smelt the wine.

He said in a lower voice:

"Never, never have I seen anything like it."

Sylvie Wardes thought in astonishment "Dario would be aware of the hell in her life with Wardes and envied it."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> De temps en temps une redondance paraît dans la narration . Par exemple, Némirovsky écrit, « Il caressait entre ses mains le verre de cristal. » Si l'on caresse un verre, on se sert des mains et le syntagme « entre ses mains » est redondant. Conforme à notre but de conserver dans la mesure du possible le texte de Némirovsky, nous avons laissé sans changements encore des exemples de cette redondance que nous avons remarqués plus tard dans notre traduction.

<sup>41</sup> Partout dans *Le maître des âmes* on ne trouve jamais l'emploi de l'italique. La phrase se lit ici : « Elle pensa avec étonnement que celui-ci, pourtant, devait connaître l'enfer de sa vie avec Wardes et qu'il l'enviait. » Lorsque Mme Wardes dit « qu'il l'enviait » elle serait ébahie mais ce sens reste ambigu sans aucun indice du ton, soit au moyen d'un syntagme adverbial, soit de l'emploi de l'italique pour « enviait ».

“If you knew,” she thought, “the sad meals I’ve eaten, here, alone night after night, and all this useless waiting, these long nights and these tears . . .”

But he did know, very well. Everybody, aware of Wardes’ scandalous existence could guess every humiliation suffered, detect every sigh, could snigger, pity her.

That, that was the most bitter, most unbearable suffering; not being able to humbly accept the fate reserved for him, not being able to stifle a guilty arrogance in his heart, still shudder at every inquiring or pitiful look directed at him.

But, who would have guessed? She bore sarcastic remarks, pity or scorn with so much apparent indifference.

But all that was only a lie, pride’s new stratagem. She admired Dario, this unknown person, this outsider, welcomed out of compassion this evening, in confiding so simply in her, revealing his poverty, feeling neither shame nor painful modesty.

She asked, aware no question would be indiscreet and he would gratefully welcome it, happy to feel her interest in him:

“You’re not married, are you?”

“But I am,” he said. “I am married. I know why that seems strange to you. I don’t look as if I am, do I and my shabby clothing like that of a poverty-stricken student and my appearance are rather like an unmarried misfit. I know. But I have a wife. I’ve been married a long time. I have a child.”

“Ah! I’m pleased about that,” she said warmly: I’ll be able to show you my daughter, talk about her. Only a father feels for other people’s children. I don’t know why I thought you were alone, without a wife or child”.

He suddenly felt a desperate desire to confide in her, for her to know him as he was, as he had been, the desire which drives a man to confess his faults, less to be pardoned than to be loved, guilty, unhappy but sincere, truthful, such as he is in the eyes of God.

“I don’t know if I can really make you understand,” he said slowly, “what all this means to me.”

In an uncertain gesture he pointed to the walls, the dark grounds seen through the window, the roses adorning the table.

“It’s true I’ve never seen anything like this, but I was aware it existed. And it was this that gave me the courage to pursue it, to rise up, cost what it may. Not only the *décor*, you understand, *madame*, not only the well-ordered and expensive house, nor the opulence, but people like you, *madame*.”

She asked:

“You don’t know any French people? Can that possibly be?”

“I’ve occasionally been in a few middle-class homes, ordinary workers homes, but, I repeat, it isn’t a question of *décor*, but of minds. Your husband, he doesn’t astonish me; I know others like him; but you, a woman like you, no! You mustn’t be offended, *madame*,” he said, seeing that she appeared surprised and irritated; “You’ve well and truly worked out that I’m neither talking about your beauty, nor the way you dress, but about a life I suppose different from everything I’ve known, or still know.”

“Any life, no matter how little it has been fully lived, contains numberless mistakes and sins,” she said with an air of deep sincerity which struck him; “So don’t disparage your past or those you’ve known or yourself.”



“Ah! that’s because you don’t know. You can’t know . . . How can I make you to understand?” he murmured, “it’s not only poverty, vice or crime, but the ugliness of all that wretched despair . . . But forgive me! I’m being annoying, boring you, taking up your time.”

“My time’s my own,” she said, shrugging her shoulders; “the nurse is with Philippe. The child’s sleeping.”

“But isn’t there anyone waiting for you? You must have so many friends, relatives, a large family.”

“How wrong,” she said with a smile. “Don’t concern yourself over that. “ I never have anyone waiting for me.”

They had left the table and Madame Wardes sat on a divan in a corner of the room, in semi-darkness, understanding Dario preferred to hide his face.

But Dario, standing before her, now remained silent.

“I don’t understand,” he said at last in a troubled voice, “I don’t understand why I feel this desire to speak to you about myself. Never, I swear *madame*, have I breathed a word to anyone about my life, my difficulties or my past. No doubt I’ve always felt an icy indifference, but you, *madame*, it’s true isn’t it, you have compassion in your heart and not scorn, friendship for people and not mockery. Isn’t that so?”

“Yes,” she said.

Dario was drunk for the first time in his life, a kind of drunkenness allowing his body to feel warm<sup>42</sup> and relaxed, affording his mind boldness, subtlety but hidden despair.

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<sup>42</sup> Le texte français se lit: « Il était ivre pour la première fois de sa vie, mais d’une ivresse qui laissait le corps lucide et tranquille . . . » L’emploi de l’adjectif « lucide » présente un problème. Tous les synonymes que

“I’ve come from so far. I’ve climbed from such depth. I’m so weary. What you’ve offered me to-day is relief. I was born in the Crimea,” he said suddenly, following a moment’s silence: he was driven by the desire to evoke for her a hated past, a shameful past; it seemed that by listening alone she would free him. Why here and not elsewhere? I don’t know. I belong to an obscure race from the Levant, a mixture of Greek and Italian blood, what people call a ‘wog’. You don’t know about these vagabond groups which migrated everywhere and were cast on such different paths so that in the one generation, but in different places, some sold carpets and honey-coated nuts on European beaches and others in London and New York, were rich, educated and even unaware of each other. They shared the same name and were ignorant of the others’ existence. So by accident I was born in the Crimea. My father was a hawker, like those you see here in this country who’ve no doubt stopped at your gate and at times managed by their insistence and antics, by playing on your pity and charity, like me now, showing you their stock replete with furs and coarse jewellery. My father sold carpets at times and at other times jewellery from the Caucasus and fruit. He was very poor, but for a long time didn’t lose hope. He used to say that every man on this earth has his lucky moment, you had to wait for it; luck didn’t come but children did, every year; some were born, others died. All my childhood (I was the third child and five followed) was spent amidst the painful cries of childbirth, insults and blows. My mother was a drinker . . .”

He stopped and slowly smoothed his face with his hand.

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fournissent les dictionnaires de cet adjectif se rapportent à un certain état d’esprit— clair, clairvoyant, pénétrant, perspicace et ainsi de suite. L’adjectif se rapporte ici au corps. Comment le traduire? Qu’est-ce que Némirovsky voulait dire ? Malgré notre désir de conserver dans la mesure du possible le texte de Némirovsky, comme nous l’avons déjà affirmé, l’incongruité d’un corps « lucide » est telle que nous avons traduit « lucide » comme « warm ».

“All that,” he said, “for six years, eight, ten, a whole life lived, a hellish cycle, a longer life than later would be lived a whole life. But now I must speak to you about Clara, my wife. Imagine this town, a small port on the Black Sea. I won’t tell you its name, its historic name, impossible to remember. Clara lived there. Her father was a Jewish watchmaker. In their eyes, I was a vagabond, the infidel. But Clara loved me. We were children. Her father took me in and wanted me to learn his trade, but I dreamed of studying, of later becoming a lawyer or a doctor, of having a worthy profession, of escaping from the mire. Here, I had some good fortune, because a high-school teacher had taken an interest in me and made me work. So, at eighteen, I was destined to become a watchmaker. I wanted to escape from this backward village and especially never see my family again.”

He was searching for words. He said quietly, with lowered eyes:

“I hated this mire. Then—ah! Madame why tell you all about that? Why demean myself before you? To-morrow you won’t want to see me again, but you’re doing me the greatest kindness listening to me like this. A bitter heart, swollen in hate and bile, locked, hardened by so many years suddenly half opens, I could never tell you how grateful I am, Madame . . . Until this moment, no-one except Clara has known anything and Clara can neither judge nor pardon me and besides, what I’m going to tell you now she is unaware of. She loved me. I wanted to leave. She followed me. We had nothing. I stole money from her father and we left. She was fifteen and I was eighteen.”

He stopped speaking. He seemed to have forgotten Sylvie. She didn’t know what to say but his fierce vehemence touched her. She forced herself to assume the calmest and most measured of tones and to ask:

“And next, what did you do?”

But he was silent for a long time. Now awareness was returning and a dreadful feeling of shame. What was this drunken confession going to make her think of him? At last he managed to control himself, and answer:

“Next we got married. We lived in Poland, Germany and finally in France. How we got here and what poverty we lived in I won’t try to tell you.”

“But all that’s over now! Now you’re happy, married and a father; you have your profession and a future ahead of you”.

“A future,” he said quietly; “I believe in destiny, a curse. I believe I was destined to be a good-for-nothing, a charlatan, and I can’t escape it. You can’t escape your fate.”

He waited a long time for the sound of her voice, but she said nothing. Her beautiful face was pale and weary.

“Tell me more about your wife,” she finally asked, “and about your child. The curse you speak of, even if it’s on you, will be gone before it affects your child, since he will live in a happy atmosphere, among worthy people. He won’t know about your desires and your remorse. Isn’t that enough?”

He leaned over quickly, grasped her hand and kissed it.

“Thank you, *madame*,” he said in a low voice.

Then, without saying farewell, he hastened from the room, out of the house and disappeared.

## Chapter 11

Clara had put the baby to bed and was waiting for Dario to come back. She had lit the lamp and, as she usually did, left the shutters and window open. When he was on his way home to her, and still in the street among strangers, he'd lift his eyes, catch sight of this light and his heart would rejoice.

In their youth when her father and mother had gone up to go to bed, leaving her alone in the small room at street level (everywhere along the walls in their long, narrow frames creaking, moaning and sighing stood the clocks)<sup>43</sup> she used to light a candle and by its light would begin preparing her lessons for the next day. She was a little, fifteen year old school girl in a brown dress with apron and bib, two long pig-tails at her back and smooth, pale cheeks. Dario was a vagabond, a poor apprentice watchmaker with holes in his boots. She would sit her book on her father's work-bench, among all the open clocks, their delicate hearts stopped, devoid of life; she practised her lessons in a hushed voice. The candle smoked, the room was cold and dark; she could hear the sound of the waves against the breakwater and sometimes a soldier singing on his way home from the tavern, or a vehicle's clatter along the nearby boulevard and again, occasionally, the noise of a quarrel at the port.

When her parents had gone to bed in their room upstairs, Clara would move the candle close to the window, pushing it along the workbench, so that its feeble light could be seen from the

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<sup>43</sup> Le français entre parenthèses se lit : « partout sur les murs, dans leurs caisses étroites et longues, grinçaient, gémissaient et soupiraient les pendules. » Ceci est un bon exemple de l'espèce de phrase qui affleure très souvent dans l'œuvre de Némirovsky. Il y a une inversion du verbe (ou des verbes) et le sujet termine la phrase. Nous avons commenté cette caractéristique dans le détail dans notre chapitre sur le style.

outside, and then she would unlock the chains and padlocks on the door. What a terrifying moment! Her heart still fluttered at this memory, after so many years . . . Were the grating of the locks and the clank of the falling chains going to wake the parents upstairs? Dario would prowl around in the streets waiting for the signal. Just like to-day when he saw the light in the window he would know all was well and they were fortunate; the father had seen nothing; the neighbours hadn't gossiped. He could safely stay with her until dawn. She used to snuff the candle when she heard his step and would stand close by the door; Dario would press against her and take her in his arms. They had never been caught out.<sup>44</sup>

In Europe, amongst the thousands of lights in the street, Dario would notice her lighted window in the poor hotel in the *quartier latin* or in the small dwelling they had occupied at Saint-Ouen and would immediately feel warm and reassured. He would think, "Everything's all right."

When he came in, even before he spoke, she would quickly smile. That was also a custom she'd never give up. Everything was going along well now; they had a home, food but she would never forget the nights when not a morsel of bread remained nor any coal to warm themselves. This smile, then as now, meant, "Things are going all right, see. Another day gone. We're alive and together. What more could we ask for?"

As soon as Dario came in she got up and served the meal. He ate slowly, enjoying deep within his body this sense of fulfilment and rest that affords satisfied hunger. What joy to see Dario lift the food to his mouth, slowly chew it and say to herself that she was sure of food for

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<sup>44</sup> Dans ce paragraphe et dans celui qui le précède, Clara se rappelle sa jeunesse. Il est important de conserver le sens du rappel du passé et presque de rêverie qui se fait sentir dans les deux paragraphes. Aussi avons-nous traduit l'imparfait des verbes par leur forme plus étendue en anglais, par exemple « rôdait » par « would prowl ».

this evening and again for the whole week, perhaps for the whole month. Who could say? Every day Dario went to *La Caravelle*, Wardes was cured but seemed unable to do without him because Dario set out every day for the beautiful house he had so often spoken about and where he was received like a prince.

At last she heard the sound of the gate opening and Dario's step in the garden. How slowly he was walking! How late he was! But she wasn't concerned; from the moment he was here with her, alive, nothing terrible, really terrible could happen. He came in. He walked towards her and kissed her. Then he sat near her and was silent, his hands at rest.

But she had already stood up. She prepared his meal. He forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls, but soon pushed the meal away.

"I'm not hungry, darling. I ate at *La Caravelle*."

"Really? Again? How tired you look!"

He didn't answer.

She took in her arms the baby who had woken, cradled him against her, settled him down and sat close to her husband on the trunk covered by an old blanket. They didn't feel comfortable in armchairs that were hard, formal and intended for visits, a non-existent family and clients. For them the hard trunk which had seen all the railway stations in Europe was a place of rest, a sure refuge.

She squeezed up against Dario's shoulder.

"Yes, you are tired. You've been happier however these last weeks, more calm. You've been breathing better. You weren't frightened any longer, I felt it. When I came back from hospital

you were like a beast pursued by a hunter, a poor beast, breathless, quivering, with bloody paws,” she said quietly and with a smile.

She took his hand and kissed it.

“But to-day, I can feel you trembling again. Are you afraid? What’ve you done?”

“I haven’t done anything,” he said with effort, “and I’m not frightened. There’s nothing to be afraid of Clara.”

“Are you unhappy, Dario?”

Dario’s pale and trembling mouth pursed. He was silent a moment, but answered:

“No.”

Did you stay at the Wardes’ for long?”

“Not very long. Madame Wardes has left.”

“But . . . yesterday, weren’t you aware of anything? Did they leave like that, without saying good-bye to you? What about your fees?”

“Fees, ah, that’s what you’re concerned about? No, no. Don’t worry. At least Wardes is still here in Monte Carlo but Madame Wardes, she’s left.”

“You say that in a strange way. Left, what do you mean? She’ll come back won’t she?”

“She won’t come back.”

“Never?”

“No. Never.”

“But how do you know, Dario?”



He seemed to hesitate, then shrugged his shoulders; he was thinking “What won’t I tell her? What wouldn’t she understand, my wife who loves me? And besides what’s there to hide? Nothing, from her or myself. Sylvie Wardes isn’t the woman for me.”

He took a crumpled letter from his pocket and held it out to Clara.

“Here’s what I got this morning.”

She read:

*“Dear doctor,*

*I’m leaving and won’t ever come back to La Caravelle. During Philippe’s illness and since his recovery and latest lunacy, you’ve shown yourself so helpful and loyal that my only regret in leaving is not having said good-bye to you and not having shaken your hand. This departure which I’d been preparing a long time has been made urgent and necessary by an unforeseen circumstance. I think I’ll be living in Paris from now on. Here is my address. If you are in need of sincere friendship, of comfort, remember me.*

*Sylvie Wardes.*

Clara slowly folded the letter.

“You got this letter this morning, so what were you going to do at *La Caravelle*?”

He gave a weak smile.

“I don’t know. It was ridiculous. I wanted to see the house again.”

He said in a muted voice:

“You aren’t jealous Clara? You know you’re the only one I love in this world, but this woman isn’t like other women. Between her and everything I’ve seen until now, except you,

Clara, and our child there is a distance as great as that from heavens to the earth. I don't know how to express it to you . . . I've never seen its like. A human creature without affectation, selfishness and greed, for whom money and this world's riches mean nothing and who is at the same time good and helpful, perceptive and intelligent. Perhaps there are a lot of people like that in her world (although I don't believe it), but certainly for me it was rare and extraordinary. That was why I was fond of her, like a sister," he said, raising his eyes towards Clara. "I never stopped talking to her about you and the child. She always listened to me. She always comforted me. For several months, since Wardes' illness and even more since this disgusting brute was cured, I used to go to see her every day and she greeted me with so much kindness and understanding I became fond of her," he repeated despairingly. "That's it Clara. I can't say it in any other way . . . You're not angry Clara?"

"No. I know there are lots of things I can't do for you. I'm a simple and uneducated woman."

"You have all the qualities, my darling wife," Dario said tenderly. "The difference between her and you no doubt comes from this, to put it simply, she belongs to a people who, for centuries, has been free of hunger, has never had to go in search of food like our ancestors and us and can allow itself the luxury of unselfishness and honour—and we can't," he said bitterly.

"Why did she leave, Dario? I, I would never have left my husband."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> La phrase française se lit, « Moi, je n'aurais pas quitté mon mari. » On pourrait traduire ainsi, « I, myself would never leave my husband » où l'emploi du pronom personnel réfléchi « myself » signale la résolution de Clara, mais elle ne s'exprimerait de cette façon, puisqu' elle vient de dire elle-même qu'elle est ignorante. Comme nous l'avons déjà fait remarquer, nulle part dans *Le maître des âmes* Némirovsky ne se sert de l'italique pour souligner le ton affectif d'un mot. En revanche, elle est prodigue dans son emploi de points de suspension pour faire ressentir au lecteur une variété d'émotions ou pour impliquer une idée particulière. Donc, nous avons décidé de traduire comme signe d'une vigoureuse affirmation, la répétition, « I, I'd never leave my husband ».

“You don’t know what a brute Wardes is. I regret with all my heart not letting him die like a dog. Listen, I’ve never told you. It was a month ago. Madame Wardes’ child, little Claude, a weak, pale creature was ill. She’s not our beautiful Daniel,” he said proudly. “It was only a chill and she was not in danger but her fever persisted, in spite of all my care, and Wardes wasn’t there. This woman was dead-tired, worried and alone; I thought what would I do if I knew my little Daniel was ill and his mother was alone? Nothing would hold me back. I’d leave everything, I’d hurry to you. I asked where Wardes was. In Monte-Carlo again I made up my mind to go and get him. When I told Madame Wardes this, she smiled and appeared to think I was still very innocent, very ignorant of evil. I left and waited at the casino. I couldn’t go into the members’ area. I waited in the vestibule,” he said, remembering how he had handed his card to a lounge valet and the words he had written: ‘Doctor Asfar presents his compliments to M. Wardes’—the words were the same he used when requesting his fees; he had tried to find another expression but unsuccessfully—‘and regrets to inform you that little Claude is extremely ill, and her mother is by herself. He takes the liberty of advising him to return immediately to his wife and child.’”

I waited for two, three, four hours, I was furious. If I’d been able to get my hands on Wardes I think I would’ve dragged him by force, but he didn’t come and eventually the valet entered and returned my card. There wasn’t an answer. And Wardes only came back four days later. The child was cured but she could just as well have died in his absence. He came back, changed, didn’t say a word to his wife and left for Paris while Elinor ( I told you Wardes is Elinor’s lover; she calls herself Elinor Barnett, formerly Mouravine, and goes under that name now), he

continued speaking very quickly, his expression feverish and worn—“this Elinor was waiting for him in the car.”

“If it was me I wouldn’t have left him,” Clara repeated.

“But are you aware he wanted to drag her along to mix with whores and prostitutes? . . . I can’t even talk to you about that; you are unacquainted with these vices, this filthy debauchery, and do you know what ‘the unforeseen circumstances’ were she talks about in her letter? I found out about it from Ange Martinelli. Yes, everything that happens in Nice and roundabout holds no secrets for him. When Wardes returned from Paris, he was with this woman, Elinor. She wasn’t happy about waiting for him in the car. She came into the house. Besides I know why; it was a tactic to get the wife to leave, to get the divorce Madame Wardes would never agree to but this way he could argue she abandoned the marital home. It’s impossible she didn’t work this out; she saw and understood everything,” he said, picturing in memory Madame Wardes’ eyes, those deep, piercing eyes which seemed to read in the depths of hearts; but in this matter, doubtlessly, she weakened.

“Why didn’t she want to divorce him? So does she still love him?”

“No, she’s no longer in love with him. She’s not still in love with him, I’m sure. I’m telling you she’s no longer in love with him. It’s impossible,” he exclaimed in a sort of rage.

“Well, why? I don’t understand.”

“No doubt because she’s a practising Catholic.”

Clara suddenly asked with an imperceptible smile:

“Is she very beautiful?”

“Yes,” Dario said in a muted voice, “very, very beautiful.”

“Then she’s happy to have been forced to leave this brutal husband she no longer loved. Perhaps there’s another man around. What can God do for a woman? Love’s her only defence.”

“She’s not like other women,” Dario repeated.

“But in marrying Wardes she may well have been motivated by love or desire for wealth or simply by some human sentiment, just like us. So, she’s no angel. She’s a woman.”

“I prefer,” Dario said raising his head and watching her with a slight smile both mocking and tender, “I prefer believing, Clara, she’s an angel.”

“She’s not at all like me,” he said following a moment’s silence. “She has reactions and thoughts different from mine. What she seeks in life isn’t what we seek. What we call ‘happiness’ isn’t what she sees happiness as being and it’s the same with misfortune. In the deepest poverty, she wouldn’t plead her own cause. She’d seek to save . . .”

He paused, not knowing how to name this incorruptible, divine essence he found in her, but not in himself.

“. . . She’d try to preserve her pride and her conscience. She wouldn’t deprive others, ever, neither for herself nor, for example her child, or any man.”

“Well, she doesn’t love her child.”

“She does, Clara, but her understanding of love is different from ours. That’s just it, she’s a different being.”

He thought:

“A soul . . . Yes, that’s what I was seeking, the word I knew nothing about before meeting her. It’s not what’s commonly called soul, that pale lamp which dimly lights up thick masses of flesh, but a grand and brilliant light.”

He said:

“She accepts things and it’s not cowardice but pride. She’s not afraid of poverty and then . . . when she looked occasionally at me . . .”

He covered his eyes with his hand and said slowly in a hushed tone:

“I felt peace settle in me.”

Clara got up, lay the child down again, tucked him in, left the room. When she returned Dario hadn’t moved. He was sitting on the old chest, his forehead against the wall. Suddenly she said:

“Do you remember when you were young your mother forcing you to steal an officer’s silver table setting, how the officer beat you, how you nearly died from the blows and how before giving the stolen setting to your mother you took and hid a little silver spoon and gave it to me as a present. I wouldn’t take it so you sold it for a *rouble* and spent it on sweets. Do you remember?”

“But why are you talking to me about this? I hate my past! I hate it!”

“Because you’re it and it’s you, poor Dario. You can’t change your flesh, you can’t change your blood, or your desire for wealth or revenge when you’ve been offended. Another person, Dario, wouldn’t love you the way you are and you couldn’t really love her.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You’d admire her but you wouldn’t love her. What did you say? A sister? I’m your sister. Yes much more so than your wife. We speak the same language. The other is a foreign language you’d like to learn . . .”

“That I mumble my way through, that I spell out,” he said bitterly.

“But that you’ll never master.”

“Who knows?”

She stroked his hair.

“Dario it’s a great blessing for a husband and wife to speak the same language, to have been hungry together, to have been humiliated together. Don’t you think so?”

Without waiting for an answer, she left him and went to do the washing-up in the kitchen. She was quietly singing. For a long time Dario listened to the sound of the running water and this song . . . how many times he must have heard it . . . In the Crimean tavern opposite their poor dwelling the sailors used to sing it in chorus during the long winter nights. Clara was stirring up both regret and anger within him, like certain memories you’re ashamed of and yet are dear to you because they are your very life itself and appear to flow through you like your blood.

When Clara returned, he had thrown himself on the bed without undressing, as he used to do sometimes, and his head was buried in the pillow, covered by the sheet he had pulled down over his face while he pretended to be asleep.

## Chapter 12

*La Caravelle* was unoccupied. Dario's only thought in leaving was less about being with Madame Wardes again than getting out of Nice where he was forever in search of her and where, besides, he hadn't been successful. Well, it was August, the low season, and at a time when Nice was not yet fashionable in summer and its inhabitants deserted it with the arrival of hot weather.

Leaving had always been in Dario's mind the only desirable remedy. Where others worked harder or sought oblivion in wine or women, he dreamed of express trains and different towns well aware that in these he would find only misfortune and destitution, but destitution of a different kind no doubt. That was already something to the good.

He at last managed to reach an agreement with one of his fellow countrymen, a dentist, about renting an apartment in Paris, moving in together and splitting the costs.

Three months later he was in Paris. The removal expenses had been met with Wardes' fees, extracted however with great difficulty. Dario had chosen an apartment in a decent neighbourhood so that he could have a suitable address on his letter head and visiting cards but the very dear rent was a heavy burden. He had hoped to have patients straight away. The dentist assured him of an excellent clientele, but alas! nothing changed. Money, money again, the endless calculations, hopes forever dashed, money spent even before it was earned. This was his lot! Nights when you go to sleep, exhausted, knowing that tomorrow won't be better because the best thing that can happen is that tomorrow will be like the day just gone, so dreary and bitter. To be frightened of looking ahead, doing calculations. From time to time getting your hands on some money you'd like to put in a hundred different places at the same time and seeing it slip away



between your hands. Getting to a sick person's house, caring for him with your best efforts, scrupulously, courageously, comfort him, console the family, leave, be woken in the early hours of the morning by a desperate call, be called a saviour, send your bill, get no reply, write again. "Doctor Dario Asfar, as is customary etc.", finally get a small down payment—and the balance as soon as it's possible. Never set eyes on the balance. Find out the family has gone to another doctor, because the doctor, Dario Asfar, was too selfish, pressured them with requests for money and besides not owning a car too often came late. Such was Dario's life.

It was then he got into the habit of increasing his bill by adding two or three visits he hadn't really made, relying on these to make up for what he was owed and would never receive.

The dentist and his wife were uncouth, dull and lazy. They had three children who together with Daniel made a hellish noise. Ceaselessly from the household there issued the sounds of shouting and quarrelling.<sup>46</sup>

Dario and the dentist found that by living under the same roof there were some benefits: when a patient came to see him, Dario would say:

"You should get your teeth looked after. You can't chew properly the way they are. The burning and bitterness you complain of aren't due to anything else. Since you're here, I would urgently recommend seeing my neighbour. We've reached an agreement. He charges special prices for my patients."

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<sup>46</sup> La phrase se lit en français : « Jamais ne cessaient les cris du ménage, leurs querelles ». Nous avons conservé l'inversion.

Dario got a percentage of his neighbour's fees for every new patient and the dentist recommended Dario to his patients, but came the date when fees were due and those in arrears called on to pay, each lay in wait for the postman, ready to tear each other to pieces over a bulky letter addressed to either.

These eternal calculations pursued Dario to his patient's bedside. He wasn't yet highly enough placed to allow any attitude at all towards them. He often forgot to be light-hearted; to employ the customary jokes and the final words spoken from the doorway to the cancer patient unaware of his illness: "Now, now, it's not really serious," causing him to think, " Maybe, after all. He neglected the little jokes, optimistic expressions and flattery when he treated women. He couldn't manage to rid himself of his foreign accent and miserable, uncultivated manner.

Arriving home at the end of a long day's work and before joining Clara, he'd wait a few moments at the entrance to the house. It was the only time his mind was at rest. Inside there'd be the gas and electricity bills. He'd add up the outstanding debts, see Clara's red-rimmed and half closed eyes, the result of too much sewing the previous evening under lamp-light; he'd remember the child needed shoes and he himself a new overcoat. He'd allow himself a moment's respite in the noisy street opposite this iron bridge; he no longer watched these melancholy, leafless trees, the autumn fog, the gloomy, sad people hurrying along; he forgot the smell of sickness and poverty he couldn't get rid of; it wafted about him and permeated his clothes. He stopped thinking . . . he rallied his forces as if in an unequal battle in which if death spares you for a moment more and you're unable to flee, you strengthen your grip on your weapon, think of a loved one, fling yourself forward, knowing finally in your heart you'd give your all, be prepared to lose your soul if that's the cost of survival.



## Chapter 13

A few days before Christmas, Paris experienced a week of gloomy and freezing weather. Sylvie Wardes and her child were now living in Paris with a relative on the *rue de Varenne*. It was almost lunch-time; she'd gone out on foot; she was hurrying to get to the house, standing with its old walls and its chimneys, tall and reassuring;<sup>47</sup> it was a refuge.

Sylvie had left Wardes. Probably he'd ask for and get a divorce because she'd deserted the marital home. Later she was to remember these months, in which she'd surrendered to despair, as the saddest time in her life. Up till this period she had always been, in the good or the bad, confident where she was heading and sure of herself. Now she was lost in deep uncertainty.

She was nearing the house when, near the *porte-cochère*, she saw a man standing still in the fog and rain, his hands buried in his pockets and a hat, dripping wet, on his head. When he saw her, the man took a step forward, calling her by name. She recognized Dario.

“Dario Asfar,” she said.

He smiled.

“You recognise me, madame? You haven't forgotten me? I . . . was passing by, madame, forgive me and I was thinking perhaps you might allow me in the way you used to down there at *La Caravelle*. But I wasn't sure. I've been waiting . . .”

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<sup>47</sup> Nous avons fait remarquer, à plusieurs reprises, que Némirovsky emploie des adjectifs qui présentent un problème pour le traducteur qui cherche à saisir leur sens. Ici, Némirovsky décrit les « cheminées hautes et calmes. »

En employant « calmes » nous croyons que la traductrice veut que le lecteur reconnaisse les connotations de chaleur et de tranquillité entourant le mot « cheminées » mais comment exprimer cet effet en employant un seul mot? Comme l'adjectif qui rend le mieux ces sentiments, nous avons choisi « reassuring ».

He didn't tell her he'd been stamping his feet a long time in the freezing mud, begging God for a miracle that he might see her. And, suddenly, she had just appeared. But perhaps she was going to turn him away. He grasped her hand. He awkwardly excused himself, speaking so quickly that at first she barely understood what he was saying. He gradually calmed down however and said quietly at last:

"I don't know how I dare come to your home. I've often wanted to but couldn't find a pretext."

"I'm happy to see you," she said gently, "and a pretext isn't necessary. Come inside. It's cold and raining."

He followed her. He was disturbed to such an extent that he took in nothing, neither the old building's courtyard, the hallway nor this cold, dark lounge-room. She finally took him into a small, well-lit room and left him alone.

A short time later she returned, having changed her wet, freezing clothes and bringing the tea. She poured him a boiling-hot cup he enjoyed drinking.

"You're trembling. How cold you must have been . . ."

"I'm still weak. I've been sick. I had to stay in bed more than a month."

She asked him about his wife and child. They hesitated, searching for words. She hadn't changed, he thought—black dress, bare hands, diamond ring on her finger, elegant head held high with its sincere and lively movements, the long, inclined neck, dark hair flecked with silver, rounded, unblemished forehead and this profound, wise look of complete understanding.

He took her hand and suddenly lifted it to his face, his frozen cheek, not daring to touch it with his lips.

“I’m cold,” he said at last. “I’m tired. I see only the unfortunate, the sick and the desperate. This is why I came.”

“What can I do for you?”

“Nothing, nothing!” he exclaimed in a terror-stricken tone. “I’m not asking you for anything. Just don’t turn me away. Accept my presence.”

“Why did you leave Nice? You were doing well down there, weren’t you? Do you have patients here? Are you making a good living?”

“No, things are going badly, badly. I can barely make the two ends meet. And my sickness has disrupted everything. Firstly, because I couldn’t do anything and as well a few families that accepted me chose another doctor. I’m dogged by bad luck and feel so responsible for my wife’s unhappiness that all I can do is get out of the house.”

“Responsible?”

“Yes. Why did I drag her here? Why did I have a child? Why? What right did I have? I wanted to play the big man, play the French doctor, me, yes me! But what am I? Mud. I was born to sell nougat or carpets, not to be a doctor. My efforts to lift myself up failed every time and I fell lower than before. My dream was to come and tell you my scientific research was on the right path,” he said, forcing himself to smile, “to present some moral dilemmas or announce my discovery of a new serum. And what can I tell you? I don’t have a *sou*. No, don’t say anything! Don’t offer me any money! The day I accept your money you can say: ‘That’s it. He’s what he was fated to be from birth, riff-raff.’ For the moment I’m still debating within myself and still have hopes. But what am I? A creature of earth,” he said in savage violence, “moulded of silt and

darkness. *Madame*, I profoundly ask your forgiveness. I shouldn't have annoyed you. You've done me a great deal of good."

He stood up.

"Good-bye, *madame*."

"Have you done something wrong?"

He gave a weak smile.

"I only know two people in the world who could ask me that without smiling—my wife and you. I've done nothing wrong. A debt is soon due and it's never out of my mind, I've already been able to defer twice but I can't put it off any longer. I hope against hope and tremble for my loved ones. What's to become of my wife and child without me? I'd steal, kill if necessary, I say this to you and I would say it before God if my mind could be at peace over their fate. I'm like a wild beast lost far from its forest. No one will feed my family unless they tear food away with their teeth . . . They don't know how to do that, how could they? My wife is frail and worn-out . . . my child little and weak . . ."

"Let me help you," Sylvie begged. "You can give me the money back later. Don't be ashamed."

"Never, never. I forbid you to offer me money. You, giving me money! Oh forgive me *Madame*, forgive me," he murmured lifting his hand to his forehead in a gesture both weary and distraught. "I'm still feverish. I'm ashamed. My troubles are so wretched. I'd rather confess to a crime."

“Don’t talk to me like that,” she suddenly said. “I don’t deserve it. You treat me sometimes as if I were . . . a heavenly being, not, like you, of this world. I’ve done some wrong things, and I keep on sinning and I sadly stray.”

“No, they’re not the same errors, nor the same temptations, the same faults. I’m happy about that. I like to feel you so much above me. And occasionally, I hate you,” he said more quietly,” but more than that I love you.”

She didn’t answer.

He humbly said:

“Would you be willing to see this savage madman again?”

“As often as you like,” she said . . . “Sad, sick, unhappy, alone, remember I’ll listen to you, you’ll be welcome and I’ll help you if you let me.”

He stood quickly and picked up the old, black leather briefcase he’d left on a chair.

“Thank you, Madame. I have to go now. I must make a call before dinner.” He bowed awkwardly. She extended a hand he scarcely dared to hold and shake. He left.



## Chapter 14

Another look at the *rue de Varenne*, at Sylvie's house and those around it, and Dario slowly walked away. In former times he was forever picturing these beautiful, warm but inaccessible rooms with their lights burning and children playing on the soft carpets. For the first time he'd seen them with his own eyes. Through the half-opened shutters he looked enviously at the concierges' lodges, the shops at the back and the craftsmen's ground-floor rooms. How happy they all were!

People used to say to him:

"But you've lived in France for so long! . . . You're almost one of us! . . ."

This word 'almost' evoked in him a world of inexplicable feelings and bitter experiences. He had no friends, no one to support him and no relatives. Nothing could make him feel that he had the right to be here. In spite of himself, he saw himself like a beast outside its burrow sensing traps everywhere, sharpening its teeth and claws and knowing that in these alone would it find support. In the metro corridor, hemmed in from all directions by the crowd, he stopped for a moment and took a letter out of his pocket, re-reading it with deep attention.

*Dear doctor,*

*In reply to your letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, I must inform you of the impossibility of my being again able to defer the payments for the amount you owe me and which you agreed to pay by cheque. I have charged only reasonable interest. I hope you will take the necessary steps to have the cheque covered by the due date. My son has left la Cuisine and is totally recovered. The*

*sanatorium was excellent. But you must know how much that cost and that I have to recoup it in one way or other. He has a job in a shoe factory where he is highly regarded.*

*The season is good. There are a lot of outsiders, although with the exchange rate the class of people has really dropped. Elinor Barnett whom you know has been one of our clients. She is living with M. Wardes and is to marry him. She is now in Paris. Here is her address in case you want to see her. I advise you to do so: 27, boulevard Bineau, Neuilly-sur-Seine.*

*I remain, dear doctor, your good friend.*

Ange Martinelli

Wardes had rented a house surrounded by a garden in Neuilly for his mistress.<sup>48</sup> “We have a lot of guests to-day”, the servant said in a confident and friendly tone; he was Wardes’ valet and knew Martinelli well and aware of the reason Dario had been called to Wardes’s house. “Cocktails are from seven to nine. Madame is dressing”.

“Please be kind enough”, Dario said shaking hands with him, “to ask Madame Barnett to be good enough to see me. I won’t keep her for long”, he added.

No. Not for long. A ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ and he would leave. And then ? What would he do? Only two courses of action now remained: Elinor or Sylvie . . . Elinor really should help him. If there were no funds for the cheque and Martinelli acted, it was prison for him, disgrace and the

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<sup>48</sup> Il faut noter ici la transition subite de la scène dans le métro où Dario lit la lettre de Martinelli à celle où le domestique de Wardes parle à Asfar. De toute évidence, Némirovsky oublia de rédiger un passage qui lierait les deux scènes. Dans leur préface du *Maître des âmes* Lienhardt et Philipponnat ont affirmé qu’ils ne sont pas intervenus dans le texte pour corriger de telles lacunes.

end of his career. If it only concerned him, he would've preferred prison to both these vain and humiliating resorts. "But I'm not alone", he murmured despairingly.

He was at last shown in and taken to a small room where Elinor must keep her dresses; there were cupboards along the walls; you could sense the faint smell of perfumed furs. He was left alone a long time and then a maid came in; she opened a drawer and took from a leather container a pair of gold shoes wrapped in black paper. Dario watched her avidly intent on noting and interpreting favourably all these signs of wealth.

Elinor appeared: she was a slim girl with the play of steel-like muscles below her tender, almost transparent flesh. She was a redhead and her eyes were alert and hard. She was polishing her nails; she appeared impatient and uneasy.

"I'm happy to see you, doctor," she began, "but . . ."

He interrupted with a clumsy abruptness that was almost insolent.

"For the love of God, let me speak. I find myself in a desperate situation . . . that you're responsible for without meaning to be."

He related what had occurred. Elinor, unmoved, allowed him to speak.

"I beg you to lend me this money. You're now in a situation . . ."

"You don't know my situation," she said.

"Listen! You're my only hope. Do you understand what that means? There's a cheque I can't meet, prison and disgrace. I haven't got a *sou*. I've turned this way and that. I've been sick a long time. No-one pays me. Not only do they give me nothing but they are furious because I dare ask for what I'm owed. My patients are poor, it's true. They all promise: 'Next month, doctor . . .' but I need the money now. You're my last resort".

“What is it that you risk?”

“Prison”.

“A light sentence.”

“Do you think so?” he asked as he looked at her in hate.

“Happy, rich, satisfied, and having stolen another woman’s wealth, she’s making fun of me! She wouldn’t lift a hand to save me. She wouldn’t say a word. She wasn’t so proud when she was carrying Mouravine’s child!”

“My career ruined,” he said, “and poverty for my wife and child. A light penalty, what a word to use! But you’re wrong to turn me away, I swear it to you Elinor. I can be a faithful friend and an implacable enemy. Don’t rely on my weakness, my present poverty. One day perhaps you’ll beg me to help you . . . as I’ve already done. Don’t say no. You don’t know what direction your life or mine will take . . . Just like me you started from way down. You can see where we are now and what the difficulties were. One day it will be I who can help you. You’re on a slippery road, beset by pitfalls and you’re a long way from your goal. Never make an unnecessary enemy”.

Nodding her head, she gave a smile that was both hesitant and hard.

“I like you better like this than when you’re begging for charity. Believe me doctor, I know how to be grateful enough for what you’ve done for me and my friendship for you is genuine. I’ve spoken highly of you to Wardes. After all, we’ve got shared memories . . . painful ones but they’re the kinds that bind you closer.

She moved to the dressing table and made up her cheeks and lips.

“Do you remember Mimosa’s house? The ends of the month when the left-overs for the week were served with a disgusting sauce and the scenes with the *générale*? I can confess now, doctor: the only man I found interesting back then, who even pleased me, was you, yes, you with your eyes like a famished wolf’s, like burning coals when they looked at a woman. You can accept the compliment without any concerns. I know you won’t take advantage of it to ask me for money. To begin with, because you’re too much in love with Wardes’ wife . . .”

“Be quiet”, Dario said in a harsh voice.

She finished:

“ . . . and because you know . . .”

“That won’t make you spend one *centime*”, Dario said. “I know. I know you.”

“I don’t have any money, my dear Dario; you don’t mind my calling you Dario the way I used to at Mimosa’s House? I’m Wardes’ mistress, not his wife. He’s the most self-centred person in the world and the most miserly in spite of his extravagance. For himself, yes, nothing’s too dear! But for others! Here, nothing’s mine, except my dresses. Not the house, the furniture, not even . . .”

She showed him her jewels.

“Don’t you recognize them? They’re Madame Wardes’. Before going, she left them for her husband. He covers me in them, decorates me like a window display, as if I were a living shop sign. That’s good publicity, the company brand, but they’re his and he locks them in his safe when the work for the day or night is finished. If I stay with him . . .”

“Out of love”, Dario said ironically.<sup>49</sup> She shrugged her shoulders.

“We’re talking seriously, little one. If I stay with him it’s because I hope to marry him, and then . . . if the firm falls into my hands and . . . But for the moment that’s just a dream, and the fact is, with great difficulty, I’ve been able to put aside some thousands of francs and there’s nothing I can help you with.”

That’s all right”, Dario said. “Good-bye, I’m leaving”.

He shook her hand; she held his for a moment.

“You’re still burning with fever. Have you been seriously ill? What are you going to do? Don’t go. Where could you go now? It’s late. No one will put you up for the night. Stay here. I’ll talk to you later. I’ve got a plan, a project . . . and you can be useful to me.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Attend your reception? Don’t consider it! Look at me!”

“What? Your clothes? But do you know who comes to my home? No-one will look at you. You’re not acquainted with those kinds of persons. Some are drunk from the morning on. Others come here, just as you came, hoping to find the thousand *franc* note they need, the wealthy mistress or the backer. Stay, stay, I really mean it.

Is there something you need help with?”

“Yes.”

“And you’d . . . pay for it?”

“Money? Nothing. But working together could be good for you and me. Stay, Dario.”

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<sup>49</sup> L’emploi très rare d’un adverbe qui donne le ton émotionnel d’un énoncé.

Dario hesitated a moment.

“All right, I’ll stay”, he said.

## Chapter 15

There they all were, all those Dario had caught sight of in his short stay in Nice. The same minor characters, the same heads you see appear with their same facial features and their same hypocrisy for ten, fifteen, twenty years, in places like them just as unchangeable and all that until death carries them off, or prison (and, when it's only prison, they return like the bodies of the shipwrecked the sea unceasingly throws up on beaches and then takes back again).

Half-hidden behind a curtain, Dario watched them. He was beside himself with tiredness and the chilled champagne had gone to his head; he couldn't eat and his throat was choked by anxiety. All this food displayed in the Russian fashion (Elinor's first marriage had bizarrely mixed Slavic features with its American character) made his stomach turn.

Wardes had rented a furnished mansion for Elinor on the *boulevard Bineau*. Probably, it had belonged to a French family which had moved or been ruined. In the plan of the rooms, the large French windows and this circular lounge-room, where he found himself, Dario recognized the same noble proportions and atmosphere both welcoming and stately which reminded him of the drawing room in the house on the *rue de Varenne*.

He didn't move. He observed the crush of people. An innocent, an uninitiated, a Frenchman would have thought:

“Here they are, the rich, thinking only of enjoying themselves, dancing or drinking.”

But here none of these he saw was in search of pleasure but their daily bread just like him, exactly like him, as Elinor had said.



Besides, he recognized many similar faces, greedy, bold and uneasy in appearance. Here, how many like him! . . . How many brothers!

In secret mockery and with that powerful and deep bitterness that alone brings relief when you see your shameful and naked self, he thought:

“Yes, indeed, they are brothers, brothers who’ve also come from foreign places the French can’t even imagine. I, Dario Asfar, know all about that. I’ve rolled in the same mud they’ve come out of. I’ve eaten the same bitter bread. I’ve shed the same tears, quivered with the same desires.”

He smiled: Bah! He thought he was alone! But, here it was, his family! How many brothers unrecognized until this evening!

“What if I touched this one on the shoulder? I can guess his nervous shudder, his stifled cry because that’s the way I’d react. You’d believe someone’s come to arrest you. Yes, you, my brother, so fat, appearing so well nourished, looking without physical desire but in humble and stubborn hope at the shoulders of that bejewelled woman . . . I know you, my brother, you’re from Salonika. Our fathers worked in the ports together, bought and sold in little taverns, drank in the same low dives and cheated with greasy cards on small freighters on the Black Sea. And you, my brother, where are you from? Bucharest? Kichinev? Syria? Palestine? You, I met you in Warsaw—holes in the soles of your shoes and no overcoat amid the snow—you or your brother. Your hands, reddened and swollen by the cold, in spite of the pleasant warmth of the heaters and the manicurist’s care, and your poor back’s sensitivity to the cold, now bowed under the fine material of your clothing, are a legacy of that time when you wandered in the freezing wind. I recognize them! And you, my brother handsome young man and you, my sister, beautiful

brunette, if I spoke to you of Odessa and the red-light district near the port you'd recall the surroundings of your innocent childhood . . . You, renowned financier, friend of ministers, decorated, you'll never forget you've gone hungry! You, film magnate, you've never forgotten you were frightened and you stole. In you the French will see a crook triumphant but I, I know you, you're a pitiful and unhappy swindler. You deserve to enrich only those who know how to use you, just as you've used others. To each his prey, according to his cunning and strength!

He looked at the troubled French among them; this playwright debauched by drugs and women who knows his plays no longer sell but must give his rivals the impression of sexual vigour, extravagance and bubbling personality so that people might say: "He hasn't deteriorated, he's just the same as before!" He looked at the professional gambler, condemned forever to win and suffer every setback (if he loses people say his luck's turned and it would be better for him if he were dead). He looked at Wardes . . . and suddenly Dario thought:

"What they have in common, all those I see here, what makes them alike, isn't the need for money, as Elinor thinks, or pleasure but the necessity to keep going, hang on longer than their adversary. Conceal their weaknesses and wounds. Because their mental strength is the unique capital keeping them going. What sicknesses, anxieties and inexplicable fears must these unfortunates share, condemned as they are to the never-ending search for success! Ah! If I dared . . . What they need is a confessor, someone who knows about their filthy secrets, someone to listen to them and send them off with a *te absolvo*, especially someone to let them satisfy themselves without any remorse . . . Drug them! That's what's needed," he thought. He recalled Wardes' frantic pleas: "You've got to drug me, doctor! Yes, firstly listen to their confession and then drug them. It's a guaranteed money-earner," he murmured, remembering such and such a

famous name. “Why not? Keep on going the way I’m living? Make my son a beggar the way I’ve been? Why?”

He looked at Elinor’s rowdy crowd of guests.

“I really thought I’d never see you again, though, when I left behind the mud and my childhood poverty. And here in Paris, in the heart of Paris, again I find you, and you’re amongst the richest and most envied, most despised perhaps, but envied, for all that. Well, what good has been this long hard road, these fruitless efforts, these studies, all this reading, this poverty, what good to have borne all that, what good to accept light-heartedly the same fate for my son? There’s only one future for me, be a charlatan, cultivate the vices and ills of the rich as you’d sow a field”, he thought; “Here I am now, with all my efforts, my troubles and dreams, demeaning myself and again waiting for charity as before ! but this is the last time.”

The warmth, the music, these faces endlessly milling around before him increased his anxiety and induced a feeling of unreal elation that quickly disappeared as he thought:

“But all that will remain a dream, speculation if I’ve only got patients who are concierges, mercers, minor employees, labourers as my sole clientele! It’s the kind of people here I’ve got to get to!”

Nevertheless, he didn’t move. He watched amongst a circle of drunken men a well-built woman, blond, hair loose, heavily made-up dancing alone in the Russian style with a handkerchief in her hand and, casting off her shining shoes, she finished the dance in her stockings. He recognized her; he had seen her at the Mouravines’; she was pretending to be drunk; she too, what she was looking for here was her daily bread, earned by pandering to others.

## Chapter 16

At last Elinor approached and gestured to him. He followed her and in passing<sup>50</sup> said “You’ve forgotten me, Elinor!”

“No, wait, I haven’t forgotten you. Listen, Dario, I’ve got a proposal. First of all, so that there’s no uncertainty between us, fully understand there can be no question of my lending you money. I’d give money to a lover, but not a friend. You don’t know the school I was educated in. Dying of hunger on the sidewalks in New York doesn’t teach anyone unselfishness or generosity, and even if by some miracle in childhood I’d been aware of these two feelings, my training course among the Mouravines would have been enough to make me forget them. Living with the *générale*, I don’t know if you really understand the education you got. But now it’s finished. I’ve got my degrees, I can guarantee you. I’m qualified to teach in my turn and all that learning isn’t forgotten! But I’m ready to propose a joint effort in a business which will profit you as much as me.”

She waited for him to say something. He was listening, saying nothing but his face leaning forward expressed close attention and mental calculation. He was feeling that particular tranquillity which takes hold of the mind at certain moments in life when you catch sight of your destiny, fortunate or unhappy, you’ve been created for. It seems you hear within a secret warning: “Now the die is cast. Close your eyes. Wait. Let it happen.”

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<sup>50</sup> En français la phrase se lit, « Il la suivit, et entre deux portes, il lui dit ». Malgré notre volonté de conserver les idiotismes en anglais, il est impossible de traduire littéralement « entre deux portes ».

“You know,” she said, “Wardes suffers from a mental disorder. He’s been caring for himself unsuccessfully for years. Every quack in the world has been striving to treat him, and he’ll go to the first doctor who can give him relief, no matter what the price. Can he get this relief? That’s your business. If you like, I’ll offer you a deal. I’m tired of seeing all Wardes’ money disappearing before my eyes and making others rich except me. I’ll guarantee sending him to you. In return, I want half your fees. Wardes is a goldmine for doctors.”

“Listen,” Dario said abruptly, in the same mysterious, greedy and secret tone he would have used twenty years before when he was the little vagabond in the big ports, the one never scared of any shady partnership, living on his wits, knowing only devious methods; “Listen hard! It’s not worth the trouble just for Wardes. It’s too little. He can’t get me out of my difficulties by himself. There’s not enough in it. As rich and as mad as he is, that’s not important. That deal would only benefit you but here’s what I propose; I don’t need one patient but a clientele. In that way all your friends are choice game. Are you willing to get me as much publicity as possible? Are you willing to say you’ve found a doctor as yet unrecognized, young, poor, but a genius? These mental illnesses, these functional disorders, these extraordinary fears that certainly no doctor could cure are a vast field of unlimited opportunity but there must be someone to vouch for me. I must have someone saying ‘Me, he cured me . . . he saved me! Go and see him. Listen to him . . .’ You’ll get fifty percent for every rich patient you send as soon as I get the fee myself.”

“Yes. We can agree on that,” she said slowly. “That’s how I get money for myself. If I didn’t get my cut from the tailor, the jeweller, the florist and the tie seller and didn’t bank on Wardes’ tastes, vices and illnesses, he’d manage to have me for nothing! He’s got a real talent for

exploiting and torturing those not as strong as he is. Ask Sylvie Wardes. Besides, if I was his wife I could look after my own interests. But I'm only his mistress. Too bad for him! ”

Dario wasn't listening. At last he said in prayerful tones:

“Elinor, you don't know what this moment means to me. I ask you again, I implore you again, lend me ten thousand francs until next March. It's not only a question of eating or saving me from prison; it's not even about my wife and child,” he said in a muted voice, “but about absolute ruin, total renunciation, of . . . but you can't understand! Help me, I beg you. Save me!”

She shook her head without answering.

“Will you?”

“No, Dario.”

“I'm lost,” he said so quietly that she guessed rather than heard his words.

“No. You're cleverer than you think. Cunning and strength are in your blood. In spite of yourself you can't get rid of them. You'll get out of trouble.”

He left her. The following day he went to Sylvie Wardes; she lent him ten thousand *francs* and Martinelli's cheque was met.

## Chapter 17

As he studied Dario's house, Wardes felt anger, hope and fear. He hadn't as yet gone in. He regarded the street Dario saw as middle-class and respectable. In Wardes' eyes it was poor and squalid. Could it possibly be that this little doctor, half-forgotten, who Elinor spoke well of, was at last the one he was waiting for, the one who would save him and bring him a cure and a life? For Wardes had never doubted that a cure was possible. He only had to find the man who had the knowledge, the key words, the healer, the sorcerer, the crank, the quack, what did it matter! And this little outsider, tormented, feverish-eyed (now he remembered seeing him leaning over his bed at Monte-Carlo and in *La Caravelle*), this wog, this unknown wasn't a dishonest man. He'd refused certain illegal practices. On the other hand, he wasn't an imbecile and knew how to face up to his responsibilities, since with Elinor . . .

Wardes would just as well have been frightened by an outright crook or a man with an unblemished conscience. These learned men, these benefactors of humanity, these upright, great professors weighed down under wealth and honours, Wardes feared and hated them. A Dario Asfar would understand him better. In their company he felt weak, guilty, humble. No doubt it was this that reassured Wardes; he wouldn't feel ashamed with this poor doctor. That was what Wardes needed. He could only feel perfectly at ease with inferiors. Now, here was the perfect alloy, necessary and desirable: Dario's humble situation and his knowledge (or guesswork) capable of helping him.

He had entered the house with his heart lighter and it was only at the moment when he asked the concierge: "What floor does Doctor Asfar live on?" that doubt and despair gripped him again.

How many times like this had he gone to one or the other! How many hopes! How many disappointments!

As the lift went slowly up puffing, creaking and groaning (it was an old house), Wardes, silent, felt once again attacked by these waves of distress and rage invading him and swamping his being. He wanted to die. Just as you throw well away a piece of clothing that has caught fire, in the same way at times he would have wanted, in a violent and murderous act inflicted on himself or others, to cast aside this body betraying him. God! To be free, strong, able to sleep, work, enjoy! . . . And these incredible possessions, he expected to get them from an unimportant local doctor! For sure, he was mad . . . but Elinor . . .

He trusted Elinor's intelligence. As hard and as cold as she was, she wouldn't let herself be taken in by an incompetent, that's for sure!

"And it's in her interest to see me cured," he thought "at least until I marry her . . . She didn't hide that was what she wanted. Why not? He recognized Elinor's value. She's a bitch but with a cold and lucid mind."

He got out of the lift, stopped again on the landing opposite a door where two copper plaques bore the names of the dentist and the doctor.

Before ringing, he hesitated, but here the thought occurred to him that he was going to face a man who knew him, who'd seen him both in sickness and health, who'd witnessed one of his attacks. He wouldn't have to explain anything, what a relief! He wouldn't have to confront the scientist's knowing look, judging you, considering you with interest or in cold pity, as the case may be. He'd be spared that terrible moment before someone unfamiliar in which swallowing his



pride and shedding the pretence of happiness, he'd surrender himself weak, naked and defenceless.

He rang at last and it was Clara who came to the door. But she was so humble in her grey blouse and with the child clinging to her skirt, that he took her for a servant, handed her his hat and entered a modest, small living room.

He waited for some time He was unable to sit. He walked from one window to another, from one wall to another. It was twilight. The room was lit by a centre light covered in dust and with two fused bulbs.

At last, Dario opened the door to his consulting room and beckoned Wardes to enter. Ah! How he'd waited for Wardes! There comes a moment when you feel borne along by luck. In his heart, Dario felt the quiver of joy a hunter experiences when, after a long wait, the coveted game falls at your feet.

Wardes, nevertheless, felt calmer. He let himself be examined, answered Dario's questions.

"Elinor has great confidence in you, doctor," he said.

Dario had resumed his place behind the desk separating him from the patient. In this way, some distance from the patient with his facial features in shadow, his hands crossed before him, his body immobile and an attentive look, Dario managed to assume an air of authority and mystery, and in using the persuasive, smooth voice he was learning to modify and in the careful muffling of its shrill, foreign tone, he was calming Wardes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Encore une phrase longue, caractéristique du style de Némirovsky.

“Elinor,” Dario said, “knew me at a particularly difficult time in my life, when I was pursuing, unrecognized and in semi-poverty, delicate and difficult research resulting in this psychic theory which has already brought relief to many patients like you. No doubt Elinor has spoken to you about this.”

“I hope it’s not a question of psychoanalysis? I’ve tried it but without success.”

“No, no! I told you I invented it. Like all those who’ve gone before me my *confrères* have attacked me, mainly those very ones you speak of, the supporters of Freudian theories; there is some good . . . I confess I’ve used them as a starting point. Long and minute analysis is required to get to the root of illness, but when it’s discovered I don’t believe there’s an immediate cure. I believe it’s then treatment begins. To put it extremely simply and enable the lay person to understand, it’s a question of what I call sublimation of the ego.”

There appeared on Wardes’ face an expression Dario had not yet recognized, one he would see later on the faces of thousands of unhappy people; a pained disbelief mixed with hope, and a repressed and bitter smile meaning: “Lead me on! Entertain me!” while a humble and greedy look begs: “Put my mind at rest. Have pity on me.”

“What you’re calling in your hidden self a defect, something shameful, an illness, is the sacred source where your most precious faculties are born. This exceptional mental structure which is responsible for your suffering, may God preserve you from its loss as the result of medication, rest therapy or a better life-style, applied as they are to the common run of humanity, the uneducated, without sparkle, without drive. No longer would you be Philippe Wardes! No longer would you be yourself! You’re a cut above others and that’s the way you must be treated. You’ve an almost superhuman faculty for hard work, will-power which has until now crushed

everything opposing you. Isn't that right? I'm not mistaken, am I? Well, your violent acts, your anxieties and ills are but the manifestations of the same precious and inspired quality of your nature. This illness must be transformed into new forces. We must suppress this feeling of guilt, due to heredity, education and a residue of religious morality, you judge to be evil in you. It's this feeling of guilt alone causing your suffering. Awareness of the evil is not at all important but it's the feeling of shame associated with it we must destroy. Delicate and exhausting work! Painstaking investigation! You understand the treatment is extensive. I promise you a cure only at this cost. But imagine, with patience and courage you'll again find your mind set free. Now, you're a slave, you're on the verge of despair. Abandon yourself to me! I can help you."

Wardes murmured:

"Doctor, what's killing me are these alternating feelings of unfounded anxiety and rage. Doctor, I go off to sleep happy and relaxed (I'm not talking about my insomnia, that's another story. It's hell). I wake sometimes in the middle of the night gripped by such a panic that I'd race into the street if I wasn't held back by what remains of my rationality. I'm frightened. I don't know about what. A breath of air, a glimmer of light, my memories, my dreams; a criminal hounded by remorse doesn't have these starts of terror, this anger, this expectation . . . It's as if I'm threatened with punishment for a crime I've committed and forgotten. Then, this anxiety turns to fury, into a kind of inner rage tearing me apart, relieved only when it is quickly directed towards others, driving me to violent actions I can't control, actions you've already witnessed. And my whole life is flowing away like this, doctor. That's not a life! Doctor, help me!"

He was speaking in a hushed voice, trembling, lifting his tortured face towards Dario and yet restrained by a last shred of modesty, each weakness he admitted concealing another more shameful.

“My method,” Dario said, “is close to what poets and artists instinctively use; they transpose their lower passions to a higher register and in so doing end up with an increase in their mental force. We act this way with the psychic element. Do you place yourself in my hands?”

“Yes” Wardes replied wearily.

In his heart he scorned and mocked Dario as he did himself, but he had been gripped by the awesome force of hope. Perhaps he was getting a foretaste, now that the first step had been taken and the most difficult words pronounced, of the pleasure of confession, the still more intense pleasure of concealing and disguising his secrets.

He thought:

“I’ll come once or twice. Who knows? There’ll still be time to drop him, to try something else.”

Dario continued, lowering his voice, forcing himself to be calm, authoritative and gentle.

“Now we’re going to proceed in the manner of classic Freudian analysis. This is the necessary, tentative step. We’ll abandon it as soon as there is experienced the first sense of shock. Stretch out on the divan here in the dark,” Dario said, taking Wardes by the hand and leading him to a narrow divan, upholstered in grey twill, pushed into a corner in the room. “Don’t tense up like that. Fear nothing. We’ll stop at the first sign of fatigue. Don’t look at me. You may close your eyes. At no time turn to me. I’ll ask you questions, but I’m but a voice, an invisible presence, a receptive device which can neither judge nor compel you. My method isn’t one of

restraint but of liberation; not one of renunciation but satisfaction. It will deliver you from your illness. Wait. In confidence.”

The first session commenced.

## Chapter 18

Thirteen years later, Dario was expensive. Women were mad about him. They had been warned that he was a charlatan. He was all the go, he's good, people don't know where he comes from. "But jealousy, people's spitefulness, his fellow professionals, we know what it's about," they thought.

Below the cheeky hat, arching above the eye or set to the back like an angel's halo depending on the season's fashion, the gaze of the French bourgeoisie, accustomed to calculating, was weighing up the furnishing, the décor in the waiting room, *avenue Hoche*, in the doctor's own home; it evaluated the ceiling height, the extent of the garden seen through the French window, the paintings, the thickness of the carpet and the women remarked to each other, nodding their heads, "Can you imagine how wealthy he must be to enjoy such a life?"<sup>52</sup>

"He doesn't treat the body but the soul", they added, repeating this word he had confided to one of them, the name he gave himself:

"My title is 'Master of Souls.'"

They were waiting for the door to the consulting room to open. It was autumn and they wore black or brown tailored suits; fox furs encircled their breast and hips. Their chins rested on the hairy, thin paws and cold snouts. Make-up rendered their faces smooth and indestructible but just as there escapes a fire's glow through a loophole, so the soul showed through in their anxious,

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<sup>52</sup> On a remarqué le talent particulier de Némirovsky de brosser ces petits tableaux descriptifs soit de visages, soit de mœurs, comme celui-ci. On les a nommés « hypotypos ».

gloomy and drawn looks.<sup>53</sup> What were they suffering from? Thousands of feminine ills. No orgasms. No more orgasms. Dario's clientele came mainly from women and the few men here neither spoke nor moved. They didn't even sigh but waited, terrified. It was a pale October day, cold and rain-drenched. At times, they raised their eyes and looked at the doctor's splendid garden with its trees and paths and then again lowered their eyes. These men had never seen Dario. At times, their thought seemed to leave their bodies as someone leaves behind the clothes they've taken off. Mentally, they wandered far from this room, from this day. Some were caught up in small, everyday problems, meetings in the evening, domestic problems, thinking of their wives or mistresses. Others were searching out tomorrow's concerns: the division of property, inheritance taxes and other persistent difficulties. A man uncrossed his legs and, at length, in melancholic and humble expression, rubbed his weary eyes. A man moved as if to have a cigarette, then the awareness of where he was returned together with the memory of what his doctor had advised, "An over-worked heart. Don't smoke." He sadly tensed his mouth and let fall his empty hand. This one was quietly moving his lips, no doubt rehearsing for the hundredth time the words he would use to confide his secret to the doctor. His neighbour, with a sour expression, was thinking:

"I know he's only a quack. Haven't I been told often enough! From tomorrow on I'll hand myself over, body and soul, to a distinguished doctor, a genuine professional. But what if this one cures me? . . . Why not? Strange things have happened before."

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<sup>53</sup> Nous avons tâché de conserver le rythme et la cadence de cette comparaison par l'emploi du même nombre de syllabes du français et de l'anglais, La comparaison en français se lit, « mais comme par la fente d'une meurtrière s'échappe la lueur d'un feu, l'âme se montrait dans le regard anxieux, sombre ou hagard. »(p. 159)

The women were also pretending to be impassive. Only as passed the hours (and the hours were extremely long) their faces aged, their eyes hardened and you could notice the nervous tensing of their hands under the fine cloth of their gloves.

“He isn’t even good-looking . . .”

“Yes, but how gentle his voice is . . .”

They spoke in a hushed voice. The men, scornful, lost in thought, no longer heard anything. Time flowed on. Pale and overwrought, they lowered their heads. Then they heard the sound of steps behind the door separating the waiting room from Dario’s consulting room and all craned their neck forward in an anxious, greedy and downward movement like that of farmyard creatures when they believe the farmer’s wife’s hand is about to open and the grain fly.

Finally, the door opened, and there appeared on the threshold a thin, short man with a swarthy complexion, broad forehead, ears too big, translucent, and with silver hair. The patients looked greedily at this thick hair, this noble forehead and these weary eyes. His gaze, thought the women, seemed to read the depths of their heart. He inclined his head slightly. A brown hand, decorated with a heavy platinum ring, lifted momentarily the folds of a red-velvet curtain, crumpled it distractedly, allowed the patient to pass and then allowed it to fall.

In the waiting-room you could still hear only the sound of the rain and the clock’s ticking. The men and women waited patiently.



## Chapter 19

The last patient had just left. It was after eight. Dario was resting, seated at his work table with his forehead resting on his hand. As a result of playing his public role, of having studied every movement, every look, having rehearsed like an actor the words he was going to use, the key words inspiring confidence, those that threaten, that liberate, even alone he felt himself constantly playing a role. This weary and melancholy pose, this beautiful, well-groomed hand adorned with an imposing ring, supporting his head with its grey hair, it was this pose which pleased others and suited his character.

The room he occupied was simple, formal and expensive. There were old books, writing accessories in bronze and malachite, thick carpet, glass cases enclosing a collection of ancient Persian vases and, to brighten up the desk's austerity, a fresh flower was placed between the telephone and the journal recording the name of the patient and his sickness. The décor was perfect. Before Elinor's marriage to Wardes had turned her into Dario's natural enemy and earlier at the time of their friendship and complicity, she had helped him with her advice. But now no help of this kind was necessary for him. He knew how to acquire: silver-ware, objects, women and a reputation. Getting things? Holding on to them was more difficult.

It was the depression. It was destroying both decent people and charlatans. It had reduced Dario's turnover just as it had done to local G.P.s'. Certain patients went bankrupt at the moment payment was due. Others deferred payment year after year. Some were suddenly cured; you could no longer count on anything. Even Wardes was no longer loyal. He hadn't come for five years. Wardes' business seemed to hold up in spite of the nastiness of the times, and he was

gambling less than previously. Dario also had to deal with the muted or open hostility of French doctors as well as that of foreign psychiatrists who accused him of plagiarising their methods and using them to exploit people's gullibility. But for one patient who abandoned him, others would return. He had in his favour his skill, his experience and the prestige acquired by his amorous adventures. His eastern appearance assumed in aging, in the contrast of grey hair and dark skin and the piercing brilliance of his eyes, a beauty pleasing to women. Lastly, he was famous and thought to be rich.

Since he had been free of hunger, all the burning and guilty desire within him was directed towards women, always more expensive. Only those who appeared beyond his reach attracted him but, in the end, they also were easy to get and easier still to hold on to. The secret was pay, pay and pay again.

This was the way things remained; women were at the same time his pleasure, folly and necessary luxury, just as were this house, garden and his collection of paintings. Clara would say:

“Why a picture gallery?”

To set her mind at ease he would say:

“You can sell it . . . the day money is hard to come by.”

But he wouldn't do it; a man like Dario could no more sell his collection than a carpenter his plane or a blacksmith his anvil. He justified his charges on his lifestyle and if this was lowered his income would automatically decrease. His secretary, a Jewess from Jassy, thin, ugly with burning eyes entered and handed him the list of consultations for the next day. He examined the page, made some annotations, folded it with a weary hand and returned it to her, murmuring:

“Thank you, Mademoiselle Aron. You can go now.”

She looked at him adoringly; he had saved her from poverty among many other poor immigrants, because for those starving in a foreign land he always found money or help. He shook her hand distractedly; she lowered her eyes and blushed. When at last she raised her eyes with a sigh she was alone; Asfar had left; he had stepped softly and silently, as was his custom, gliding noiselessly across the carpet like a shadow.

## Chapter 20

Already dressed and only waiting for Clara to get ready, Dario went into his son's room. Daniel was now sixteen. Each birthday come and gone gave Dario a feeling of confidence and secret triumph. Soon, Daniel would be a man. Was there anything he couldn't aspire to? His good looks and talents amazed his father. He was strong. He was in good health. He had endurance, great physical courage, a charming, natural modesty, strong muscles, broad chest and beautiful blond hair. Hundreds of times, thousands of times in speaking of their son, Clara and Dario had murmured as they smiled:

“Where does that child come from? Who does he resemble? He's not like one of ours! He's like a prince's son.”

That in his childhood he had worked hard and always came first, did not astonish them. What filled them with a simple pride was he never lied. He had never stolen, never failed to keep his word and never cried in shame. His cheerfulness was delightful. Occasionally, when Daniel was a child and used to laugh and play with Clara, Dario would come and hide behind his study door and there he would gaze at the child and listen to his shouts of delight and his gentle, joyful voice. If Dario appeared, however, Daniel immediately became silent. Quite early on, Dario had noticed his son was frightened of him, even seemed to shun him, but for a long time it had been enough to love him without being loved in return . . . That the child was good-looking and happy was all Dario asked . . .

Sometimes, even now, he valued nothing greater than the shock of delight, of joyous surprise he felt on entering this huge room, splendid and bright and seeing an adolescent approach, graceful with fine features and he would think:

“This is my son. From my poor flesh was formed this beautiful white and pink body. From my famished race was born this happy child.”

Just as a woman comes to be admired in evening dress before attending a ball, Dario was happy to appear in tails wearing his row of foreign decorations and say off-handedly:

“Your mother and I are dining at so-and-so’s home . . .”

This was a rich and famous name . . . but Daniel listened indifferently, a look of sarcasm shining in his regard.

“Bah! That’s natural! You don’t know, you found all that in your cradle at birth”, Dario thought you don’t know what that means to me . . . So much the better, my son. May all things come easily to you . . .”

He sat beside Daniel.

“What were you doing? Reading? Drawing? Keep going. Don’t pay any attention to me.”

But Daniel threw away the pencil and sheet of paper in his hand.

“Is it your mother’s portrait?” Dario asked vaguely catching sight of a woman’s face.

“No,” Daniel replied in a muted voice, and he appeared uneasy and irritated.

His father wanted to stroke his hair. Daniel drew slightly away.

He detested these long, oriental fingers. Although Dario didn’t use perfume, it always seemed to the boy when with his father that from the too meticulous grooming of this brown skin

and hand adorned with a thick ring, there came to his nostrils, he thought in irritation, the scent of a woman.

Dario thought sadly Daniel had never liked being hugged or kissed. Certainly, it was good he was manly, secretive and cold in character. In life that was an asset.

“Papa,” Daniel said suddenly, “Papa, to-day in my drawing class a lady came to pick up her daughter when she heard my name, came up to me and asked if I was really Doctor Asfar’s son . . .”

“Ah! Is that so?” Dario said with a slight frown.

“Her name’s Madame Wardes.”

“Can this possibly be?” Dario said under his breath.

He remained silent a moment, then questioned his son in a voice tender and moved:

“What is she like? She can’t still be a young woman. She used to be very beautiful. I haven’t seen her . . .”

He quickly worked out the years.

“Ten . . . twelve . . . more years”

“Yes, she told me.”

“What is she like now?” Dario repeated.

“Her face is very beautiful, a wisp of white hair on her forehead and a very gentle voice . . .”

“Is this her portrait?” Dario asked, moving his hand towards his son’s drawing.

“No, Papa.”

Dario's hand was still open, as if demanding the sheet of paper. Daniel tore it to shreds and threw it into the ash-tray.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> La dernière phrase se lit, « Daniel la[une lettre] déchira en menus morceaux et la jeta dans le cendrier ». À notre avis, l'antécédent du deuxième « la » est « menus morceaux » . On devrait écrire « les jeta » mais nous avons traduit la phrase comme Némirovsky l'écrivit.

## Chapter 21

The dinner, a very long one, was over. The evening dragged on and it was fatal for Clara who was fragile, worn-out and ill. There was nothing about her that really indicated approaching death, but everything was under threat. A kidney had been operated on some time before. Her lungs were delicate and her heart showed signs of fatigue. Even if everyone could notice the rings around her eyes and the yellow patches under her skin, she nevertheless appeared as pleasant and as alert as previously. In her brilliant husband's wake, cajoling Dario's clients, friends and mistresses and waiting on him, this humble woman found, god knows where, wit, cheerfulness, charm and the most delicate flattery for everyone. But, sometimes, at the end of the evening she was barely conscious.

This evening, waiting beside her husband to farewell their hostess, she stood erect and still pain evident in the heavy wrinkles at the corners of her lips and thinking of the night that lay ahead and the imminence of death. The others, even Dario, her doctor and husband, didn't believe she was so ill but she herself was as aware of her death as one is aware of bearing a child as yet unseen and whose features are hidden deep within the womb, a child to be revealed on God's chosen day. Death dwelt in her and nothing could prevent its appearing when due.

She had almost forgotten what surrounded her. This happened more and more often now. It was terrible for her always having to be alert, concentrate on selecting among the crowd this man



or woman who might one day wish to consult Dario. In a desperate effort, she drew herself up even more.

Another moment's patience. The evening would be over. Set free, Clara could hasten to the freshness and solitude of her bed.

Dario lightly touched her shoulder.

She shuddered. Her face again became animated. Some colour even returned to her cheeks. She smiled and said good-bye the lady of the house. She joked. She left ahead of Dario.

They were in the car now. Like the times when in the streets of a foreign town and racked by fear among a crowd, they would run towards their miserable room, their sole refuge at the centre of a hostile universe, tenderly holding close each other. She moaned faintly at each jolt. But he protected her, lifted her gently in his arms and cradled her. He was going to leave her in search of other pleasures but this moment was Clara's.

"She's served me till the end," he thought watching her in pity; "she's put on her yellow dress, the one that suits her best and shows her off to advantage. She's put on her pearl ear-rings; she's laughed and suffered again the trial of a long evening without flinching; in spite of palpitations, feverishness, pain in her back and leg where the injections had formed an ulcer in the fine skin, she is content now; she knows she has done her duty and served the man she loves with an unconditional love, the most beautiful kind."

He took her hand and kissed it.

"Darling . . . my little one . . . my Clara."

She smiled. When he spoke to her like this, what wouldn't she sacrifice? But she no longer had anything to give. Perhaps her life but it was already his.

“You were marvellous this evening.”

“We’ve been invited to dinner at the Dalbergs.”

“Is that right? It’s very important Clara.”

“I know . . .”

“When?”

“The eighteenth.”

“But that’s impossible. All our evenings are taken up. We’ll have to cancel the dinner at our place the previous evening; you’re too worn out to bear it,” he said with admiration and respect which seemed to revitalize her. She drew herself up.

“What! Won’t be able? Really? Do you think so? You’ll see . . . You don’t know your old wife.”

She smiled and her eyes and teeth sparkled. She had never been beautiful, far from it, but he still found her charming, more charming than a good number of other women. He looked at her not as a man in love would—that was impossible—but with a sort of tender fatherliness. She was as precious to him as Daniel.

“And doubtlessly,” he thought with weary clarity, “all that meant nothing to her. My love and desire were what she wanted—that angry, jealous love, the kind I feel, or felt for . . .”

But what good were names? She knew them all. He knew she was aware of them. Instead of caresses he could give her words of admiration, homage which does nothing to satisfy the passion of a woman in love.

“Yes, you were marvellous this evening . . . vivacity, charm . . . not a woman your equal.”

“Imagine that. I know . . . I know when I want to, when my injection’s been quite strong,” she said in a hushed voice, “to settle the pain down, I’m not a pretty woman, unfortunately! I’ve never been pretty and I’m old but nice and friendly and this can be of use to you. And that’s the way it should be . . . I’m happy about it. It’s my role . . .”

“You’re tired. Don’t talk. Rest. Put your head here,” Dario said, indicating his chest.

But she struggled on.

“I’m not tired,” she said, turning pale. We’ve got to get invited to the Dragas. The Dalbergs will make that possible. You need foreign exposure. You don’t get enough consultations abroad. I was told about an exceptional case.” She suddenly stopped speaking, looked at Dario and asked: “Darling . . . is it true I’ve been useful in your career? In making you happy?” “Yes.”

“Dario, you’re a very learned man, a great man! I’m proud of you. You’ve been so good to me . . . when I think . . .”

He cradled her in his arms. She spoke slowly, as from the depths of a dream. The car was smooth and silent but in spite of that, a few bumps drew some stifled moans.

“I was a poor girl, uneducated and unattractive.”

“What about me?” he asked as he smiled.

“You, that’s another matter . . . Men grow up faster and more easily than women do . . . In the beginning do you remember I knew nothing about table manners or how to enter a lounge-room. You, Dario, seemed to know everything as if by instinct. Have you ever been ashamed of me?”

He stroked her neck and hair.

“Do you want me to tell you what you’ve meant to me? You’re the only one I’ve ever loved,” he said and, at the same moment, he felt he was telling the truth, but not the whole truth, not even its most important part but at the heart of this total but incommunicable truth was the most precious portion.

When they reached home, Dario helped her to undress and get into bed. He stayed with her until she drowsed (or appeared to). On tip-toe, he made his way to the door. She opened her eyes then and called him in a weak voice:

“Dario!”

“Yes,” he said turning back to her.

“Dario, did Daniel tell you he met Madame Wardes?”

“Ah! So that’s what’s worrying her,” he thought.

He asked:

“Weren’t you aware he’s known young Claude a long time?”

“Yes.”

“Dario, tell me the truth before God, were you Madame Wardes’ lover?”

“What are you saying?” Dario exclaimed. “Never! Never!”

She didn’t answer.

“You do believe me, don’t you?”

“Yes. But . . . you did love her?”

“No, Clara!”

“When you said that your voice changed . . .”

“What are you thinking of? Go to sleep. You’re exhausted, darling. I swear on Daniel’s life I’ve never looked on her . . . Mme Wardes . . . that way . . .”

“Why did you stop seeing her? What’s between you?”

“What’s there been between us? Ten thousand *francs*, Clara, nothing else—the money to pay off my debt to Martinelli. I was ashamed. I thought she might see like some kind of odious play-acting . . .”

“All your love for her,” Clara finally said, her voice trembling.

“All my devotion, all my friendship, Clara.”

“What about now, are you going to see her again? Daniel insists on going to see her. How are you going to stop him?”

“Why stop him?”

“What if Daniel begins to love her as well?”

“You’re dreaming, my poor Clara!”

“Ah, it’s because he’s the only one I still have,” Clara said quietly.

She continued:

“Are you going to see her again?”

“No. That’s something I won’t do.”

She quivered in joy.”

“Really?”

“I could say it’s out of respect for you. But it’s mainly because Sylvie Wardes has been something so special for me,” he said, his voice low, “that I wouldn’t want to see her with different eyes. I’m afraid I can’t just look at a woman purely any longer, Clara! I can’t look at a

human being without finding defects and vices in them. I've so few illusions left about the West I wanted to know, I have known perhaps to my own misfortune and that of others . . .”

“Others? What are you saying?”

“So what did I say, Clara? It's very late. I insist you stay quiet and sleep. See, you've got everything you need. Your medicine for the night, a book, a lamp. Kiss me and rest.” Leaving the room, he passed Daniel's door. The light was out. He left the house.

Now began that part of his life which had become, little by little, his true life; life during the day was only exhausting work to have these few precious hours, spent in the depth of the night and so fleeting.

He was off to visit a young, Russian mistress, Nadine Souklotine. Her reign wouldn't be a long one. Another would come along. Then there would be another and again he would struggle with the inextricable need for money to ensure the luxury of what Paris named 'his harem'. How could they understand, all these French with their luke-warm blood? The women changed but the pleasure remained faithful.

## Chapter 22

Madame Mouravine had been stopped at the entrance to the house on the *avenue Hoche* by a servant who was as gloomy and as solemn as the house and its garden.

“The doctor doesn’t have consultations to-day, Madame.”

“The doctor is home and he will see me,” the *générale* said, pushing the servant aside. “Tell him I’m here on behalf of Mademoiselle Nadine Souklotine.”

The servant showed the *générale* into the small waiting room where the patients under treatment would wait, wishing to be out of sight. Madame the *générale* had grown thinner and her hair was white.

She waited a long time. She frowned, looked at each of the pictures in turn, the high ceilings and the display cabinets. She stood up, walked to the window and appeared to take in the size of the garden. Dario Asfar was certainly earning a lot of money. But what crazy expenditure! At that moment, the door finally opened and she was led into Dario’s home.

“I’m happy to see you again, Doctor.”

Dario murmured a few words of welcome and said courteously:

“I presume you haven’t come as a patient. You look in excellent health and I don’t see patients today. At any rate, I’m happy to see an old friend again.”

“Yes, Doctor and someone who’s always had the most sincere liking for you.”

“May I ask you about the *général*?”

“God took him from me at the Orthodox Christmas in 1932.”

“Really? And Mitenka?”

“Mitenka? He’s making out. He’s doing his own thing. An old friend of yours, Ange Martinelli, owns a cabaret in Nice now and my son’s his Artistic Director.”

“Congratulations. Does Mimosa’s House still exist?”

“Since the *général*’s death I’ve concentrated mainly on business . . . of all sizes . . . vastly different kinds. In a roundabout way this business has to do with you, Doctor.”

“Let’s see,” Dario murmured.

Dario appeared impassive. He gently crossed his hands on the table and looked closely at the large ring decorating a finger . . . The stone seemed dull. He breathed lightly on its shining surface.

“Did you give a name to the servant?”

“Yes, Mlle Souklotine . . .”

“I’m indeed interested in that young person.”

“You must’ve been surprised to see me, but . . .”

He interrupted her.

“I wasn’t at all surprised. I heard people talk about you. I’m very well aware you’re involved in all kinds of businesses, among others that you happen to be still . . . raising capital for those who momentarily find themselves in difficulties; In fact you took your earliest steps towards this profession when I first had the pleasure of making your acquaintance. I hope, however, that you now attach guarantees more . . . favourable for the debtor.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“What! Doctor . . . I used to lend my own money once. You hang on to your money. It’s part of you and you don’t easily part with it. But, to-day, I’m acting on behalf of a group which has



every confidence in me. I'm, how can I put it? a broker or better still a saleswoman? I'm a link between those for the moment short of money as you describe it, and the capitalists. But I'm not only involved in business of this kind, I repeat; occasionally I'm charged with delicate missions."

She waited for him to speak but he remained silent. He had removed his ring and was making it sparkle against the light. At last she said:

"Properly speaking, I come not on behalf of Mlle Souklotine herself . . . but of her family. She's eighteen, doctor. That's a little . . . young . . . don't you think?"

"I don't think so," Dario said as he smiled and pictured this green-eyed girl with the beautiful body who had been his mistress for five months. "You know as well as I, if you are acquainted with the family, that she was already in circulation at fifteen, if I can express it in this way . . ."

"Doctor, you're talking about the daughter of an honourable man, formerly a lawyer in Saint- Petersburg."

"That's possible," Dario said indifferently."

"What do you intend to do about this girl?"

"Come on, dear *madame*, wouldn't it be simpler to tell me what the family wants to avoid a scandal?"

"That you pay a certain sum to the girl you seduced."

"Do you know how much Nadine has cost me in six months, Marthe Alexandrovna?"

"You're so rich, doctor . . ."

They both remained silent.

"How much?" Dario asked resting his cheek on his hand.

“A million.”

Dario gave a soft whistle.

The *générale* moved her chair closer to Dario’s and said suddenly in a friendly voice:

“Doctor, you’re a terrible Don Juan! You weren’t like that in the past! You were the most faithful of husbands, the most tender of fathers when I knew you . . . Ah, when I recall the Dario Asfar living in Mimosa’s House and the one I see now, I believe I’m dreaming . . . Since then I’ve heard a lot of talk about you, Doctor. I was told you earned fabulous amounts before the Depression. You bought *La Caravelle*, the most beautiful property in Nice. However, what are you doing with it? You live there two months a year. The upkeep is exorbitant.”

He didn’t answer. He pursed his lips. The enchantment which had gripped him at the entrance to *La Caravelle* twenty years previously had not yet been lost. It was quite true he only spent some weeks each year there although he sent Daniel whenever he looked tired or the weather in Paris was too rainy. But, for that moment when he had entered Sylvie’s home as its master he would give a fortune. He had given a fortune. *La Caravelle* was too heavy a burden. It was mortgaged as well as his home in Paris. When, my God! would he stop being at bay, forever pursuing money which eluded him? When would he finally stop thinking of money?

The *générale* was watching him with that penetrating, dispassionate look usurers, lawyers, doctors, all those who live on others wear. She said in a low voice:

“I’m also aware that since the depression your resources have become depleted, Doctor, like all of us,” she repeated with a sigh, “and our needs have continued to grow. Now, about this Nadine Souklotine . . .”

“I love these whores with the look of an angel,” he murmured.

“How disgusting! How disgusting! I can’t listen to you.”

“Marthe Alexandrova, since this matter is in your hands, would you be willing to negotiate for a reasonable amount? I’ll recognize the service, rest assured . . .”

“But there can be no question of that, Doctor. I accepted this task, because a long friendship links me to the Souklotines, very worthy people! So virtuous, so close, bearing so nobly adversity. They have four children younger than Nadine. But from that to count on an outraged father’s honour, a mother’s tears . . . Go on with you! Who do you take me for, Doctor?”

Dario murmured, shrugging his shoulders:

“I haven’t known any woman, in any sordid or shameful situation, who wouldn’t demand consideration. But you’re free to refuse. I’ll offer the negotiations and the associated commission to someone else.”

“Doctor, why are you treating me like an enemy?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. You must know—Nadine must’ve told you repeatedly that I’m in the loan business. Now, I know you need money. Couldn’t you ask me?”

“Our first relations of this kind weren’t crowned with success, Marthe Alexandrova.”

“You were a poor, little urchin then. Now you’re one of the kings of Paris. Come on, Doctor, tell me frankly, between friends, what was the interest rate you were charged on your last loan, ten months ago?

“You know all about it,” Dario said, trying to smile.

“That’s my profession. Come on, you’ve been dealing with cut-throats. I’d bet twelve percent.”

“Eleven.”

“I could arrange a loan at ten percent interest. You’ll need additional money for this unfortunate Souklotine story. Besides, we know you could, if you wished, make some brilliant deal which couldn’t fail to get you afloat again and get us our money back as a result.”<sup>55</sup>

“What are you trying to say?” Dario slowly said. I know you’re handling multiple missions concerning me, Marthe Alexandrova.”

“Some command, others obey, doctor.”

“Let’s speak frankly, you’re too clever a woman to make me waste my time. What’s the price (the last price) for the family honour of the former Saint-Pétersbourg lawyer?”

“I’ll take on the negotiations at eight hundred thousand *francs*. For myself, as commission, fifty thousand *francs*, out of respect for our old friendship. I’ll give you a loan for this money at ten percent, a most reasonable rate; about the other matter . . . someone has asked me to remind you of a name. This person has asked me to tell you they’ve helped you before, and would be capable of helping you again were you willing to take control of certain interests and projects.”

Dario used the tips of his fingers to rub his long, weary eye-lids.

“You’re talking about Elinor Wardes. But since her marriage, she’s become an enemy.”

“You feed at the same source, both of you,” the *générale* said as she sighed. “Since she’s become Wardes’ lawful wife and not his mistress, everything’s changed.”

“What does she want from me? Come on,” Dario asked in feigned indifference.

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<sup>55</sup> Némirovsky emploie ici « nous faire rentrer dans les débours ». Une traduction littérale de cette expression n’est pas possible. Nous l’avons donc traduite dans son sens anglais.

“How should I know, Doctor? How should I know? Go to see her. She’s a woman of remarkable intelligence. I must confess many of the prejudices I had about her, when she was part of the family, have gone. I recognize her qualities. Wardes’ wife, imagine that . . . And you know it’s she who manages everything, because Wardes’ condition continues to worsen now. For very long periods, he undergoes treatment in Switzerland. He handles nothing. Unfortunately, at moments, he becomes ambitious again. He wants to prove he’s still Wardes, the great Wardes, and he acts then in such a way that poor Elinor has great trouble in setting right what he’s ruined.”

“This closeness between you two is truly touching! I believe I can recall a certain antipathy.”

“It was over Mitenka, the apple of my eye.<sup>56</sup> Now my son’s married. He has two beautiful children. The question of feeling, of motherly jealousy no longer comes between Elinor and me. We do each other favours, sometimes . . . I’m a humble woman, but hard-working. No effort, no deed would be too demanding to reconcile two former friends or conclude a delicate transaction . . . Elinor heard people talk about it. She employed me on several occasions, firstly at the time of her marriage. Yes, hard-working and honest, there you have my well-deserved reputation. I’m a poor widow. I wear myself out without thinking, in spite of age and sickness,” she said raising both hands to the cleft of her breasts, with a hoarse sigh. “Attacks of asthma are killing me, doctor. I’ll be coming to you as a patient one day. But you aren’t in general practice any more. I’ll have to go, see you next time dear doctor. Your wife is well? And the child? What, sixteen already! God! How time passes! Ah! Children, our cross and consolation here on earth!”

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<sup>56</sup> Il est impossible de traduire mot-à-mot cet idiotisme en anglais.

## Chapter 23

When the past re-appears in a man's life, it never has the features of a single face but evokes a whole chain of friends, love affairs, forgotten regrets.

"It was Sylvie's name", Dario thought, "which had made all these witnesses and actors in the difficult years reappear. Difficult? Less than to-day perhaps . . . Once again he was burdened with debts, at bay, and in a situation—spied on by enemies, by rivals—such that he could only survive by prestige and this was bought by money, money . . ."

Dario had asked the previous evening for a meeting with Elinor Wardes. He was on his way to her now.

"What's really wearying", he thought "is I'll have to handle her carefully. This Elinor was straight-forward and hard in times gone by but must now think she's entitled to consideration and lies. The devil take these women!"

It was strange that Dario who had never thought of Elinor as a woman now felt driven to her not only by self-interest but by a particular curiosity. So obsessed was he now by sexual desire every woman woke in him a kind of strange irritation, the need to prove to himself his power.

Elinor received him immediately. She was wearing a long, violet housecoat; it was her favourite colour and caused her red hair to shine with its row of curls in the style of 1900 across her forehead, following the fashion. She was thinner. She had aged in the thirteen years. She was less insolent and more assured. She rarely laughed but had kept the strange and fleeting smile, her thin lips turned up on one side of her mouth revealing the brilliance of her long sharp teeth.

“Dear Doctor, I called you about Philippe,” she said, taking his hand. “He’s come back very depressed from Switzerland. I very much regret this falling-out that took place between you . . .”

“You just can’t talk about falling-out,” Dario said with a smile: “A brutal abandon would be the reality. One fine day, he left me. I waited for him the following week. He disappeared.”

“Poor Philippe! You’re acquainted with his outbursts!”

Little by little, and though he’d groaned earlier over Elinor’s hypocritical advances, Dario was finding in the interview almost a sporting pleasure in playing the game according to certain rules, in revealing the truth little by little, cautiously, exposing it and concealing it by turn. It was the oriental game—haggling, bartering, trade-offs—he’d lived on.

“Yes, poor Philippe. How is he going, Madame?”

“To tell the truth, he is worrying me.”

“Have his anxiety attacks returned?”

“Sadly they’ve never stopped!”

“He was noticeably better, however, when I was caring for him.”

“Doctor, I’m a layman, an ignorant, weak woman. I admire you very deeply, I assure you. I neither claim to judge nor understand your treatment, the famous theory you created (your *confrères* are wasting their time in harshly criticizing it, I’m telling you nothing when I say I’m not at all aware of what’s remarkable about it). I certainly didn’t suspect thirteen years ago I was in the presence of a trail-blazer. I met Florence de Leyde and Barbara Green the other day and they swear only you . . . But don’t you think, to get back to my husband, that rest, simple physical rest is as necessary as the mental treatment you call, I think, the sublimation of the ego? You never told Philippe not to drink, gamble or have sex.”

Dario half-closed his eyes.

“Debauchery and the intense emotions engendered in gambling are in a sort of way the obsession, the abscess of a sick mind. To the layman this may appear paradoxical, even immoral. But to be fair, a treatment can only be judged if it is observed scrupulously from beginning to end. This is the core of my theory. Now, what did Philippe do? You know as well as I do. He submitted with bad grace to a few weeks’ treatment each year, whilst the complete eradication of his illness would require constant care spread without interruption over several years. This is the essence of my treatment. Instead what did the patient do? I’d see him turn up suddenly, begging me to cure him, to free him from his obsessions and nightmares. Some time afterwards—three or four weeks, never more—he’d use his business or your objections about me as pretexts to disappear and that went on for more than a year. This disobedience alone was enough to destroy the fruits of my effort let alone his short patience. In line with my theory, the patient has to abandon his soul to the skill of the doctor. I repeat, only a long period of uninterrupted treatment can be effective.”

“Doctor, there can’t be any question of the complete freedom of treatment you usually have.”

Dario inclined his head. Little by little, as Dario aged, his expressive, Levantine face had taken on the serenity and impassiveness of a mask. There was no quivering of his lips. He had joined his hands and was resting his chin on his finger-tips. His eyes were half closed. Elinor was speaking in a gentle, even voice but fine droplets of sweat flowed through the make-up at her temples, giving her away.



“You know he represents considerable interests. In 1920 a business could have a man like Philippe at its head . . . an insane genius . . . But in 1936? In the prosperous years he used to benefit from every kind of publicity even if it was scandalous, but to-day . . . For several years he’s done nothing to get people talking. If he starts his mad behaviour again we’re lost. The company—a doctor is a confessor, I’m trusting you—is already heavily compromised. Only unflagging effort can save it. Philippe can’t do it.”

“I admire your competence, Madame.”

“When you have a husband who’s weak and ill, it’s a woman’s duty to take his place as much as her strength allows.”

“You’re very strong, Elinor.”

“Do you think so, Dario? Deep down a woman needs to be supported and guided. It’s not my fault if Philippe . . . But it’s not about that. I’m letting you know the situation quite frankly. My poor husband can’t look after his business any longer by himself. If he was content to do nothing, everything could still be saved. But he’s the legal owner of the enterprise. Now, this is what’s happening. He disappears, goes and shuts himself up in Switzerland or elsewhere. One fine day back he comes, takes everything in hand and harms everything. Can you use your treatment to persuade him that he shouldn’t get involved in business?”

“With difficulty.”

“Could you get him to consider in good grace a lengthy retirement?”

“Prolonged, perhaps. Indefinite, no!”

“Don’t you think, doctor, there are cases which demand painful decisions?”

Dario leant slightly backwards and settled his head on the chair's back-rest. A weak, weary smile crossed his lips and disappeared like a ripple on water. His face became as inexpressive and calm as before.

"You choose your words carefully, Elinor. You do know what you're asking me?"

"Philippe is mad."

"It's possible, in all cases, to act as if you believe it."

"With your help, Doctor . . ."

"It will be fully understood he remains under my supervision."

Elinor turned slightly pale and agreed.

"Unfortunately," Dario said with a sigh, "I don't own a suitable nursing home."

"Well, there's *La Caravelle*."

She smiled.

"I found out you'd bought it. I'll never forget my arrival in that house. Wardes was drunk. His wife was leaving the same night. I've never seen anyone accept disaster with such great dignity. *La Caravelle* was more suited to her than to you or me, my dear. When I learnt you'd bought the property, I thought:

"Deep down no-one really knows Doctor Asfar. You're a romantic, my dear friend. Are you still a friend of Madame Wardes?"

"If I were I wouldn't be here," Dario harshly replied.

Elinor shrugged her shoulders.

"Let's get back to Wardes . . . Don't you think *La Caravelle* would be a suitable nursing home?"

“I’m afraid I’ll have to sell it.”

“Really? Why?”

“I’ve a great need for money. I’d hoped, however, to convert it into a clinic, but my goal was quite philanthropic. I wanted to make it available to patients of modest means. People don’t think enough about the middle class, about the admirable bourgeoisie of this country. I had no success in raising capital or getting support from government or private sources.”

“But sponsors could be found, doctor. How much would you need?”

“A million,” Dario said.

## Chapter 24

The following year in the Easter holidays Daniel left alone for *La Caravelle*. He had just turned seventeen; he had grown too quickly. Dario wanted him to have a rest for three weeks. Neither he nor Clara could go with him: Dario was involved in business and his liaisons, Clara had just been ill.

For some time Daniel had enjoyed being by himself. He was becoming unsociable and uncommunicative, Dario thought, although he knew his son was seeing Sylvie and Claude Wardes almost every day.

Daniel had travelled with a friend who had left him at *La Caravelle*'s gate before continuing his journey to an Italian village where he was expected. Daniel gripped his light luggage and walked up to the house. It had rained. Raindrops were falling on his neck and bare head as he passed among the aged pines and magnolias. He was thinking. Sylvie had walked along the path, she had often traversed the rose garden stretching out at the front of the house. God! Why hadn't he known Sylvie when she was young! Claude was adorable but nothing was as beautiful and charming as Sylvie, who was Clara's age however. Yes, she was an old woman in Daniel's eyes. But, if he felt a sense of admiration almost religious for her, he was also aware of that beauty, of that nobility of character and attitude, to all that had attracted his father before him although Daniel was unaware of it . . . the tender admiration he had for Sylvie was both that of a son and lover.

He was at that age where men are still so impressionable, so feminine, their minds so little formed, they seek above all to obey, respect and submit either to a friend, a master or a woman. It is only parents who have no power over an adolescent's mind. But Sylvie's words, her example,

the dignity of her life and her tastes were as a unique sustenance nourishing his need for devotion and admiration. On the other hand, Claude was like his mother.

He could admit, without its being ridiculous or sacrilegious, that he loved Claude but he strove to see with Sylvie's eyes and to live within the strict confines of Sylvie's morality; this was all the easier as, in this way, it satisfied the vague resentment he felt for his father. Dario set great store by wealth and appearance. All this was as if non-existent for Sylvie and, in the recognition of her moral superiority, Daniel satisfied at the same time his conscience and a concealed dislike, an exasperating contempt for his father, born in him with life itself—like a drop of poison mixed in his blood.

In his bag he had hidden books given to him by Sylvie and a photo of her and Claude.

He approached the house. No lights were on and the door was locked. He rang. It was three years since he'd been to *La Caravelle*. He didn't recognize the servant who opened the door nor the heavy features of the obese man with the very red complexion who immediately appeared.

"Monsieur Daniel? We didn't hear the car. Will monsieur Daniel forgive me . . . Did you stop at the bottom of the hill?"

"Yes. I was with a friend who was in a hurry and couldn't come up."

"Would Monsieur Daniel like his old room?"

"Yes. I don't think I saw you when I was here three years ago."

"I've only been here a year. Doctor Asfar who knew me was kind enough to employ me as caretaker of his home and as someone he could trust. My name is Ange Martinelli. For a long time I used to be a head waiter in this area. I ran into hard times and it was then I appealed to

Monsieur Daniel's father's kind heart. Does Monsieur Daniel have everything he needs?" Ange asked, following Daniel into his room.

"Yes, thank you," Daniel replied.

He had opened the window. He listened to and recognized the distinctive noises of holidays at *La Caravelle*: the deep, regular sound of the sea, the far-off whistle of a train.

The first eight days were peaceful and happy. He went swimming and rested on the small, private beach where the grounds finished. Occasionally, he took his lunch with him and ate it lying in the sun, already warm and dazzling. He played with pebbles, making pucks out of them. He abandoned his books and swam in the sea then went off to sleep on the beach. Towards evening, he took long walks in the country-side, always alone with his dogs, naïvely proud of his solitary life and casting scornful looks on the cars and women he came across. After dinner he would shut himself away in his room and write to Claude and Sylvie.

He had been there a week when the weather, up till then so fine, turned bad. On the first rainy day Daniel went for a long walk. He ate in a gloomy, little English *pâtisserie* smelling of ginger and the subtle aroma of black tea; he returned home at night; he locked himself away with his books and was perfectly happy. It was still raining the next day. The day seemed longer. The town was sad under the rain like a woman in tears.<sup>57</sup> Two days later, it was still raining and cold in *La Caravelle's* large rooms. The night before Daniel had caught cold, he was a little feverish. He spent the afternoon looking through his window rather gloomily watching the grey sky and

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<sup>57</sup> De temps en temps, nous avons remarqué une certaine gaucherie dans les comparaisons que Némirovsky emploie. Nous avons ici un très bon exemple.

the pines tormented by the wind. It was a pale, gloomy day. At five o'clock Ange came and knocked at his door.

"Pardon me Monsieur Daniel," he said, his long eyelids hiding his dark, piercing eyes, "but I think Monsieur Daniel would be more comfortable downstairs. This side of the house is too exposed. I've had tea served in the library and I've taken the liberty of lighting a fire. A fire on the coast at Easter! It's outrageous, Monsieur Daniel but as the saying goes, you can't beat the weather. Does Monsieur Daniel wish to go downstairs?"

Daniel put his books under his arm and went down. The library, a delightful room, was Sylvie's former small salon. It had been decorated with books. The walls were painted in a soothing pale green. Tea had been served near the fire-place and there were chestnut cakes crowned with light, white cream. The fire sang and hissed joyfully.

"Thanks a lot, Ange," Daniel said. He raised his eyes and smiled. The former head waiter was secretly watching him with deep, almost tender, concentration.

"Is it all right to serve the tea, Monsieur Daniel?"

"You've gone to a lot of trouble for me."

"No, Monsieur Daniel. I'm happy to be of service to the son of the doctor who's been so good to me, and I dare confess Monsieur Daniel a young man of his age reminds me of my own son and everything I do for the comfort of Monsieur Daniel is done with pleasure."

"Are you married, Ange?"

"I'm a widower. My wife died a long time ago leaving me with my boy."

"And . . . where is he now?"

"I haven't seen him for a long time."

“He’s not in France?”

“Yes,” Ange said bitterly. “He often comes to Monte Carlo and stays at the hotel I used to work at. He’s rich now. When he was as old as Monsieur Daniel I wanted to make him a cook, it’s a good trade, but he was left with delicate lungs as the result of an illness . . . At that time monsieur’s father looked after him and I must say cured him as if by miracle. Consequently I was afraid of leaving him in the kitchens and basements close to the ovens. Nothing had ever been too good for him. I made him study. I found him a job in a shoe factory. Do you know what he did? He got the owner’s daughter pregnant and married her. It’s the biggest shoe-making company in the market. I cried in joy, Monsieur Daniel. But God punished me for taking pleasure in the grief and dishonour of a father like me. From the day my son had such a fine position, he was ashamed of me; I lost my money trying to open a dance studio, here, in Nice. Now he’s got no hope of laying his hands on what’s left of my money. I won’t even see him again when I die . . . But excuse me. I’m boring and making Monsieur Daniel sad. The fire’s well alight . . . the tea’s still hot . . .”

He made his way slowly to the door. Gripping the handle, he asked:

“Would Monsieur like the record-player, if he’s had enough of reading? There are some fine records.”

“Thanks. I’d like that.”

Ange went to get the gramophone.

“Didn’t Monsieur Daniel know it was here three years ago?”

“The gramophone? No, that’s true.”

“It belonged to Monsieur Wardes. He left it here when he moved out last month.”



“What? Wardes! That poor fool . . . So he was . . . locked up here?”

“Yes, Monsieur Daniel.”

Ange picked up a box containing records and opened it in front of Daniel. Daniel watched without touching them. This Philippe Wardes was Claude’s father . . . He’d been the husband of . . .

He suddenly felt a burning curiosity, almost painful.

“What was he like? Is he old? Sick?”

“Old? That depends on what Monsieur Daniel understands as old. In his fifties. Sick? . . . You couldn’t say he was ill.”

“Did he occasionally have moments of lucidity?”

Ange’s gloomy face took on an ironic expression which struck Daniel. But Ange answered immediately in the calmest of tones:

“Sometimes . . .”

“Did you know him before his sickness?”

Ange uttered a sigh, like a stifled burst of laughter.

“I’ve known a lot of people, Monsieur Daniel. I knew some now rich and famous, who give a morsel of bread out of charity but who used to come to me begging for money: ‘Ange, save me! . . . Ange, I’ve only got you . . .’ who knows where they’d be to-day without my money . . . I knew Wardes when everybody kissed his hands and treated him like a king and I’ve seen him here, alone, with his carers like a beast abandonned by everyone, saying again and again: ‘I’m not mad, Ange! You’re the only one who believes it, aren’t you.’ I knew his wives as well, the second who’s come a long way since the time I’m talking about . . . She’s a very capable woman.

I knew the first Madame Wardes. In those days people used to say (Please forgive me but Monsieur Daniel is a man and understands things), people talked about her intimacy with Monsieur Daniel's father, but no-one blamed her because her husband had left her."

Suddenly, Daniel felt as if he was drained of blood, then suddenly it rushed up and invaded his heart. At last he said in a low voice:

"I've a great deal of respect for Madame Wardes, Ange. Please don't talk to me about her."

At the same moment, he thought that every night for a week he'd given Ange his daily letter for Madame Wardes to be posted the next day with the first mail pick-up.

Ange humbly said:

"I'm sorry . . ."

He bent down and tended the fire. He puffed a little as he leaned over and slid small, dry branches under the logs. In the space between his dark hair and collar you could see a roll of flesh, dark red, almost purple. He got up with difficulty and went to close the half-open French-windows overlooking the grounds. He walked noiselessly, in a movement that was extremely quiet and light for a man of his weight but, at each step his soles made a furtive, scratching sound. He approached Daniel's armchair and noticed the half-empty cup.

"Take this away," Daniel said.

Ange picked up the tray and left, leaving Daniel alone.

## Chapter 25

In the following days, Daniel was careful to stay out of Ange's way but couldn't forget his half-confidences. "Disgusting lies," he thought. "What could a man like his father and Sylvie Wardes have in common? The idea of their complicity had never crossed his mind . . . What was it Ange had said? 'Intimacy.'" Daniel felt an almost physical disgust, causing him to tremble and angrily grind his teeth when alone.

He now realized solitude was no longer possible for him. He sought out friends living in Cannes and, every morning, left *La Caravelle* returning only at night. Occasionally he caught sight of Ange in a dark corner of the corridor. Ange seemed to be on the look-out for the young man; for an instant he would appear in the doorway, issue an order to the servant looking after Daniel in a low voice and leave.

The holidays were at an end. Daniel had to go home on Low Sunday. Daniel had stayed late in Cannes that evening. For the first time in his life he had drunk and gambled a little. He felt weary and agitated. He went to bed but hardly had he lain down when he felt still more awake and tormented. For some time, stretched out in the darkness, he didn't move. Was it possible his father and Sylvie? . . . And this story of Wardes' confinement? He had well understood from Ange's account that Wardes' madness was weird . . . uncertain . . . He thought desperately:

"That's no concern of mine. I'll have my own faults later, my follies, my own life . . . What do I care about my father! Besides they're just downstairs scuttlebutt. My father's ugly, my

father's old. My father's a cynical man without scruples. Sylvie—this saint—wouldn't lower herself to look at him . . . Come on, what do I suspect? What exactly do I believe? Unnecessary confinement with this Elinor Wardes' complicity? ”

Yes, that was possible. It seemed to him that Elinor Wardes was capable of anything. She was close to his parents now. She was forever dining with them or inviting them. They went out together.

He stood up and sat on the window—still hoping the gentle night wind would calm him.

He thought of Ange's anger towards his father. Was it Dario he'd wanted to talk about when he said: “Those now rich and famous who used to come and beg for my money.” Had his father been . . . so poor? And why was he now refusing to see Sylvie again? All these suspicions and half-formed assumptions were torturing him.

He was thirsty and drank the whole jug of water at his bed-side but it was tasteless and lukewarm. A little Perrier, sparkling, chilled that's what he'd like. He looked at the time: two o'clock. The servants slept in another part of *La Caravelle*. Only Ange would come if he rang for them now. Ange's room was on the floor below, near the office. Except for him and Ange, the house was empty. Ange had once said to him:

“If Monsieur Daniel is indisposed during the night, don't hesitate to call me. I don't sleep.”

“If he comes,” Daniel thought, ‘if I wake him, I'll ask for a bottle of mineral water. They're in the refrigerator. The office must be closed for the night. I don't have a key. When I see him, perhaps . . . I'll ask him a question, a single one. But he won't say anything. He'll be frightened of losing his job. He told me himself . . . He's going through a hard time. It's in his

interest to lie and conceal what my father's done. Yes, but . . . It's not a question of self-interest . . . He's sly, bitter. I can read him, work him out. I'm not a child any longer. He's desperately jealous of my father, because of money no doubt, or his good fortune . . . And then, even if he doesn't want to tell me anything, by his looks, his hesitations, the hoarse sigh he occasionally utters, I'll work out the truth," he thought.

"What truth? The past with Sylvie, the present with Wardes . . ." He rang and waited.

He waited a long time. No-one came. He rang more loudly. He left his room. The corridor was dark and the stairs deserted. *La Caravelle* had never appeared so vast and silent. He rang again and again. Below the dogs woke and threw themselves at the closed door, shaking it with their heads and claws. Ange didn't show himself. Daniel leaned over the banister, looked at the darkened vestibule, and called out:

"Ange. Come on! Come up. Are you there? I don't feel well. I need you!"

No-one. He ran across the vestibule. He opened the door separating the kitchens and the office from the part of the house where Ange lived. He saw a light in the kitchen. He entered. Ange was sitting near the table with an empty bottle of cognac in front of him. His head was bent and resting on his crossed arms and it seemed he was sleeping deeply.

Drunk! This is what he spends his nights doing! "I don't sleep, Monsieur Daniel . . ."

Daniel was gripped by a fit of nervous laughter. As for himself, he still felt the whisky he'd drunk flow like fire mixed with his blood. He grasped Ange's shoulder and shook it. Ange lifted his head and threw it backwards with such force that Daniel quickly held the chair down. He believed the headwaiter's heavy weight was going to hasten a fall. He shouted in Ange's ear:

"Ange! Ange! It's me, monsieur Daniel, don't be frightened!"

Slowly the old man's eyes opened. He looked at Daniel's haggard face, and said in a voice low and clear:

"I knew for certain you'd come, little one."

Again, Daniel burst out laughing. In astonishment he heard this raucous, trembling laugh ring in his ears, then thought: "It's weird hearing him call me 'my little one'. The whole thing's comical."

"Is there a drop of cognac left, Ange?" he asked.

"You'd like a drink?"

"Yes. Why not, old man?"

"You're making fun of me, eh," Ange said, frowning, his face a deep purple. "You look down on me, you too, eh. But why, dear God? All my life people've made fun of me . . . People beckoning me with their finger-tips, when I was a head-waiter, greeting me with a brief nod . . . I like that . . . How's things, Ange? And they're no better than me. I did my job, quite calm . . . I was well aware they were making fun of me behind my back. And your father . . . I remember him, that one! Do you think he shook my hand, offered me a chair? He was in a hurry, supposedly, in a hurry about what? To go and borrow money. To go and twist women around his little finger with his dough. To carry out his dirty put-up jobs, locking up people no more mad than you or me . . ."

Visibly, he was frightened of his words. He staggered, sat on his chair.

"That's no concern of yours. And, besides, you're an innocent child, you can easily see that, an innocent child. Just look at his luck, his happiness, your father, still having you, looking at you when he wants to . . . your healthy cheeks, and this air of childish innocence that catches at

your heart. A son, what, a son! Are you going to tell him I drink, get drunk at night, eh? Bah! He would've noticed it for sure, sooner or later. Everyone knows. They all look down on me! I know for sure he'll send me packing. I'm telling you. Things are going bad for me . . . For you too. Would you like a drink? Hold on, here's a glass. There, behind me, in the cupboard, excuse me Monsieur Daniel, you'll find some wine or whisky or good champagne, Clicquot 1906, there must be some left, poor Wardes used to drink it all day long. Monsieur Daniel won't mind serving himself, he isn't proud."

Daniel opened the cupboard door, picked up a bottle of champagne and placed it on the table, but neither Ange nor he thought of opening it. They remained seated, facing each other in silence.

Finally Ange asked:

"What do you want to know? Come on, come on get the most out of me. You can ask me anything to-night. It's easy to see I'm sloshed. Sitting here facing a boy like mine (my son like he used to be, because now he's bald with a pot belly) sitting here looking at those beautiful eyes, those fresh lips—you think I'll tell you everything you want, everything to make you happy. Who interests you? Know what your daddy was, eh? My son has a wife, a family who must repeat all day long to him: Your father was uncultured, uneducated. You've got to look down on him, forget him, curse him . . . Oh, well there'll be someone who'll say to other people's sons: 'Your father was a shark, one of those little Levantines who come to our country, dying of hunger and leave with millions. Leave? I don't give a f . . . about you. They're too comfortable here and they stay here. They die here, they've got dealing in the blood. Some sell filthy pictures, others coke. As for your father he's a charlatan. He trades in people's unhappiness. Well, what do you still

want to know? Is what I told you about Madame Wardes and him true? That, my little Monsieur Daniel, is something you'll never know. Imagine what you like. Think about it. Dream about it. I do a lot of dreaming myself, every god-made night. Not about other people's stories, not likely . . . About my own family, my own blood, my parents or the flesh and blood you fathered . . . womanising, money all that passes, is forgotten, but when your family is involved, that single drop of the same blood poisons everything. Maybe he was Madame Wardes' lover. Maybe not . . . Me, I don't know anything. All the same it's strange he came night after night and stayed with her for hours in the sitting-room upstairs when Wardes was ill . . . As for Wardes . . . That also interests you, eh? Well! Listen . . . I'll tell you what I know. It's up to you after that . . ."



## Chapter 26

Daniel was spending his first night in Paris. On arrival, he found Clara on her feet; he was never to know how ill she had been. His father was waiting for him. Daniel had been pampered and made much of, kissed and quizzed. Was he tired? Hadn't he swum too much? And in this season, the water must have been still cold. He had written very few letters . . . He had grown taller.

Now, at last, he was alone, well away from them in his room with the door closed. He paced up and down from one wall to the other; he had inherited it from his father, this irrepressible anxiety, this muted fever mixed with his bones, his blood.

It was late, past midnight. He heard his father's step downstairs, the noise of the *porte-cochère* half-opened, opened and quickly closed. He knew his father spent almost every night away. Never had he wondered what business, what pleasures drew him far from the house, sometimes until morning. He thought suddenly he'd always instinctively shied away from the thought of what his father was doing with his life, just as you'd stay clear of the edge of a pool whose waters are deep and dark.

"What would he do? Talk to him about Wardes? He'll deceive me", he said to himself. "He'll distract me, tell me what pleases him and things will continue just as in the past. Was his mother unaware of it? . . . He knew how much she helped him, how much she was involved in his business. She was well up on everything. Who was it who kept his appointments' book? Who demanded the fees due? Who pestered Mademoiselle Aron, the secretary, to recoup the fees that were overdue? They seemed so close, his father and mother . . . No doubt his father was so loved

that Clara must have made him own up to everything in his life, concealed or illegal. Sometimes Daniel had believed . . . (he still believed it) Clara knew all about Dario's liaisons. Not only was she aware of them but, certainly, tolerated them. Once he'd surprised her ordering flowers on Dario's behalf by phone for a woman known openly and publicly as his father's mistress.

"But she can't know the whole truth about Wardes," he thought. "But, then would that mean she's . . . that they're accomplices?"

But it's *maman*! It's *maman*!"<sup>58</sup> he murmured as if defending her against someone who'd sniggered and whispered in his heart, "She knows everything. And she accepts everything because she loves him and is not a woman like Sylvie who has a law within, a God! . . . *Maman* has only one law, one God, him . . .

Besides, Sylvie herself . . . Hadn't Ange insinuated she'd been his father's mistress?" He hid his face in his hands. "That as well, his mother knew, without doubt . . . She'd never liked him talking to her about Sylvie. Ah! He must talk to Clara who alone of all could help him. He wanted to know the truth from her. Perhaps it all was an invention by Martinelli, a lie, the ramblings of a drunk. She would draw him close to her; she would kiss him; she would stroke his forehead and, close to her, he would believe once again in the goodness of the world. She would explain that he was mistaken. She would give him proof <sup>59</sup> of Wardes' madness, of Sylvie's innocence." He thought he heard her words:

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<sup>58</sup> L'emploi de 'maman' souligne la force de l'amour de Daniel pour sa mère.

<sup>59</sup> À l'encontre du français, l'anglais préfère l'emploi du singulier pour « proof ». Inversement l'anglais préfère le pluriel pour « délices. » *Dans Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais* Darbelnet et Vinay écrivent de « la préférence de l'anglais pour des mots singuliers par la forme et pluriel par le sens. . . Cependant il y a toute une série de cas où c'est l'anglais qui préfère pour marquer les parties de l'ensemble, alors que le français se contente du singulier » (pp.122-123).

“But you’re dreaming, my little boy, you’re dreaming . . .”

Like the nights when he used to wake up from a nightmare and found himself in his bed, his head against his mother’s breast. She would bend over him, in her long white night-dress, her greying hair falling on his cheeks, faithful, tender, smiling, kind.

“It’s only a nasty dream, my little boy, my Daniel,” she used to say.

He sat on his bed, his legs trembling. How could he dare talk to her? He loved her, respected her. But out of love for her he had to warn her. Again, he thought:

“There wouldn’t be any point in talking to my father! What am I in his eyes? A child. He’ll threaten Ange, keep him quiet, get rid of him with a sum of money and won’t let Wardes go! He well knows I won’t denounce him. But my mother will find the necessary words and frighten him, talk to him about the possible scandal, the crime, prison, what do I know! Or talk to her in his name. Because he does love her.”

But he didn’t move. He remained there divided between the desire and the fear of going off to find her, when, suddenly, he heard Clara’s gentle step at the door. She knocked.

“I heard you walking . . . you’re not sleeping my little one?”

“No, maman. Come in.”

She walked to the bed, blinking her myopic eyes.

“But you haven’t undressed . . . Why haven’t you gone to bed, Daniel? Are you ill? How pale you are . . . When you arrived, it was easy to see you weren’t as you usually are . . . Daniel, aren’t you well? Have you any concerns? You’re almost a man now,” she said looking at him in fear and tenderness, thinking: “As little as he resembles Dario, when he’s unhappy, when he’s cold, when he trembles as he’s doing now, it’s the other I see . . .”

She sat on the bed, enfolded him in her arms.

“What’s the matter, Daniel?”

“Nothing, *maman*.”

“Don’t lie. Are you ill?”

She put her hand on Daniel’s forehead, drew him to her, caressed his cheek with her lips. Always, she had felt the first touch of fever. He was shivering, his teeth were chattering, his hands were icy, but she knew he wasn’t ill. She sighed. Basically, that was all that mattered, health, life . . . The rest! . . . She whispered in his ear:

“Darling, tell me what’s troubling you. I can hear and understand everything.”

He remembered Dario in former times, approaching her, confiding in her, and after a slight start, perhaps, of conscience, she would forgive. She used to help him if he needed help. She used to close her eyes.

“Oh! *maman, maman*,” he said in a hushed voice.

“She looked at him, terrified.

“But what’s the matter? What’s happened?” You’ve lost some money. You’ve had an affair with a woman.”

“It’s not about me, *maman*.”

“It wasn’t about him! Blessed words . . . Yes, he was seventeen years, the age people take to heart others’ debts, others’ sorrows . . . And he was so fair and generous. As a child, he hadn’t been able to bear one of his comrades being punished, nor see an animal badly treated, or a child beaten.”

“Ah, that’s because he’s never been sorry for himself,” she thought; that’s why there remains in him so much for others . . . my little child, happy, well-fed, satisfied.”

“It’s about my father, *maman* . . .”

She became pale and drew away a little. A long silence passed between them.

“About your father? I don’t understand.”

“*Maman*, do you know about Wardes’ madness, about his confinement?”

“Unfortunately I do . . . Poor man!”

“*Maman*, have you ever thought . . . this attack of madness, during which he had to be locked up, was very convenient for Elinor Wardes?”

“What do you mean?”

She hesitated before saying anything. She pronounced each word carefully, with distaste, trembling.

“Come on, *maman*, he was extravagant. He couldn’t run his own business. In spite of everything, until now, no one had ever said he was mad . . .”

“But, my darling, your father had known Wardes for years, has been looking after him . . . I don’t know for how long . . . you were still quite a young child when Wardes first came to our home. You’re well aware your father treats mental illnesses. So, it couldn’t be about a mentally sane man.”

“He was tense, violent . . . Naturally, it’s not about health. He had phobias, without doubt, anxiety, but I’ve heard my father say I don’t know how many times: ‘He’s not mad. He’ll never be mad.’”

“Who’s talked to you about Wardes?”

“I can’t tell you, *maman*.”

“Why?”

“Because . . . I promised”.

“Daniel, Daniel, you’re getting involved in something that’s none of your business!”

“Really? And when the story breaks, when people know Wardes wasn’t mad, that my father had him locked up at his wife’s request, when people count the money he received for this delightful task will you tell the police, the journalists and me we’re mixed up in what doesn’t concern us? When a crime has been committed, it concerns those who’ve discovered it in the first instance! And it’s their business to inform the police.”

“But, Daniel, you won’t give your father away?”

“So it’s true, *maman*!”

“No! No!”

She grasped his shoulders, shook him.

“I don’t understand where you got that from! Who’s put that idea in your head? I swear you’re wrong, you’re dreaming, Daniel!”

“My father is a . . .”

“Be quiet”, she repeated.

She stood up quickly, and with all her strength, she, who’d never struck Daniel as a child, smacked him—but not with much force. It was she who tottered and collapsed on Daniel’s bed. After a moment, he bent over, he took the hand that had just struck him and tenderly he kissed it. She threw herself against him, wrapped him in her arms and drew him close to her.

“*Maman*, forgive me! *Maman*, forgive me!”

He heard the wild beating of his heart. He couldn't say any other words.

She said quietly:

“Don't think about all this. Forget it. I'm sure he cannot have done anything wrong, blameworthy! But, even if he'd killed or stolen, even if he was abandoned by the whole world, our duty would be to protect him, love him and help him . . .”

“But I can't, *maman*, even out of love for you! I can't stifle my conscience. I'll talk to my father myself.”

She agreed wearily.

“If you wish.”

“Do you think he'll be cunning enough, strong enough to deceive me? I'll approach others if that's the case . . .”

“But what's Wardes done to you? What do you owe Wardes? You don't know him. Your father loves you. He sacrificed himself for you . . .”

“It's not about Wardes! It's not about the individual, *maman*, but about the crime, you must know it's a crime! . . .”

“Listen to me, Daniel, I give you my word of honour Wardes will be released.”

“How will you manage to do that, my poor mother?”

“I've given you my word.”

“You'll talk to my father . . . but you'll be so sorry for him . . .”

She pushed him gently away and got up.

“What I'll feel doesn't concern you, I promise. Go and sleep, now, my little one.”

## Chapter 27

It was morning when Dario came home. Clara wasn't in bed. She was waiting for him in her room. He thought at first that she had had one of her heart attacks which occasionally happened in the late hours of the night. With painful anxiety, he took her in his arms.

"Clara, darling, what's the matter? Are you ill?" She was breathing with difficulty. He gently forced her to sit close to him.

"Don't tremble like that. It's nothing. We'll get you well."

"I'm not sick, Dario. Listen, Dario! I beg you to tell me the truth; I've been told that Wardes was perfectly healthy in mind, that his wife and you have had him locked up because Elinor wanted to be free . . ."

Without answering, he stood up and moved away from her.

"Dario, look at me. It isn't possible, you haven't done that. Answer me! You've never lied to me. If you knew who told me that, Dario! It's . . ."

She didn't manage to say her son's name. She pointed to his room.

"The little one," he said quietly.

"Dario, so it's true."

She passed her handkerchief across her lips, her appearance sad and desperate.

"It's better to tell me the truth, Dario . . . as always, as you used to . . . you well know you can't hide anything from me. We're too close to each other . . ."

She took his hand, drew it against her, with the same movement of tenderness with which she had wrapped her arms around Daniel's shoulders some hours before.



“Did you want to do a favour for Elinor, to settle a debt? . . . Answer me. Have pity on me. He isn’t mad, this unfortunate person, isn’t that so?”

“Free, he’d die like a dog, from alcohol or drugs, or he’d kill himself after a night’s gambling. Locked up, he’s made me a million.”

“Dario, it’s a crime.”

“Not in my eyes.”

“This money, you’d earn as much in two years, and honestly!”

“Clara, darling, I haven’t earned a *sou* honestly in ten years. But the worst is even this way, I can’t get out of difficulty. This million paid other debts. Again, I’ve got nothing! Again, the hounds are after me.”

“But sell everything. Sell everything you own!”

“And what will I do afterwards? Can you see Doctor Asfar in a little apartment in Batignolles<sup>60</sup> with a maid of all work, no car? Who’ll come to see me then? Who’d believe in me? It’s the curse weighing on me. I live on people’s madness and greed, and if I stop flattering their madness, they’ll turn away from me and ruin me. I need money. To get by on. To live. To provide for you.”

She gently squeezed his hand.

“For me? I won’t take our money where I’m going. You well know I’m dying.”

“Don’t talk to me about your death, Clara,” he said after a moment’s silence. “As for me, I feel so weary, so old I fear above everything my death comes before I can assure Daniel’s

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<sup>60</sup> Un des quartiers du nord de Paris, ancienne commune annexée en 1860. Donc un quartier pauvre.

future. But even if I knew I only had six months to live for these six months at least I'd want to have money, even at the cost of a crime. Forgive me, Clara. I'm talking to you as if to God. I fear poverty above everything. It's not only because I know it, but because generations of unfortunates before me have known it. There is in me a whole lineage of hungry persons; they are still not, they'll never be sated! Never will I be warm enough! Never will I feel safe enough! Nothing is more odious, more shameful, more irreparable than poverty! Clara, I'd die for you if I had to, I swear it, but, even for you, I won't give up Wardes. I'll never let Wardes go free, never!"

"Dario, I don't understand. Since you have the money you needed, this unfortunate man can't be of use to you any longer. Give him his freedom, Dario . . . on any pretext whatever! Recognize you were mistaken! Say he's cured! But don't have this crime on your conscience any longer . . . that will bring us misfortune!"

"But, my dear, he is still of use to me . . ."

"How can that be?"

"His wife pays me to keep him locked up. That's how we live."

"But your patients? Your consultations?"

"Every year that gets worse. Every year tax and debts eat away everything in advance."

"But this desperate man may one day kill himself!" Clara exclaimed grasping his hands."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"He's well guarded."

“But if something goes wrong no doubt you would have brought it upon yourself.”<sup>61</sup>

“Naturally.”

“You disgust me.”

Again he shrugged in an expression of weariness and pity.

“Poor Clara you’re reciting a lesson. They’re not your words, those words, they’re our son’s. Yes, undoubtedly I disgust him, if he knows, if he’s guessed. How could it be otherwise? Remember my life, at his age. He . . . Come on, I’ll only say a word. You’ll understand: He’s always had enough to eat. That’s why we can’t understand each other.”

He was moving nervously throughout the room.

“He’s spoiled, spoiled . . . Do you know what my stepfather used to say? ‘When a child sleeps on a mattress and not on the ground, he’s already spoiled, weak, incapable of knowing how to fight.’”

“Dario, why fight?”

“Why? You’re saying that to me, Clara. But what would’ve become of me if I hadn’t known how to fight? Do you remember we were poor, famished, two miserable immigrants, and we’ve become rich, honoured<sup>62</sup> and powerful,” he said in pride, looking around at the beautiful furniture, the high ceilings, the expensive curtains, as if he was seeking to reassure himself by looking at the visible signs of his success; what would have become of Daniel if I’d allowed myself to be restrained by scruples or pity?”

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<sup>61</sup> Il est impossible de rendre littéralement « Il te serait . . . bien payé » .

<sup>62</sup> Bien que Le Petit Robert fournisse comme synonymes « estimé » et « honorable » du mot « honoré » nous avons rejeté chacun et avons choisi « honoured ».

“Dario, be quiet! You’re not speaking from your heart, through your real nature! You didn’t used to be that way. What’s happened?”

“I’ve lived,” he said, sighing.

“Dario,” she said in Russian, and he looked at her, astonished, because for many years they had spoken only French between them; you’ve given me my daily bread, then wealth, a child who lived and happiness . . . yes, happiness, because you’ve loved me in your own way. Now, there’s only peace you can give me before I die. I’m frightened, Dario.”

“Of scandal? Rest assured Clara, there’ll be no scandal. Elinor is a woman rich and powerful. She knows where to hand out money where necessary and how much is needed. About her, you can be at peace. In short, everything’s been done, at the right time, with the maximum of precaution.”

“Daniel could expose you,” she said in a hushed voice.

“Never! You well know! He won’t do that because of you.”

“Aren’t you ashamed in his presence?”

“Bah! Let him talk. One day when I die, if he’s rich, he’ll forgive me for having been a crook. The best of fathers, if he only leaves his heirs the memory of his virtues, believe me, very quickly gets blamed: ‘He was honest, right! People never said anything about him. But . . . Why didn’t he think of me? Couldn’t he have done that? . . . He was weak . . . He was too honest . . .’ That’s the way children are, Clara. No, my dear, my old , my faithful friend, not for you, not for him will I let Wardes go . . .”

## Chapter 28

“How much, doctor?” the patient murmured.

“Five hundred *francs*,” Dario replied.

The aging woman half-opened her bag and gave him the money compressing her lips,<sup>63</sup> with an irritated and desperate look, as if she was thinking: “Charlatan, the hope you sell is dear.”

But in the depths of her heart, she believed him. Dario’s eyes, his voice, his smile inspired confidence. And she had heard so much talk about his miraculous cures! He treated exclusively these strange maladies of the nervous system which give rise to a thousand interpretations, to a thousand treatments. And if the illness, which had seemed to be cured was reborn under other forms, if a new neurosis appeared, no-one blamed the doctor: people were grateful to him for having sold some months, some years of respite.

Dario crumpled the money in his hand, lifted the curtain which shielded the salon door, letting through the patient with the yellow complexion, the hollow eyes and jerky step. She moved away. The salon was half empty. A woman, clothed in black was waiting near the door. He motioned her to come in.

When she walked past him, her face in shadow, he didn’t recognize her, but shuddered nevertheless. Only one woman in the world had this serene step and long and delicate neck he saw beneath the black hat.

“Madame Wardes!”

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<sup>63</sup> Nous avons d’abord traduit ‘« en pinçant » par « pursing » mais nous nous sommes rendu compte que nous employions une suite de mots-« bag », « money », « pursing » tellement associée que l’effet aurait dû faire sourire le lecteur.

It was Sylvie. In fifteen years they hadn't met each other. She was close to fifty now. She was almost an old woman.

She sat and he turned on the lamp on his desk to see her better. It was a spring day, heavy with storm, gloomy. He looked at this face without an atom of powder or make-up, the face of a woman who no longer sought to please, this flesh noble and delicate, scarcely bruised by age, these big eyes whose expression was so serene and so wise.<sup>64</sup>

Dario was pale, attentive, on his guard. But, little by little, his eyelids quivered and dropped.

“You, Sylvie! What a long time, my God . . .”

“A very long time,” she said.

She had become somewhat pale. She slowly crossed her hands on her knees. He suddenly thought he'd like to remove the black gloves which hid her fingers. How beautiful her hands were. Did she still have the diamond which used to fascinate him in former times?

“You do know, don't you, I know Daniel. He often comes to my home. We're good friends. Hasn't he told you so?”

He shook his head.

“He did tell me once, more than a year ago. Then he never spoke of you again. Daniel isn't very open . . . with me.”

“However it's for him I've come.”

“How's that?”

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<sup>64</sup> Il était facile de conserver la plupart de l'allitération de « si sereine et si sage ». En employant « wise » nous avons conserve le « s » mais à l'intérieur du mot.

“Look at me,” she said.

He lifted towards her his beautiful eyes with their long feminine eyelashes, surprising on the hard and cynical face of an old Oriental.

“I’ve come for him and in the name of my husband. It is me Daniel asked to verify if certain stories he’d been told about Philippe’s arbitrary detention were correct. I’ve seen Ange Martinelli. I’ve received a letter from him. Dario if you’re afraid of scandal, a court case, let Philippe go. I managed to get him to agree to keep quiet.”

He said with effort, because his lips found it difficult to form the words:

“Leave Wardes where he is. You come with but one weapon, the ramblings of an old drunkard. I’m not afraid of a trial.”

“You’ll have against you the French doctors. You know you’re accused of doing a charlatan’s work. You’ll have against you the psychiatrists of the Vienna school who claim you’ve plagiarised their theories and you discredit them. You’ll have against you your debts and the life you lead.”

“I understand. But for me I’ve Elinor’s money, the world’s corruption, influence and connections. My dear Sylvie, that’s better, that’s more precious.”

“Dario, it’ll be your loss.”

“So what! I’ll have played and lost.”

“I’ll have you charged,” she said, “as soon as I leave here unless I’ve got your promise.”

“You’re talking to me as if you were threatening to burn a man who’s drowning. From the moment Wardes is free, he’s the one who’ll have me charged.”

“No. He won’t do it. I, myself, can answer for that. I know Philippe well. The trial, expert witnesses, the months waiting, the articles nasty or mocking, all that frightens him more than you. Free, back in control of his fortune, he’ll leave here, he’ll end his days away from France, I’m sure of it. You won’t hear people talk about him any longer.”

“What’s Wardes done to you? He cheated on you, he abandoned you. He’s weak, corrupt, wicked. If he isn’t mad, at least he’s been tottering on the edge of reason for twenty years. What good can he do? To whom is he useful? Remember that night at *La Caravelle*, Claude’s illness, a child, the desertion . . . Why for any reason, for what love would you forgive him? He forced you to share his filthy life,” he said in a lower voice. I’ve occasionally thought he was as brutal with you as he was to the unfortunate women he picked up on the street. Did he ever hit you?”

She interrupted him.

“Yes he did . . . often,” she said calmly, but her face became still paler, more sunken, aged suddenly.

“He’s a sick man! A madman! ”

“Not quite. Between these terms there is a nuance, but this nuance is the truth. He must be cared for, but not this way. You can’t cut him off from the living because he upsets the woman he lives with and yourself. That would be too easy!”

“Ah!” he said ironically, “I admire you. You have an unwritten law, infallible, deep in your heart. Me, I’m not like that. It’s reality I see, a man who’s done as much wrong to you as possible and who’d be as evil if set free as a wild beast. Your daughter who’d have about her name the scandal of a court case, all that mud, that shame, because Wardes’ whole private life would be exposed. I, who’ve always been your friend, faithful, devoted and whom your



revelations would destroy. My son, lastly, who's really innocent of all that and deserves pity. How I envy you knowing so well always where the truth is!"

"I have with me a light that never deceives," she said gently.

"You're talking about God? I know you're a believer. Ah! You are, you, children of the light. You have only noble passions, you are infinitely beautiful . . . But I, I'm formed of darkness, of earth's silt. I don't worry about heaven. I need the wealth of this world and don't ask for anything else."

"Let Philippe go," she said, "I beg you. Don't keep this crime on your conscience. Put it right as far as possible. For the love of Daniel!"

"Daniel," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "poor innocent child . . . I'd like to see him in five or six years from now, when I'm dead, having left only debts, and when he thinks of the fortune which could've been his if I hadn't listened to you!"

"Poor Dario," Sylvie said with a smile. "You'll just have to come to terms with it. Daniel doesn't think only of worldly possessions . . ."

He answered bitterly:

"If I'd been fortunate like him, I'd be like him perhaps . . ."

"For the love you held for me, I beg you . . ."

Dario remained a long time silent.

"That's the first time you've used a woman's weapon . . . My love for you . . . you never seemed to notice it. Why talk about it so late?"

"Because now," she said in a hushed voice, "there's no longer any danger."

“Sylvie, do you understand how much I loved you? I’d never met a being like you. There lies my misfortune. That comes from way back, from childhood. To believe wholeheartedly that life is peopled by monsters. And what else to believe? When you’ve seen only poverty, violence, plunder and cruelty.<sup>65</sup> Later on life doesn’t come to set you right. It’ll do its best, often. It’ll load you with worldly goods: wealth, honours and even with genuine affections. You’ll see it, until the last day, with your child-like eyes: a horrible chaos. But you will have changed my heart.”

He was speaking in a voice, hushed and bitter, without looking at her.

She said softly:

“No. You have a greedy heart which will never be satisfied.”

“Sylvie, listen hard. In memory of my love for you, I’ll give up what I’ve undertaken. I will in a way set Wardes free, Wardes’ body, but he’ll come back again looking for me. For such a long time he’s been in my power . . . Don’t look at me like that. I’m not a demon, but from this power, I won’t be able to free him. He’s a weak man, worn out, an unfortunate who for a long time no longer has a soul and what has taken its place, his impulses, his actions, his desires his dreams themselves, it is I who inspire them in him. I have your word. I know you’ll see to it that he doesn’t do anything against me. But he’ll come back and throw himself into my arms and then . . .”

“He won’t come back.”

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<sup>65</sup> L ‘emploi du singulier anglais pour remplacer le pluriel français.

## Chapter 29

Two years later, Wardes returned. It wasn't Dario's day for consultations. The doctor wasn't home, he was told, but was due to come back about seven o'clock. Wardes was able to wait.

The servant showed him into the large sitting room, deserted and dark; he wanted to turn the lights on, but Wardes stopped him, there was still a little daylight; it was March. Wardes was in horror now of the glare of light. He took a few steps and sat down before the empty fire-place. He remained there, immobile, crumpled<sup>66</sup> in his armchair, until seven o'clock.

At seven, Dario came home to dress. When he learnt Wardes was waiting for him, he thought:

“Logically, he ought, presently, to kill me like a dog.”

He couldn't resist a shudder of fear, but, he found, occasionally, in the very excess of emotion an intense and fervent pleasure. He went to dress before receiving Wardes, in order to extend this moment of uncertainty, so dear to gamblers, in which anxiety and hope, both stretched to the extreme, become one.

He led Wardes into his office. Both, without speaking, a long time watched each other. Wardes said in a hoarse voice:

“You've acted towards me in an atrocious manner, a vile manner. No court in the world, if I'd brought a charge, would've judged otherwise.”

“Why haven't you brought a charge?”

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<sup>66</sup> Wardes est désesparé, déconfit, tiraillé d'angoisse. Plutôt que d'employer « effrontré », « abattu » ou « écroulé » nous avons choisi « crumpled » ce qui, nous croyons, décrit mieux son état d'âme.

“You well know why. Because, after getting free of your hands, a man can no longer call his soul his own. You’ve taken away my strength, my will-power, the instinct to defend myself. You were well aware of it. You were counting on that when you released me.”

“What is it you’ve come to do here? Wait. Don’t lie. You’re going to tell me you wanted to insult me, kill me, but the truth is you need me.”

“No!” Wardes shouted.

“No?”

Dario approached him and gently placed his hand on Wardes’ shoulder.

“You said, just now, something remarkable, you said your soul isn’t your own. But therein is your salvation and perhaps your cure, if you wish. You came, once, bringing me a distressed soul, as one gives up to the surgeon a sick body, telling me, ‘Cure me. Chase away the demons.’ As long as I kept you in my hands, as you say, you were set free.”

“No! A thousand times no!”

“Well, why did you come back?”

Wardes didn’t reply.

“You’ve resumed your normal life, now?”

“Yes.”

“What can I do for you?”

“Listen,” Wardes said, “for two years all the care, all the treatments have failed where you had, to a certain extent, succeeded. You understand how desperate I am, since to-day I’m before you. I’m not frightened of you.”

He repeated:

“I’m no longer frightened of you. I know you’ve played a game that doesn’t succeed twice. Besides a letter from me is in safe hands, and a charge will be made, at the very moment, if ever . . .”

A rush of blood rose to his face.

“Stay calm,” Dario said gently and with authority, “be quiet immediately. You’re poisoning yourself morally with words and hateful thoughts.”<sup>67</sup>

“It’s Elinor, isn’t it, who’s done everything?” Wardes said in a lower tone: “I don’t have any reason to complain about her, anyway; in my absence the business has been admirably run, with a masterly hand. All the same, you two, you’ve committed, in doing that . . .”

Dario interrupted him:

“You come both to insult me and implore me. I know your condition, be sure of that. I knew you’d come. I alone can give you rest.”

“Yes, I believe in the depths of my soul you’re a depraved<sup>68</sup> man, capable of meditating and executing, coldly, a crime. You’ve committed a crime against me. But only you can save me, like a tranquilliser, like alcohol or any other filthy drug.”

“Your accusation,” Dario said, “is a disgusting allegation . . . or the raving of a sick man.”

“No. I’m your client, but I’m also . . . I was Philippe Wardes. I know what money is. You’ve sold me, you’ve delivered me feet and wrists tied to my wife, for the sum of one million, of which she’s only paid a third, the rest probably having been expended by my council of administration wanting to get rid of me and my methods too bold in a time of crisis. That’s the truth.”

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<sup>67</sup> Nous avons employé « intoxiquer » dans son sens étymologique « empoisonner ».

<sup>68</sup> Parmi tous les synonymes de « vil », « affreux », « corrompu », « ignoble », « impur » nous croyons que c’est « dépravé » avec ce sens de « corrompu moralement » qui résume bien le caractère de Dario Asfar.

“I have carried out painfully, but firmly, my medical profession. Isolation, even enforced, was necessary for you. You admit yourself you’re sicker since you left me.”

Wardes shrugged his shoulders angrily.

“Do you take me for a child? Healthy food, fresh air, abstention from alcohol, have done me good, but you know yourself what I and others come to you for: the secret of going on living as we like to live, without suffering from it.”

“To eat the green grape without having your teeth on edge,” Dario murmured.<sup>69</sup>

He half-closed his eyes.

“Get to the point, get to the point . . . It’s late. I’m dining at the English Embassy. I don’t have a moment to lose. Do you want me to continue my treatment?”

“I want to try everything! I want to get better! But I tell you again a complaint to the state prosecutor is in the hands of my solicitor. At the first movement, at the first hostile act against me, the scandal will break. I feel at ease; your *confrères* will be too happy to make you pay for your wealth and the honours you’re weighed down with,” he said, eyeing ironically Dario’s decorations. “This time, you’d pay dearly, very dearly for any attempt of that kind. But I know you won’t do anything. It’s a trick that only succeeds once.

“I repeat,” Dario said in an icy tone, “all these shady machinations have existed only in your sick brain. You’re in pain. You come to me. I have the power to relieve you. This very night you will sleep without fear, without a shudder of anxiety. What kind of existence are you leading now?”

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<sup>69</sup> Nous nous sommes résolu à traduire ce proverbe littéralement au lieu de « To have your cake and eat it ».

“The most normal life in appearance, but the night attacks have returned, stronger and more unbearable than they used to be.”

“More frequent?” Two, three times a month? More often?”

“Every night now,” Wardes said.

He was deathly pale. His mouth quivered.

“The anxiety has taken a form which is, I believe, only the exaggeration of a fear very common in humanity: I’m frightened of death.”

He strove to laugh.

“Do you think that, doctor? At my age? This adolescent fear . . . I’ve been to war, however. You know I was brave, and even foolhardy. I’m frightened of death! Fear . . . what a weak word. I lie down and stay stretched out; I think of the shape of the coffin. I can’t remain without light; I think of the dark, the earth. I can’t close my eyes; I’m frightened I’ll never open them. If the sheet covers my mouth, I . . . I’m frightened of getting into a car, on a train, on a plane. As well, I have the same dream over and over.”

He slowly smoothed his forehead with his hand.

“I dream I’m in a town destroyed by shell-fire, the houses are in flames, I’m walking along a devastated road, torn by bombs, beside houses ripped apart and from which flames leap out . . . And then, I’ll let you off the description; you understand . . . that, that’s not the most terrible. I hear women’s cries, the cries of the wounded . . . One cry especially, uttered by a horrible girl with a made-up face, a cry. . .”

He shuddered.

“. . . a cry I still have in my ears . . . Then, at a window, I see a woman leaning out, gesturing to me . . . This woman’s face changes. At times, I dream of Sylvie, young. I go up, I tell her I’m being pursued, I ask her to hide me . . . Then, the nightmare becomes confused and terrifying, peopled by monsters . . . I don’t know why, I accuse this woman of handing me over. I feel anger wake in me, you know, this rage, this destructive frenzy which seizes the heart. I push the woman towards the open window, but, always, before seeing her fall, cast by me into the void, I wake up . . . But all this is nothing . . . I have other hallucinations, more terrible . . .”

Dario stood up, gently placed his hand on Wardes’ shoulder.

“Stretch out, here, on the divan. Say no more. Not a word. See, I place my hand on your forehead. I’m calming you. Listen to my voice. Don’t despair. Rejoice, on the contrary. You’re going to be cured. You’re going to be saved.”



## Chapter 30

In the night club's vestibule Dario stopped a moment. He drew in, closing his eyes, this warm smell of women's furs, steeped in perfume. He had a meeting with Nadine Souklotine. She was cheating on him. She'd always cheated on him, he knew, but until now, she had observed, in betraying him, a certain reserve, a certain decency. A woman has a way of being unfaithful, as long as she cares about a man, different from the way she'll cheat on him if it doesn't matter to her to be left by him and, with his experience with women, he recognized this change of tone brought into their liaison, just as a music lover, from the opening notes, recalls an air often heard.<sup>70</sup>

He entered the room, narrow and long, with grey walls and violet settees. The tables were crammed against each other. Nadine was not yet there. But would she come?

At the adjacent table to Dario's, there were two men and two women. Tall, portly, decorated, the men were talking to each other in a low voice in visible animation. They had brought their chairs together. You could hear the names of shares and figures and having uttered them, they would stop and look at each other with a pleased air. This is the way you talk about landscapes or paintings to a lover of nature or art; and half expressed, the other understands, remembers and sighs, touched.

The women, obviously, were wives; they appeared rich; they were covered in diamonds. They displayed them with the proud and calm dignity of the decent woman who has won her luxury effortlessly and considers it as her due and attaches to it the same value as her bank

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<sup>70</sup> Nous avons laissé cette longue phrase selon notre désir de conserver le style de Némirovsky.

account or an inheritance and who manages to transform diamonds and pearls into matter, dull, solid, serious. Whilst every jewel, to mistresses, is the souvenir of a combat and a victory, similar to decorations won under fire, these women wore them like the *Légion d'honneur* telling only of relations and solicitation and with which you decorate your breast without emotion, but simply so as not to call attention to yourself.

‘Well nourished,’ Dario thought.

When he saw a stranger, he would class him immediately in one of these two castes: the sated or the famished.

The women were talking to each other as well and to make themselves heard in spite of the orchestra, they had raised their voices to a shrill level. Dario, at first, listened without really understanding, occupied only by Nadine’s lateness. But suddenly his name, Dario Asfar . . . Doctor Asfar . . . one even said Professor Asfar . . . struck him. These women were talking about him.

“He’s not fashionable any longer,” said one of them in this cutting and unappealing tone taken up by women of the world, especially when talking about what they don’t understand and in this way happily compensating for their ignorance by their insolence.

Dario gently inclined his head; he was rotating the champagne flute, from which he had hardly taken a sip, in his hands. He was now listening to the women with keen interest; this gossip, caught amongst the crowd’s noise and the music, meant much more than the idle chatter of ignorant and foolish females. It was the answer to a question he had been asking for almost four years, the most alarming question for the man who lives on others—on their caprices, their

infatuation, their credulity—the only important question for the charlatan he had become (he was cynical enough to admit it to himself without shame).

“So, I’m not in fashion . . .” He didn’t underestimate this fateful warning. He looked at the women. The violet light lit their made-up faces—one, wide, heavy and with bluish marks, a small, cruel mouth, painted in dark red, in the shape of Cupid’s bow, and with large, pink cheeks. She was leaning over, and you could see the rise of her powdered breasts in the neckline of her copper-yellow dress. Her blonde hair was styled *à l’enfant*, with little ringlets at the temples. The other was tall, thin and gruff with a long neck bound in pearls. As the women spoke they watched the men dancing in front of them. Their eyes were hard, scornful but greedy, just as a mouth can be greedy, eyes knowing what they were looking for, what they want, eyes which compare, remember. A young waiter, as a dance commenced, stopped for a moment near them, and they looked at him with the look of the connoisseur, both calm and sensual, the way a gourmet of a certain age studies a dish which has already given him pleasure, a dish he has tasted in his imagination with a certain gratitude and, at the same time, has the insolent certainty of having it again when he wishes.

They stopped talking. The young man went off. They began their interrupted conversation again.

“He used to be popular, at one time, that’s undeniable.”

“Look at the woman in the pink dress. It’s Lily. God, how fat she’s got, the poor woman. The little Italian with her isn’t bad.”

“It goes without saying he’s a charlatan. People mention things about him that aren’t made up. One of my friend’s sons went to see this Dario Asfar, who gave him a price, I don’t

remember the exact amount, I think it was a matter of five or six thousand francs for a certain number of consultations. The boy's poor. He tried to bargain. Then Asfar had the cheek to tell him the treatment, to be successful, requires that the patient feels he's making an effort, a painful sacrifice and, in his case, since he wasn't wealthy, the most painful sacrifice he could make was to give up a large sum of money!"

"But you know there's nothing new in that. It's psychoanalytic dogma."

"Yes, but psychoanalysis is a serious, scientific theory. This Asfar, this 'master of souls' people don't even know where he's from."

At this point their voices were blotted out by the sudden violent noise of the orchestra. Dario inclined his head further, concealed his face in shadow.

He heard again:

"Henriette hadn't been able to bear men for six months. She told me in all confidence. She couldn't let her husband or lover come near her. For her it was atrocious suffering, you understand, a woman still young, but who's already at the age where you can't allow yourself to let a single moment of pleasure escape."

"Poor woman . . ."

"But, why do you pity her? Living without passions, when all is said and done, is it a great misfortune? First of all she went to see a famous psychoanalyst of the Vienna school . . ."

"I don't believe in psychoanalysis any more, it's out-dated."

"Personally, I've never had anything to do with him, thank God," said the blonde, seated near Dario, as she placed her white hand, dripping with rings, on the cleavage of her beautiful, prominent breasts, rising and falling gently.

“But Henriette ? Did he cure her, Henriette?” impatiently asked the brunette in the red dress, whose face, in the heat, was losing the original lustre of the make-up and assuming the gloomy look, unsatisfied and worn, it must have at other times.

“This Dario must be extremely rich,” the blonde murmured, without answering her friend’s question.

“Don’t you believe it, he’s very embarrassed financially.”

“You can’t go on spending what you used to, that’s the truth. I get my family doctor, good little Doctor Gingembre to look after me for sixty *francs* a visit, the doctor at my husband’s birth, and I’m not any less well for it.”

“Yes, these outsiders<sup>71</sup> play on our credulity.”

“Do you know there’s a new doctor, a remarkable one, who treats illnesses with a kind of hypnotism quite new?”

“But what illnesses?”

“Every illness, I believe.”

“Who told you about it?”

“I don’t remember any more. I’ll get his address, if you’re interested. I only know he’s young and very good-looking .And as well, he’s very popular.”

Dario sighed imperceptibly. He poured himself another glass of champagne which overflowed onto the table-cloth. The fashion, popularity . . . Chattering parrots . . . mad and foolish females . . . Ten more women would hear them and repeat: “But Henriette doesn’t go to

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<sup>71</sup> Comme nous l’avons déjà fait remarquer dans le Chapitre 1, nous avons choisi de traduire « étranger » comme « outsider » parce que c’est le sentiment que Dario lui-même sent le plus en France.

Dario Asfar any more. Indeed, no-one goes to Dario any more.” It wouldn’t take more of this to break his back! Yes, like an actor, like a night-club owner, like a whore . . .”

He thought:

“The truth is I haven’t knowingly played on their credulity, I’ve often relieved them, cured them occasionally, but I’ve made them pay top price, and it’s for that they don’t forgive me, although if God lends me life, they’ll pay again and again!”

## Chapter 31

It was three o'clock in the morning. Elinor Wardes with her friends, a band of drunk Americans, came into the night club. Almost immediately, she caught sight of Dario. She hadn't seen him since the day he told her a scandal was brewing, he feared a law suit, he needed to free Wardes. Now, again, Wardes had fallen into Dario's hands, under his power.

'Well played,' she thought.

She admired that. That a man was never beaten, that he could exploit everything, even failure, that he had climbed, with difficulty, bloodying his fingers, that he had fallen again, picked himself up miraculously, on the difficult ladder of success, nothing could please her more.<sup>72</sup> Success! She knew what that meant, how little was due to chance, how many attempts, how many battles, how many tears represented a career similar to Dario's, or hers . . .

But how harassed he seemed, how sad! She didn't like seeing him this way. She touched his arm in passing.

"By yourself?"

"Oh, it's you, Elinor," he said kissing her hand. Come closer. You'd be doing me a kindness."

She sat beside him.

"I've been waiting for someone who hasn't turned up," he said.

"This Nadine Souklotine? How much has she cost you?"

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<sup>72</sup> C'est une caractéristique du style némirovskien de séparer un verbe de son complément en intercalant une longue série de propositions subordonnées et de syntagmes adjectivaux ou adverbiaux, comme elle le fait ici avec « qu'il fût monté » et « sur la dure échelle de la réussite ».

“Don’t talk about money, Elinor.”

She burst out laughing.

“You’ve only lived for money!”

“Elinor, you astonish me! I thought if any woman in the world could understand me, it was you. Consider a famished beast, hunted down, with a female and little ones to feed, and cast them into a well-stocked sheep fold, among tender sheep, in a green pasture . . . But satisfied, I would have been like any other person, gentle and defenceless. Only a woman can give her life for money.”

“So you think business and money are the only things that count in my life?” Elinor murmured.

“Those, and unimportant love affairs . . .”

“I’m a woman like the others, nevertheless,” she said. “I’d like to find a man my equal. But there’s a curse on me, or perhaps it’s a side of my nature, too manly, searching, in spite of myself, weak men, feminine men, subservient to me. I’ve never been able to find any others, Mitenka first. Do you remember that unfortunate man? Wardes, next . . . And the others . . . I used to look for— and I found—good-looking, strapping young fellows, physically healthy, strong, good for crushing a woman in their arms but I must believe something else in me demands more, something never satisfied . . . I’m not talking only about the body . . .”

“I’m not either,” Dario said. “I’ve never found a woman who suited me exactly, at my level.”

He smiled weakly.

“. . . Living in another universe, situated far from me, perhaps . . . But like me, never.”



She took a cigarette and smoked for some time in silence. Then, she asked:

“When was the last time you saw Wardes?”

“Yesterday.”

“Does he come to see you every day?”

“Almost. He’s harassing me.”

“And no change?”

“In his mind? No.”

“Oh! Always the same thing,” Dario murmured carefully; “occasionally, on the edge of madness where it seems the least change will tip him over the edge.”

“And never does so.”

“There are, however, some signs more grave.”

“Really?”

He looked around him uneasily, but everybody was dancing. They were the only clear-minded ones, at this time of night when love and alcohol hold sway.

“Now he’s obsessed by suicide, mixed with his former terror of death.”

“But he stops . . . in time.”

“Yes. What’s holding him back, I sincerely believe, and I’m telling you without vanity, is me.”

“You!” she murmured, smiling.

“These consultations with me, these long analyses, his confessions which torture and relieve him, that’s the way his life is. He absorbs them as if he’s taking drugs.”

The lights, turned down during the dance number on the floor, were becoming brighter and turning pink. The women, instinctively, made the most of this flattering lighting to open their bags and examine their faces. Elinor sighed as she cast a glance in the mirror.

“I’m getting old. No,” she said stopping Dario’s objections, “it’s obvious, and not only there,” she said, showing the small mirror. All this bores me, these nightclubs, these faces, always the same . . . the idea of exhausting work, tomorrow, without the help of a man, prudent, wise knowing life and whose interest are similar to mine. It’s a sign of decrepitude, I’m well aware.”

“It’s intolerable, here,” Dario with a slight grimace of disgust, “but I assure you, at moments, I no longer have the courage to stay at home, to see my wife slowly dying, nor stand the presence of my son who never opens his mouth when I’m there. People find fault with me . . . Nadine . . . But Nadine’s a girl, fresh, young full of health and fun, who distracts my thoughts from this gloomy interior. It’s curious to what extent the most natural feelings make up the very core and substance of what the world sees in us as the most sombre, the most corrupt. Doctor Asfar and Elinor Wardes only wish the most bourgeois of lives, the most tender of unions.”

There was still a little champagne in the bottom of their glasses; they lifted them to their lips and drank slowly in silence.

## Chapter 32

At the end of summer, Dario advised Wardes to leave Paris. He suggested to him, as an ideal place to rest, a small thermal spa in the Auvergne. From there Wardes was to forward Dario, every week, long written analyses of his smallest bodily sensations, of every mental change.

At the beginning of September—the autumn weather was hot and heavy with storms—Dario advised him:

“Live in the hotel of your choice, but in the strictest isolation. Think. Rest. Write to me. Wait for my arrival which can’t be long off. I’ll examine you and we’ll leave for Paris together.”

Some time passed, and Dario stopped answering Wardes’s letters. Wardes waited, wrote again, and then sent a telegram. The answer came that the doctor was absent for a few days. Again he began to wait. Surely, nothing was easier than to take, one morning, the train or a car, to set out and return to Paris, or go and find accommodation elsewhere, but the habit of obeying Dario in all things, Wardes’s slow depersonalisation, the surrender of his soul to his doctor, had finally born fruit. Wardes felt himself locked by Dario’s will, in a magic circle from which it was beyond his power to escape. Impatiently, angrily, in hidden, savage fury, he waited.

The autumn rains began to fall. Wardes was living in the company of a lone secretary terrified of his violence who for a long time considered him in his mind as ‘a brutal madman’ but who depended on him for his living and wouldn’t leave him. He begged Wardes every day to return to Paris, but Wardes would refuse; soon, he didn’t even trouble himself to say no, he locked himself in a gloomy silence.

Wardes both hated and feared Dario just as a man possessed can fear the one chasing the demons from his body. He slept peacefully only when Dario had ordered him, either by letter or word, to sleep and be calm. Dario alone had the power to soothe inexplicable anxieties: Wardes was afraid of being in a crowd, crossing a bridge, getting into a car or railway carriage. This mental illness, oscillating between melancholy and violence, a slow sickness, almost invisible to others, but terrible, and that Wardes called in his letters to Dario, ‘a cancer of the soul’ had arrived in his period of depression, at this black melancholy, formed of silence and a death-like immobility which end in satisfying the mind; he no longer sought a way out of the surrounding darkness and sank into a profound torpor.

The hotel was comfortable, and its rooms charming and spacious, but, built and decorated before the war, its dark walls, heavy furniture, its plush curtains, everything gave an appearance of being old and solemn, making the heart feel sad. At this season, it was almost deserted: the September rain had chased away the last guests. It was cold. The radiators had been turned on but the lobby was so large and high, so empty that the heat was lost. The waiters, having nothing to do, wandered gloomily from lounge to lounge.

Wardes lived at the bar. No-one had told him not to drink, nothing was forbidden but he, himself, ceaselessly bound himself up in defences, scruples, fears. It was only his sessions with Dario that set him free. He thought:

“His whole treatment consists in reaching the moment when the soul’s degrading contents are revealed, what you wouldn’t confess to your father or your best friend. Strange, only Sylvie, in the old days, could drag out my secrets like that . . . But afterwards, I used to hate her . . .”

When he left the bar he returned to the lobby. He called out to one of the waiters in an aggressive, whining tone:

“I’m freezing . . .”

The manager rushed up: The hotel was very well equipped. He pointed out to Wardes that the radiators were turned on full; he made him move his hand towards their hot surface; he added extending his arms in a gesture both pained and resigned:

“It’s the weather, monsieur . . . And yet, the off-season is often beautiful in our mountains; but, this year, you’re unlucky!”

Wardes didn’t like, he’d never liked—this expression: ‘You’re unlucky’ applied to him. The attacks of violence had been exorcised by Dario, he thought, but were replaced by a parasitic growth in obsessions, fears and superstitions. This, in the good moments, because, at others he would sink into a melancholy so disillusioned, so black that he missed his former blind rages.

Only Dario could get him to move and force him to undertake such and such an action, write such a letter, cross such a threshold. Only he could chase away the demons. Without him fear took hold of the sick man’s soul. Each of his acts was paralyzed by an anxiety from which Dario alone could deliver him. In Dario’s absence, rituals, magic incantations, prohibitions he himself formulated bound him in such a way that the simplest of actions appeared impossible. He couldn’t cross certain streets. Certain foods couldn’t pass his lips. Darkness, emptiness, the crowd, noise, silence, light, everything was danger, confusion, traps. Desperately, he waited for Dario.

Thus passed the last days of September. It hadn't rained the evening before; a gloomy half-light had reigned and, in the evening, the mountain summits had cleared to a pale light. Again, to-day, the heavy rain poured down.

Wardes had dined. He was alone in the lobby. He walked from one door to another. He counted the flowers on the carpet. He looked at the dark pines with their reddish trunks, gleaming under the heavy rain. What silence! You could hear the rustle of a newspaper moved by the barman, but soon even that stopped. The barman went into the tiny room beside the bar where he slept during the slack periods, and Wardes, again, was alone. What was he going to do? Go up to his room? Did there exist a place more dismal than these hotel apartments, hidden away, so well defended against the outside that no-one in the world would come to your aid at the hour of death. He imagined fainting, a haemorrhage. He could see himself shedding his blood on this crimson carpet, without strength to reach the bell. He shuddered. It was necessary to cast out fear. But Dario alone could do it! No-one had this power. Where was Dario?

For two years, at the least sign from Wardes, he was there: "And why shouldn't he be there? I pay him."

He endeavoured to work out what Dario had cost him. Dearer than a yacht, dearer than a racing stable, dearer than a harem, but, at least, until now, he'd always been at his side. Day and night, since there extended into his mind that first shadow announcing darkness, cold, the oblivion of anxiety, Dario had been there. On one hand, Wardes despised and hated Dario. He thought: "He exploits me, he lives and get fat from my illness. On the other hand, he had a blind faith in him: "I need him," he thought, "I'll die without him."

He stood up quickly, went to the office, wrote out a telegram, gave it to the concierge. It was the third telegram he'd sent Dario since the previous evening. Dario had ordered him to wait patiently; but he no longer had patience. He'd go mad, kill himself. He needed the aura of peace created by Dario's words. Occasionally, slyly, to attempt to deliver himself from this power over his soul, he would remember Dario, when for the first time, in 1920, chance—or Ange Martinelli—had caused him to appear at his bed-side, poor, little foreign doctor, in a tight jacket, with shiny elbows, with his anxious air, his famished look.

“But he did relieve me! He did deliver me! How?”

This need for dependence and humility, natural to man, but that a Wardes, a non-believer, could only satisfy with human aid, Dario alone had known how to recognize it, and give him the appearance of security, peace and pardon. But Dario had abandoned him, and he felt as lost as a defenceless child.

A sudden burst of blind rage shook him.

“But why doesn't he come? Filthy charlatan. He wants to make himself needed. He wants to make himself more expensive. As if I ever stinted with him!”

He beckoned—for the tenth time that afternoon—to the concierge.

“No telegram?”

“Nothing Monsieur Wardes.”

Since, on Dario's advice, he had completely abandoned the management of his affairs, people had forgotten him, he was treated as of minimal importance. He was the master, however! How he missed the overwhelming mail deliveries of former times.

He recovered the hard and curt tone of his youth to say:

“I’m waiting for a telegram. You’ll have it brought to me immediately, won’t you?”

“Certainly, monsieur Wardes,” said the concierge quietly, thinking Wardes was expecting a woman.

Wardes remained standing in the entrance alcove, watching the rain fall on the empty terrace.

The secretary, humble, timid, approached him. His employer inspired an abject fear in him. He wrote to his wife: “I assure you he’s a madman, a cruel madman.” His wife, at this, would feel satisfied, comparing her fate to Madame Wardes’s: “Me. I married a good-for-nothing, an imbecile, but anything’s better than being tied to a madman.” Her joy was spoiled in recalling the confidences of the typist, that: “Madame Wardes wasn’t worried by it, because she alone ran the business, she was the mistress of this famous doctor, this kind of adventurer and charlatan, Dario Asfar.”

“What weather,” Wardes said.

“Yes, monsieur . . . “Wouldn’t you like to . . . go out for a little?”

“You do see it’s raining, don’t you?”

“Yes, monsieur . . . I was thinking . . . the car . . .”

“The car? No,” Wardes said with an expression, almost savage.

Only Dario knew, only Dario could exorcise this fear of cars, which had suddenly been born in him, he who found in times past a car never was fast enough. He was frightened of cars, frightened of trains; Oh! Who can describe the anxiety when is heard the drawn-out, doleful



whistle<sup>73</sup> of a train, and you imagine in a vision intense and sharp,<sup>74</sup> (yes, occasionally, thoughts pierce the mind like the thrust of a knife), you picture a catastrophe, the din of the shattered windows, the hiss from the overturned boiler, the snap of crushed bones under the carriage. And the same with a car . . . And the same with the night, the terror of a fire . . . No, nothing about this is real, he thought, quickly waking up; they are visions, a sick man's delusion . . . Dario, Dario, Dario.

"I say, uh . . ." (He had forgotten the secretary's name; he made a terrible effort, painful but unsuccessful to summon up the name, while the secretary blushed in anger, because he considered this oversight as an offence, a sign of contempt by the rich for wage-earners), "you're sure you've telephoned doctor Asfar?"

"He's asked me to do that three times since this morning," the secretary thought stifling a sigh. He said:

"Yes, *monsieur*, the doctor was absent."

Wardes suddenly pushed the door and went out. What else could he do? The only resource was this modest casino where he was alone in the gaming room with the croupiers. A little later, a woman came in. He invited her to have a drink at the deserted bar. She wasn't pretty, a blonde whose skin was already beginning to line, striped with fine wrinkles, a bruised skin,

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<sup>73</sup> Nous avons expliqué à la page 111 de notre premier tome, comment nous avons essayé de préserver les effets sonores de « quand siffle le train longuement, lugubrement . . . ». De plus, en employant le passif « when is heard the whistle » pour « quand siffle le train » nous avons su conserver l'inversion.

<sup>74</sup> Némirovsky emploie souvent deux adjectifs qui sont à peu près synonymes, comme elle l'a fait ici avec « une vision aiguë et coupante. » Il faut examiner de très près le contexte pour les différencier. Pour « coupante » le Petit Robert Dictionnaire des synonymes et nuances donne, parmi d'autres synonymes, « aiguë » mais nous avons choisi de le traduire comme « sharp » qui sied bien à l'emploi de « couteau » plus tard dans la phrase de « coup de couteau ».

crumpled like that of peaches in autumn. They went out together, walked a while by the river, in the rain. He arranged to meet her the next day, an appointment he knew he wouldn't keep. He went back to the hotel.

“Boy, go and see if there's a message for me.”

“There's nothing, monsieur.”

He sent another telegram:

“Extremely urgent, need you immediately, order you to come now. Wardes.”

The following day passed without a reply.

At eleven, the next night, Wardes woke his secretary.

“Ring the doctor in Paris tomorrow morning, as early as you can. He must be here tomorrow evening.”

Wardes was undressed. He had undone his collar, pulled off his tie, scrunching it in his hand. He was talking and breathing with difficulty, and you could see a rapid pulsation on his neck, like the rapid heart-beat of a frightened bird. His eyes were burning with fever.

The secretary was so sorry for him he forgot his fear and the natural resentment felt by a poor man towards the person he owes his living to.

“Monsieur, excuse me . . . Listen to me. Allow me to give you a piece of advice. Leave here. It's not worth your staying. The weather, this gloomy hotel, these could drive anyone mad, to suicide . . . Listen to me, monsieur . . . Let's leave! Let's leave tomorrow!”

Wardes looked at him and, suddenly, burst out laughing.

“Can you tell me?” he asked in a strange voice, as shrill as an hysterical woman's, “can you tell me? Is it true if someone sketches a circle around a farmyard bird, and even though there's no

obstacle, but the representation of one, made on the ground with the point of a stick, a fowl (or a drake for that matter) flaps its wings, utters terrified cries and can't make up its mind to fly off? . . . Is it true?"

"I don't know, monsieur . . ."

Wardes was silent. He was standing, leaning against the closed door.

"Monsieur," the secretary said very softly.

"Go away."

The secretary returned to his room.

"All night," he said later, "I heard him walking in his room. The next day someone answered the phone and told me the doctor had left on a long trip, without leaving an address. I expected Monsieur Wardes to insult me, when I saw myself obliged to tell him the truth. He counted on this charlatan as if he were the good God. He was a violent man. But he said nothing. I stayed in my room all day, to avoid meeting him. At dinner, he ordered a bottle of champagne. It appears he'd drunk heavily in the past but in the two years I was with him I never saw him take anything but a little good wine with his meals and an extraordinary amount of mineral water. At night, in my room, separated from his by a bathroom, I could hear the sound of Perrier corks hitting the roof. He drank the whole bottle of champagne and said to me: 'I'm well now. I'm not frightened any longer. I've never been as fit, as happy, as free.' After dinner, he wanted to go out. The weather was shocking.<sup>75</sup> There wasn't a soul outside, for sure. I wanted to go out with him. He forbade me, and when he spoke sharply it was like a blow from a club, and all you could do was

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<sup>75</sup> Némirovsky emploie la locution « Il faisait un temps pour ne pas mettre un chien dehors. » Malgré notre désir de conserver les locutions françaises, nous avons décidé de la traduire par l'équivalent en anglais.

obey. Besides, he appeared happy, elated like a man who was drunk. He went out. He headed, no doubt, towards the lower part of the town, towards the river. Did he lose his way in the fog? Did he have what the doctors call an attack of madness? People came and told me early in the morning he had drowned and his body had been recovered.”

## Chapter 33

The dinner, at Dario's, had just begun. Clara had taken her seat at the table, between the minister and the *académicien*.

It was one of the last dinners for the season, the most important, to which were attached great hopes. In the long run, in spite of Dario's pleas, Clara had wanted to get up, see to everything and preside over the dinner.

Such was her weakness that, at times, the long table well lit and decked with flowers was hidden from her eyes and the guests' voices appeared distant and scarcely perceptible. Fortunately, she no longer had to talk: a smile was enough, courteous and unthinking it welcomed with equal indifference the witticisms of the minister and the *académicien*'s pessimistic thoughts announcing the outbreak of war for the Spring. But all were delighted with their hostess because all were delighted with themselves. The two butlers carried out their function correctly: one serving the dishes, the other the bread and sauces. Dario's house was well run.

Clara didn't look at any of the guests; she had seen so many men rich and influential, writers, statesmen and even famous doctors (they despised the charlatan . . . but his table was excellent—it was easy to damage him when they left him) sitting beside her that they no longer even inspired curiosity. She was the kind of woman who sees but one being in the world; the others are, to her eyes, as if they didn't exist. She found neither beauty nor intelligence in those who weren't Dario, she was interested in them uniquely to the extent they could serve her husband. She saw in them sensibility and virtue if they liked Dario, if they admired him or were useful to him.

At these dinners, so long, so exhausting, there was only a single break, a moment's rest when, between two dishes, above the vase, full of roses, her gaze caught that of Dario and she noticed his smile, imperceptible to the others, this slight pout, tender and mischievous on his mouth, with which he thanked her and rewarded her for her trouble.

The service, the flowers, all these were impeccable and impersonal: they had the wisdom, both of them, to distrust their own tastes. They blindly followed the fashion. They were dining this evening on a gold-lamé tablecloth, covered by pink lace, that both found terrible. But that was done everywhere . . . To the right of Dario was Elinor, Philippe Wardes' widow. Clara looked at her occasionally and smiled. She thanked God in her heart for Elinor's existence. She knew what would happen when she, Clara, would no longer be here—she knew what was happening now. What good fortune to be at peace finally over Dario's and Daniel's fate. No-one knew better than she Dario's situation, terrible, without a way out, darker as came old age with his debts, his vices, his terrible need of money. He'd marry Elinor. He'd be happy with her; this woman, cool, with wide business experience would guarantee him wealth. She'd keep him from dangerous adventures old age made degrading. She'd been free since the death of her deplorable husband. Let her make her money serve Dario and her son. Why not? For such a long time, Clara had no longer been jealous. She was old and worn-out. What did the body matter? You suffer from it when you can't get pleasure from it.

She was well aware that, in spite of his infidelities, she had had from Dario what no-one else would know; his purest tenderness, and this, now that she was no longer a wife was enough for her.

She answered slowly, but courteously and appropriately, her neighbours, smiling with a superhuman effort, and she thought about the florist's bill, for the end of the month, the case of champagne from which this evening they had drunk the last bottle, the gardeners' wages at *La Caravelle*, about her illness, the hour past, and, above everything, more about Dario himself, about her child, her little boy, her little Daniel who barely touched the food he was served and whose angry look, charged with hate and scorn, never left Dario or Elinor.<sup>76</sup>

She begged God:

"Don't let the little one make a scene! Keep him quiet! God, inspire forgiveness in him, love for his father! God, I offer you my lonely nights, my illness, all I've suffered, but make Dario believe he's loved by his son, make his son forgive him, as I've always forgiven him, from the bottom of my heart, loving him still more because of the great pity I have for him, as you'll pardon him my God! . . . He wanted wealth more strongly, more ardently than another, but it isn't his fault if you've given him this blood, these desires, this fever, this faculty of being able to love and hate more intensely than others. He is moulded from earth's mud and made of flesh and blood, but, God who created him this way, you'll pity him! Dario, Daniel, my darlings! God, grant that all goes well for them!"

She woke from her thoughts at times, following the butler with her look. The green sauce wasn't as smooth as it should be. Oh come on, what did they serve with the salmon at the duchess de Dino's? About the food, Clara was at ease. The decoration and the service were not always quite . . . but as for the food, she was relaxed. There were few houses in Paris where the fare was

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<sup>76</sup> Nous avons fait remarquer, dans notre chapitre sur le style de Némirovsky, la fréquence des longues phrases dans ses œuvres. Ceci est un bon exemple.

as delicate, sumptuous, varied and at the same time healthy. The minister and *académicien* had a second helping of each dish. How long the dinner was! . . . Surreptitiously, she would raise her handkerchief rolled into a ball to her temples, and wipe the icy perspiration away.

At last the minister ate the last segment of orange on his plate and the *académicien* swallowed the last drop of Bollinger 1914. The meal was over.

They were alone now, all three, the parents and their child, in the drawing-room where the lights were still on. Clara, like a good house-wife would have liked to turn them off but she no longer had the strength. She held back with difficulty the complaints about being mortally tired which were rising to her lips. Daniel was standing in front of the window.

Clara acted tactlessly in asking, quietly:

“Did you have a good time, my child?”

She knew he hadn’t enjoyed himself. She was well aware some sorrow was devouring him, but the deepest love is awkward and tremulous. She was hoping no doubt for a miracle, a favourable reply, a smile; he was so serious now, her Daniel, never laughing, he who had been a child, happy and tender.

“Did you have a good time, my child?” she repeated. “Did you? Are you happy?” Dario asked; I invited just for you this novelist you admire, to make you happy.”

“See,” Clara said in a weak voice, “how good your father is.”

She implored Daniel with her look.

‘Let him say a word of thanks, no, not even that, let him speak in an affectionate voice, happy . . . Poor Dario . . . How tired he is! . . . How unwell he looks . . . He’s worried about me.



He's worried about money. He's never had a moment's peace on earth. Children are implacable . . .

"I only saw that . . . that woman," Daniel said in his high-pitched young voice full of shame and horror: that Elinor Wardes! And I couldn't see anyone else at your table."

No-one answered him. His parents, shocked, reserved sought desperately another subject of conversation, but . . .

"Why did you receive this woman?" he said, addressing his mother; "aren't you ashamed?"

"Daniel!" his father shouted in an authoritative voice.

Dario stood up to them, defying both in his look.

"You're afraid of the truth," he said defiantly. "I'd keep quiet, believe me, if I had, for an instant, the hope that *maman* didn't know about your liaison. But, in effect, *maman*, it's not possible you aren't aware of what everybody says, that papa and that woman killed Wardes, that woman gives money to my father, come on!"

"Who told you that?" Dario murmured, his lips white.

"Everybody," I tell you, everybody! Behind your back, your guests, I heard them whisper, I saw them smile . . . *Maman*, for me, and if you love me, I beseech you to stop allowing that, to stop putting up with that!"

"But, Daniel, you're mad . . . but never . . ."

“So you thought I was credulous to that extent, naïve to that extent? That I really took you for what you wanted to pass for in my eyes ? <sup>77</sup> A great doctor, an inventor of genius, perhaps a second Freud? A charlatan, that’s what you are, a cruel speculator, and among the most vile of speculators! Others deal in men’s pockets and bodies, and you, in their minds.”

“Be quiet, Daniel, be quiet, you promised you’d be quiet! He’s your father. You can’t judge him. You don’t have the right to judge him. It’s Sylvie Wardes who’s set you against us!”

But both of them turned to her at the same time.

“Not a word against Sylvie Wardes!”

“But it’s her! Don’t you understand, Dario? It’s because of her he despises us, rejects us . . .”

“Oh not you, *maman*, not you!”

“Me?” Dario asked.

He forced himself to smile, but he felt in his very bones, in his heart itself, the depth of this wound.

“Imbecile”, he said in a quieter voice. “Who do you think I wanted to get rich for? For you and your mother. To give you a better life than mine! So you didn’t know hunger, or temptation, or poverty, for you and your children, when the time comes for you to be paid a hundred times over for the joy you give me to-day. So you could be honest, selfless, noble, virtuous, without a stain as if you had been born into one of those families where honour is hereditary! You weren’t destined to be a decent man, Daniel, no more than I, but I’ve given you

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<sup>77</sup> Nous avons traduit littéralement « Que je te prenais vraiment pour ce que tu voulais passer à mes yeux .»

all that, I've given you the gift of culture, self-respect, nobility in your feelings . . . My well-fed son, blessed with earthly and moral wealth, you can't understand me. I'm not astonished and I'm not concerned. That's the way things are. You hurt me, break my heart, but if I had to I'd start again doing what I've done, I'd deceive and betray, I'd steal and lie, if I could get a morsel of bread, a smoother life, and this morality that's devastated me. I won't defend myself. That's unworthy of me. I'll continue to see Elinor Wardes since that's done with your mother's approval . . .”

“I swear to you”, the mother cried, “I swear to you, you're wrong! I swear to you there's nothing between them! I forbid you, do you understand, Daniel, I forbid you . . .”

She wanted to grasp his hands but fell backwards onto the cushions on the sofa where she had been sitting. Dario took his son by the shoulders and pushed him out.

## Chapter 34

The next day, Clara wanted to get up as usual, but she fainted and it was soon evident her heart was failing and she was going to die.

When Clara asked to see her son, Dario gave up all hope. He was in his wife's room, by her bed, leaning over her; he tried in vain to revive her with drugs and injections. But all would be over this very night.

The chamber maid came to warn Daniel, in that tone confidential and important assumed by servants when having to announce bad news.

“Monsieur Daniel, Madame is gravely ill. Monsieur is asking for you.

Never had Daniel suspected his mother was in danger. He ran to the room, weak with fear.

‘Ah! what’ve I done? What’ve I done?’ he repeated, in tears; he was certain he’d killed his mother. They had hidden so carefully her illness from him, and he recalled now only her fragility, her thin hands, her paleness. He was struck by the room’s disorder; vials and cloths were lying on the bed; all the lights had been turned on; from the lamp beside her bed the shade had been removed to give more light for the injection. It was autumn and the weather was gloomy.

Dario beckoned him to come nearer, but he slid against the wall and hid there like a punished child. He saw his mother turn her head slowly towards him. He hardly recognized her.

“Two hours can change a human being like this,” he thought in astonishment.

“Don’t force me to kiss my father, to beg his forgiveness,” he thought suddenly. “Nothing was difficult or humiliating to calm his mother, but what a demeaning lie, what revolting play-acting!”

But she didn’t ask for anything like that. She seemed only to want her son’s presence, but not his words, nor his last kiss. She didn’t take her eyes off her husband, in the way the mother neglects her other, beloved children for the one who is the weakest, sick or threatened. Little by little, Daniel finished by approaching the bed; awkwardly and silently he knelt, without noticing he was praying aloud. Dario and perhaps Clara heard the words he was murmuring, repeating in his painful amazement, always the same: “My God, forgive me . . .”

But, just as in former times, when he would cry or play beside them, and they continued to speak without hearing him, it was the same this evening, neither his prayers nor his tears reached his parents.

Clara, whom he had always seen pale, with a yellowish shadow below her eyes, her cheeks had turned crimson suddenly. She seemed to have regained some strength. Seeing that, probably, a second injection was useless, Dario had turned off all the lights, except the one beside the bed. He wanted to put the removed shade back, but his hands were trembling so much he had to throw it away. He stopped a moment, looked at Clara in despair. She murmured weakly: “Leave . . .” but he persisted, his teeth clenched in rage, thinking no doubt that it was the last service he could do for her. He gave up at last. He took a little garment in knitted wool, lined with silk, she’d let slip some hours earlier from her shoulders, complaining of being hot, and he threw it over the lamp.

Then Daniel saw his father sit on the edge of the bed and take Clara's hand; from time to time he kissed this hand passionately, without saying anything, but occasionally his professional manner gained the upper hand; he took her pulse; her face, then, would become attentive and frozen.<sup>78</sup>

Towards the end, Clara had moments of delirium. She had forgotten where she was. She was speaking Russian. Daniel didn't understand this language.

In this way he was present, without understanding it, at the last conversation of Dario and his wife. Clara looked at the walls of her room: she heard, reaching her weakened hearing, the noise of the *avenue Hoche*, below the windows, but in her thought she was in the East, in the shop of her watch-maker father. She took Dario's hand, whispering:

"Come in! Come quick! My father's not here. Have you eaten? Do you want some bread? How tired you are, my poor Dario, how pale and thin! What a long journey you've had . . ."

The dying woman began to cry.

"You've been beaten again . . . You've been humiliated again . . . My Dario . . ."

Suddenly she came to herself, spoke French again; she gently asked to be lifted up on her cushions; she tried to drink, then, mixing the past and the present:

"How good you've always been to me, Dario, and the little one. Who'll be sorry for you when I'll no longer be?" she asked seriously and simply.

She inclined her head.

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<sup>78</sup> Nous évitons ici toute explication de « glacée ».

“I, I love you. I would’ve stolen for you. I would’ve killed for you and the child. That’s why you were destined for me, for me, and not her. Leave her. Sylvie Wardes won’t save you. Those like us can’t be saved. Oh, Dario, take any other, but not that one . . .”

She was gasping. He leaned over her mouth to gather in her last words, the last breath:

“Not that one . . .”

“I’ve never loved anyone but you,” Dario cried out, as if, by raising his voice, he hoped to make himself heard by her, she, who for a long time could hear no more.

However, some time after, she raised her arm with a painful effort and laid it on her husband’s lowered head, in a sign of blessing and caress. She died during the night.

## Chapter 35

It was the second day after the burial. Dario entered his son's room, carrying in his hand a vial of sleeping pills.

"You are to take this. You're not sleeping, are you?"

"Yes," Daniel murmured, although he hadn't closed his eyes for forty-eight hours, but how did his father know it?

He recalled he had heard him, the previous night, walking softly behind his door. In his insomnia, nothing had irritated more than this light step. His father had always walked without sound, like a wild beast. Even at the time when he loved him, this silent movement had always inspired in him a profound malaise.

Dario poured some water in a glass, and dropped in two tablets.

"You are to drink this, but, beforehand, I should like to tell you not to imagine—a child like you is quick to curse and cruelly blame himself afterwards—don't imagine you've killed your mother. She was condemned. I shouldn't tell you. It would be wiser to leave you under the impression of this . . . coincidence, deplorable, so that you're more forgiving, more tolerant in the future. But I can't . . . see you suffer. I love you, my child."

"Papa, I'm desperate, my heart is broken, but even like this, in maman's presence, because it seems to me she is present . . ." he said in a lower voice.

Both shuddered, and, involuntarily, they looked at the dark corners of the room.

At last, Dario said, quietly:



“It’s nothing. You always feel it when someone you’ve loved has died . . . It’s a fiction. It’s nothing. What did you want to say, my little one?”

“I beg you to be hard on me. Your hardness will be lighter than your kindness. I can’t love you. It’s not terrible to hate your parents. What’s terrible, is to have to force yourself in vain to love them.”

“But why, in fact? Why?” Dario bitterly exclaimed.

He didn’t want to ask why. The words burst forth from him against his will.

“If you were a poor man, unhappy, abandoned, if you’d stayed the little, unknown doctor doing abortions to earn his living—you see, I know everything, I haven’t been spared anything—if you were the dealer in carpets or nougat you were destined to be, living in some bazaar in the Levant, I could have loved you. If you were coarser, uneducated, if you didn’t know you were doing wrong . . . But to be strong enough, shrewd enough to come from so far, to rise from so low and place your intelligence, doubly precious, since it was acquired with such difficulty, at the service of success and money, that, that’s a crime! And these women, this Elinor, this procession of insane women who come to see you with their dirty secrets, all that is shocking, disgusts me . . .”

“Yes, because, naturally, you like neither money nor success!”

“No, no, a thousand times no,” Daniel said with an expression of weariness and disgust.

“Shut up!”

“I hate success the way you understand it.”

Dario shrugged his shoulders

“I hate money.”

“Psch! Shut up!”

He repeated:

“Psch!”

To express scorn in moments of emotion, when he forgot his civilized manners, Dario gave vent to this wild cat hiss.

“Do you understand what you’re saying? Starving to death, like me, with a wife and a child in her arms! Be abandoned. Know you’re alone, without anyone to care for yours if you die, without a relative, without a friend, suspected of everything, an outsider! When you’ve allowed your first child to die, almost of hunger, when you’ve another miserable worm to feed (you!), when you’ve spent weeks stuck to your window, waiting for patients who don’t come, when you’ve dragged yourself from Belleville to Saint Ouen to call for your due without getting anything, when your neighbours call you a dirty outsider, a wog, a charlatan before you’ve done anything to deserve that, then you’ll be able to talk about money and success and know what it is, and if, then, you say: ‘I don’t need money,’ then I’ll respect you, because you’ll know what temptation you’re talking about. But, for now, shut up! Only a man has the right to judge another man!”

“We don’t speak the same language,” Daniel murmured. “We’re scarcely of the same race.”

“I used to believe I wasn’t of the same race as my father, I, but of another, infinitely superior. You’ve taught me the opposite. These are questions time alone can help to solve.”

He approached Daniel, lightly kissed his forehead, without appearing to feel his son’s shudder. With firm tenderness, he made him drink the prepared potion and disappeared noiselessly, as he had come.

## Chapter 36

Dario's and Elinor's marriage had been held 'in the strictest privacy' according to the expression, because of the age of the new spouses, of their recent, double bereavement, and, especially because they were both extremely involved with their business and had no time to lose. Nevertheless, they'd decided to pass eight peaceful days at *La Caravelle*. Dario longed for the moment he'd be there, when he could look at the house and garden he loved, thinking they'd never be taken away from him, he'd keep this inalienable pleasure until his death, they'd belong to his son after him. Elinor, being childless, had made, at Dario's request, a will in favour of Daniel, whom she named her heir.

Dario felt weak and ill, but at the same time happy, this happiness modest and physical you experience when you're going to have a rest, at the end of a long, hard day. His sharpest desire was to die on this terrace, where formerly he used to wait for Sylvie. Yes, it was the end of a long and exhausting journey, filled with dangers, which makes appear sweeter the halt under a roof, the warmth of a house, the comfort of a meal and then you take up the long journey, mysterious, that sinks into darkness.

It had been understood that some friends would come to their home and congratulate them and drink a glass of champagne to their health, but they didn't have friends like the ordinary run of mortals, only a flood of acquaintances, a court—for what man a little known in Paris is not surrounded by a kind of court? You didn't dare displease anyone, exclude anyone, and a large number of guests was attending, *avenue Hoche*, on returning from the *mairie* of the 8th *arrondissement*.

Elinor had a bouquet of orchids in her hand and a pale orchid with a long calyx of dark violet, almost purple, pinned to her bodice. She was wearing a long velvet dress in violet, a black hat and a splendid fur coat, some very beautiful jewels, but without ostentation. Thus she had appeared, at Dario's side, before the mayor charged with uniting them. Her hand, with the glove half-off, was a little tense; it was her third marriage, but she was a human creature; she felt moved. She clasped against her, in a movement no doubt unconscious, the violet velvet bag, locked by a clasp of diamonds, which concealed among other important papers the copy of the will demanded by Dario. Under the skin delicately made-up, the jaw muscles were tense; the lips curled slightly up on the beautiful sharp teeth, a little too long; the red hair shone under the black hat.

Now, in her home, she was kind towards all. She looked, smiling, at people's faces. They were all there, those you handled carefully and flatter, those you use, the useful, the powerful, the chosen.

"But, in fact, I don't need them any longer," Dario thought in astonishment, as if he saw chains falling—but if they were no longer his clients, they remained Elinor's: they'd buy cars with the Wardes' *marque*.

The *générale* Mouravine was there. She moved millions now. You could invite her. He suddenly remembered the night Daniel had been born, when he stood before this woman, famished, trembling, poor knowing only how to repeat: "I need money . . ." And, all his life he'd repeated and paraphrased these words. He couldn't believe it was finished, that he'd no longer say them to anyone. How everyone admired him now! The naïve believed he was almost a genius. The others respected him, since, at last, he was rich, he had seduced Wardes' wife. (Poor

Wardes, how did they get rid of him? No, you exaggerate, I grant you his wife, the unfortunate Clara, that one, he certainly killed her, but Wardes . . .) he believed he heard them saying.

In the noise of this crowd around him, tending his ear, what wouldn't he have heard? "Dario Asfar, the charlatan, how many crimes he's got on his conscience . . . Did you know the story about ? And this one? And the other one?" while a timid voice protests: "You can say what you like, he cured my sister-in-law." There's always someone to murmur (the faithful last, the innocent soul, the ultimate and obstinate slave): "He cured my sister-in-law . . ."

Little by little, however, Dario became sad and uneasy. He had hoped Daniel—were it only for a moment—would come. The previous night again, he had almost begged: "A moment only, my darling," and the child had finally said: "Yes" in disgust. He had forbidden Elinor to give Daniel the gift she'd bought him, a cigarette case too beautiful, too expensive. After having spent such a great sum, she would have too visibly expected and asked, in return, for Daniel's gratitude and friendship.

"My child," he thought in pained tenderness, you're suffering now, you despise me, but alas! I know the human heart, to my misfortune. One day, when you inherit Elinor's fortune, you'll judge me less severely and, if you want to offer it to Claude Wardes, you'll bless my memory, perhaps?"

But Daniel didn't come. At last, the guests left.

Dario took advantage of the first moment when alone to ask the servant:

"Is Monsieur Daniel at home?"

"Monsieur Daniel came back an hour ago. He went up to his room. I thought I heard him go out again. Does Monsieur want me to go and see?"

“No,” Dario said in spite of himself.

He went to Daniel’s room. He took two steps and stopped, placing his hand on his heart. He didn’t know exactly what he feared. He uttered a deep sigh on seeing the room empty. Yes, it was indeed what he thought: the child had left. He had taken Clara’s photo with him. Dario opened the drawer. He noticed only a little underwear had been taken; he looked for the toilet-bag, a gift from Clara; it had disappeared. He looked for a letter: nothing! There was nothing. But Sylvie would know where he was and give him news about him.

“If I still had a long time to live,” he thought, “there’d still remain the chance of seeing him again. He’d get older, become more cynical, wiser. But, when I die, he’ll still be a child. He still won’t forgive me. I won’t see him again.”

He was standing in the middle of the room, sad, his head bowed.

Elinor entered and came to him.

“Isn’t Daniel here?”

“No. He’s gone.”

“Oh!” she said after a moment’s silence.

He knew she was happy about it, but she forced herself to give her hard eyes an expression of pity.

“Oh! Poor Dario, it’s terrible!”

“He’ll come back,” Dario said, “for the inheritance.”

