

it as boring as a photograph exhibition, and I felt that I had no more taste, or talent, for describing now what I had seen earlier, than yesterday for describing what I was observing, at that very moment, with a doleful and meticulous eye. Any moment now, hosts of friends whom I had not seen for such a long time would doubtless be asking me to give up this isolation and to devote my days to them. I had no reason to refuse them since I now had proof that I was no longer good for anything, that literature could no longer bring me any joy, whether through my own fault, because I was not talented enough, or through the fault of literature, if it was indeed less pregnant with reality than I had thought.

When I pondered what Bergotte had said to me: 'You are ill, but one cannot feel sorry for you because you have the joys of the mind,' it struck me how wrong he had been about me. How little joy there was in this sterile lucidity! I could even add that if perhaps I did sometimes have pleasures – not of the intellect – I wasted them, and always on a different woman; so that if destiny had granted me another hundred years of life, free of infirmities, it would only have added successive extensions to a tediously protracted existence, which there seemed to be no point in prolonging thus far, let alone even further. As for the 'joys of the intellect', could I use that phrase for these cold observations which my perceptive eye or my precise reasoning picked out without any pleasure and which remained infertile?

But sometimes it is just when everything seems to be lost that we experience a presentiment that may save us; one has knocked on all the doors which lead nowhere, and then, unwittingly, one pushes against the only one through which one may enter and for which one would have searched in vain for a hundred years, and it opens.

Turning over the dismal thoughts which I have just set down, I had entered the Guermantes' courtyard and in my distraction had failed to see an approaching car; at the chauffeur's shout I had time only to step smartly aside, and as I retreated I could not help tripping up against the unevenly laid paving-stones, behind which was a coach-house. But at the moment when, regaining my balance, I set my foot down on a stone which was slightly lower than the one next to it, all my discouragement vanished in the face of the same happiness that, at different points in my life, had given me the sight of trees I had thought

I recognized when I was taking a drive round Balbec, the sight of the steeples of Martinville, the taste of a madeleine dipped in herb tea, and all the other sensations I have spoken about, and which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to synthesize. Just as at the moment when I tasted the madeleine, all uneasiness about the future and all intellectual doubt were gone. Those that had assailed me a moment earlier about the reality of my intellectual talent, even the reality of literature, were lifted as if by enchantment.

Without my having started a new line of thought, or discovered a decisive argument, the difficulties which just now were insoluble had lost all their importance. This time, though, I had decided not to resign myself to not knowing the reason for it, as I had done on the day I tasted the madeleine dipped in herb tea. The happiness that I had just experienced was indeed just like that I had felt when eating the madeleine, and the cause of which I had at that time put off seeking. The difference, purely material, was in the images each evoked; a deep azure intoxicated my eyes, impressions of coolness and dazzling light swirled around me and, in my desire to grasp them, without daring to move any more than when I had tasted the madeleine and I was trying to bring back to my memory what it reminded me of, I continued, even at the risk of making myself the laughing-stock of the huge crowd of chauffeurs, to stagger, as I had done a moment before, one foot on the raised paving-stone, the other foot on the lower one. Each time I simply repeated the outward form of this movement, nothing helpful occurred; but if I succeeded, forgetting about the Guermantes' party, in recapturing the feeling I had experienced when I put my feet down in that way, then the dazzling and indistinct vision brushed against my consciousness, as if it were saying: 'Seize hold of me as I pass, if you are strong-minded enough, and try to solve the riddle of happiness I am offering you.' And almost at once I realized that it was Venice, all my efforts to describe which, and all the so-called snapshots taken by my memory, had never communicated anything to me, but which the sensation I had once felt on the two uneven flagstones in the baptistry of St Mark's had now at last expressed for me, along with all the other sensations associated with that sensation on that day, which had been waiting in their place, from which a sudden chance had imperiously