

against the door and broke it down *right away* I wouldn't have time to kill myself and they would take me alive." But they were in no hurry; they gave me all the time in the world to die. The bastards, they were afraid.

After a while, a voice said, "All right, open up. We won't hurt you."

There was silence and the same voice went on, "You know you can't get away."

I didn't answer, I was still gasping for breath. To encourage myself to shoot, I told myself, "If they get me, they're going to beat me, break my teeth, maybe put an eye out." I wanted to know if the big man was dead. Maybe I only wounded him. . . . They were getting something ready, they were dragging something heavy across the floor. I hurriedly put the barrel of the gun in my mouth, and I bit hard on it. But I couldn't shoot, I couldn't even put my finger on the trigger. Everything was dead silent.

I threw away the revolver and opened the door.

Henri

INTIMACY

Lulu slept naked because she liked to feel the sheets caressing her body and also because laundry was expensive.

In the beginning Henri protested: you shouldn't go to bed naked like that, it isn't nice, it's dirty. Anyhow, he finally followed her example, though in his case it was merely laziness; he was stiff as a poker when there was company (he admired the Swiss, particularly the Genevans: he thought them high-class because they were so wooden) but he was negligent in small matters, for example, he wasn't very clean, he didn't change his underwear often enough; when Lulu put it in the dirty laundry bag she couldn't help noticing the bottoms were yellow from rubbing between his legs. Personally, Lulu did not despise uncleanliness: it was more intimate and made such tender shadows; in the crook of the arm, for instance; she couldn't stand the English with their impersonal bodies which smelt of nothing. But she couldn't bear the negligence of her husband, because it was a way of getting himself coddled. In the morning, he was always very tender toward himself, his head full of dreams, and broad daylight, cold water, the coarse bristles of the brush made him suffer brutal injustices.

Lulu was sleeping on her back, she had thrust the great toe of her left foot into a tear in the sheet: it wasn't a tear, it was only the hem coming apart. But it annoyed her; I have to fix that tomorrow, but still she pushed against the threads so as to feel them break. Henri was not sleeping yet, but he was quiet. He often told Lulu that as soon as he closed his eyes he felt bound by tight, resistant bonds, he could not even move his little finger. A great fly caught in a spider web. Lulu loved to feel this gross, captive body against her. If he could only stay like that, paralyzed, I would take care of him, clean him like a child and sometimes I'd turn him over on his stomach and give him a spanking, and other times when his mother came to see him, I'd find some reason to uncover him, I'd pull back the sheet and his mother

would see him all naked. I think she'd fall flat on her face, it must be fifteen years since she's seen him like that. Lulu passed a light hand over her husband's hip and pinched him a little in the groin. Henri muttered but did not move. Reduced to impotence. Lulu smiled; the word "impotence" always made her smile. When she still loved Henri, and when he slept, thus, she liked to imagine he had been patiently tied up by little men like the ones she had seen in a picture when she was a child and reading *Gulliver's Travels*. She often called Henri "Gulliver" and Henri liked that because it was an English name and it made her seem educated, only he would have rather had her pronounce it with the accent. God, how they annoyed me: if he wanted someone educated all he had to do was marry Jeanne Beder, she's got breasts like hunting horns but she knows five languages. When we were still at Sceaux, on Sundays, I got so annoyed with his family I read books, any book; there was always somebody who came and watched what I was reading and his little sister asked me, "Do you understand, Lucie?" The trouble is, he doesn't think I'm distinguished enough. The Swiss, yes, they're distinguished all right because his older sister married a Swiss who gave her five children and then they impress him with their mountains. I can't have a child because of my constitution, but I never thought it was distinguished, what he does, when he goes out with me, always going into the *urinoirs* and I have to look at the store windows waiting for him, what does that make me look like? and he comes out pulling at his pants and bending his legs like an old man.

Lulu took her toe out of the slit in the sheet and wiggled her feet for the pleasure of feeling herself alert next to this soft, captive flesh. She heard rumblings: a gurgling stomach, I hate it, I can never tell whether it's his stomach or mine. She closed her eyes; liquids do it. bubbling through packs of soft pipes, everybody has them, Rirette has them, I have them (I don't like to think about it, it makes my stomach hurt). He loves me, he doesn't love my bowels, if they showed him my appendix in a glass he wouldn't recognize it, he's always feeling me, but if they put the glass in his hands he wouldn't touch it, he wouldn't think, "that's hers," you ought to love all of somebody, the esophagus, the liver, the intestines. Maybe we don't love them because we aren't used to them, if we saw them the way we saw our hands and arms maybe we'd love them; the starfish must love each other better than we do. They stretch out on the beach when

there's sunlight and they poke out their stomachs to get the air and everybody can see them; I wonder where we could stick ours out, through the navel. She had closed her eyes and blue circles began to turn, like a carnival; yesterday I was shooting those circles with rubber arrows and letters lit up, one at every shot and they made the name of a city, he kept me from finishing Dijon with his mania for pressing himself up behind me, I hate people to touch me from behind, I'd rather not have a back, I don't like people to do things to me when I can't see them, they can grab a handful and then you don't see their hands, you can feel them going up and down but you can't tell where they're going, they look at you with all their eyes and you don't see them, he loves that; Henri would never think of it but he, all he thinks about is getting behind me and I know he does it on purpose to touch my behind because he knows I practically die of shame because I have one, when I'm ashamed it excites him but I don't want to think about him (she was afraid) I want to think about Rirette. She thought about Rirette every evening at the same time, just at the moment when Henri began to snuffle and grunt. But there was resistance to the thought and someone else came in her place, she even caught a glimpse of crisp black hair and she thought here it comes and she shuddered because you never know what's coming, if it's the face it's all right, that can still pass, but there were nights she spent without closing her eyes because of those horrible memories coming to the surface, it's terrible when you know all of a man and especially *that*. It isn't the same thing with Henri, I can imagine him from head to foot and it touches me because he's soft with flesh that's all grey except the belly and that's pink, he says when a well built man sits down, his belly makes three folds, but he has six, only he counts by twos and he doesn't want to see the others. She felt annoyed thinking about Rirette: "Lulu, you don't know what the body of a handsome man is like." It's ridiculous, naturally I know, she means a body hard as rock, with muscles, I don't like that, and I felt soft as a caterpillar when he hugged me against him; I married Henri because he was soft, because he looked like a priest. The priests are soft as women with their cassocks and it seems they wear stockings. When I was fifteen I wanted to lift up their skirts quietly and see their men's knees and their drawers, it was so funny they had something between their legs; I would have taken the skirt in one hand and slipped the other up their legs as far as you think, it's not that I like women so much but a

man's thing when it's under a skirt is so soft, like a big flower. The trouble is you can never really hold it in your hands, if it would only stay quiet, but it starts moving like an animal, it gets hard, it frightens me when it's hard and sticking up in the air, it's brutal; God, how rotten love is. I loved Henri because his little thing never got hard, never raised its head, I laughed, sometimes I embarrassed him, I wasn't any more afraid of his than of a child's; in the evening I always took his soft little thing between my fingers, he blushed and turned his head away, sighing, but it didn't move, it behaved itself in my hand, I didn't squeeze it, we always stayed like that for a long time and then he went to sleep. Then I stretched out on my back and thought about priests and pure things, about women, and I stroked my stomach first, my beautiful flat stomach, then I slid my hands down and it was pleasure; the pleasure only I know how to give myself.

The crisp hair, the hair of a Negro. And anguish in her throat like a ball. But she closed her eyes tightly and finally the ear of Rirette appeared, a small ear, all red and golden, looking like a sugar candy. Lulu had not as much pleasure as usual at the sight of it because she heard Rirette's voice at the same time. It was a sharp, precise voice which Lulu didn't like. "You *should* go away with Pierre, Lulu; it's the only intelligent thing to do." I like Rirette very much, but she annoys me a little when she acts important and gets carried away by what she says. The night before, at the *Cupole*, Rirette was bent over her with a reasonable and somewhat haggard look. "You *can't* stay with Henri, because you don't love him, it would be a crime." She doesn't lose a chance to say something bad about him, I don't think it's very nice, he's always been perfect with her; maybe I don't love him any more, but it isn't up to Rirette to tell me; everything looks so simple and easy to her: you love or you don't love any more: but I'm not simple. First I'm used to it here and then I do like him, he's my husband. I wanted to beat her, I always wanted to hurt her because she's fat. "It would be a crime." She raised her arms, I saw her armpit, I always like her better when she has bare arms. The armpit. It was half-open, you might have thought it was a mouth; Lulu saw purple wrinkled flesh beneath the curly hairs. Pierre calls her "Minerva the Plump," she doesn't like that at all, Lulu smiled because she thought of her little brother Robert who asked her one day when she had on nothing but her slip, "Why do you have hair under your arms?" and she answered, "It's a sickness." She liked to dress in front of her little brother

because he made such funny remarks, and you wondered where he picked them up. He always felt her clothes and folded her dresses carefully, his hands were so deft: one day he'll be a great dressmaker. That's a charming business, I'll design the materials for him. It's odd for a little boy to want to be a dressmaker; if I had been a boy I would have wanted to be an explorer or an actor, but not a dressmaker; but he always was a dreamer, he doesn't talk enough, he sticks to his own ideas; I wanted to be a nun and take up collections in beautiful houses. My eyes feel all soft, all soft as flesh, I'm going to sleep. My lovely pale face under the stiff head-dress, I would have looked distinguished. I would have seen hundreds of dark hallways. But the maid would have turned the light on right away; then I'd have seen family portraits, bronze statues on the tables. And closets. The woman comes with a little book and a fifty-franc note "Here you are, Sister." "Thank you, madame, God bless you. Until the next time." But I wouldn't have been a real nun. In the bus, sometimes, I'd have made eyes at some fellow, first he'd be dumbfounded, then he'd follow me, telling me a lot of nonsense and I'd have a policeman lock him up. I would have kept the collection money myself. What would I have bought? *Antidote*. It's silly. My eyes are getting softer, I like that, you'd think they were soaked in water and my whole body's comfortable. The beautiful green tiara with emeralds and lapis lazuli. The tiara turned and it was a horrible bull's head, but Lulu was not afraid, she said, "Birds of Cantal. Attention." A long red river dragged across arid countrysides. Lulu thought of her meat-grinder, then of hair grease.

"It would be a crime." She jumped bolt upright in the blackness, her eyes hard. They're torturing me. "You'll come to my house, I want you all for good intentions but she who's so reasonable for other people, she ought to know I need to think it over. He said, "You'll come!" making fiery eyes at me. "You'll come into my house, I want you all for myself!" His eyes terrify me when he wants to hypnotize; he kneaded my arms; when I see him with eyes like that I always think of the hair he has on his chest. You will come, I want you all for myself; how can he say things like that? I'm not a dog.

When I sat down, I smiled at him. I had changed my powder for him and I made up my eyes because he likes that, but he didn't see a thing, he doesn't look at my face, he looks at my breasts and I wish they'd dry up, just to annoy him, even though

I don't have too much, they're so small. You will come to my villa in Nice. He said it was white with a marble staircase, that it looked out on the sea, and we'd live naked all day, it must be funny to go up a stairway when you're naked; I'd make him go up ahead of me so that he wouldn't look at me; or else I wouldn't be able to move a foot, I'd stay motionless, wishing with all my heart he'd go blind; anyhow, that would hardly change anything; when he's there I always think I'm naked. He took me by the arm, he looked wicked, he told me, "You've got me under your skin!" and I was afraid and said, "Yes"; I want to make you happy, we'll go riding in the car, in the boat, we'll go to Italy and I'll give you everything you want. But his villa is almost unfurnished and we'd have to sleep on a mattress on the floor. He wants me to sleep in his arms and I'll smell his odor; I'd like his chest because it's brown and wide, but there's a pile of hair on it, I wish men didn't have hair, his is black and soft as moss, sometimes I stroke it and sometimes I'm horrified by it, I pull back as far as possible but he hugs me against him. He'll want me to sleep in his arms, he'll hug me in his arms and I'll smell his odor; and when it's dark we'll hear the noise of the sea and he may wake me up in the middle of the night if he wants to do it: I'll never be able to sleep peacefully except when I have my sickness because, then, he'll shut up but even so it seems there are men who do it with women then and afterwards they have blood on them, blood that isn't theirs, and there must be some on the sheets, everywhere, it's disgusting, why must we have bodies?

Lulu opened her eyes, the curtains were colored red by a light coming from the street, there was a red reflection in the mirror: Lulu loved this red light and there was an armchair which made funny shadows against the window. Henri had put his pants on the arm of the chair, and his suspenders were hanging in emptiness. I have to buy him new suspenders. Oh I don't want to, I don't want to leave. He'll kiss me all day and I'll be *his*, I'll be his pleasure, he'll look at me, he'll think, "this is my pleasure, I touched her there and there and I can do it again if it pleases me." At Port-Royal. Lulu kicked her feet in the sheets, she hated Pierre when she remembered what happened at Port-Royal. She was behind the hedge, she thought he had stayed in the car, looking at the map, and suddenly she saw him, running up behind her, he looked at her. Lulu kicked Henri. He's going to wake up. But Henri said, "Humph," and didn't waken. I'd like to know a handsome young man, pure as a girl, and we

wouldn't touch each other, we'd walk along the seashore and we'd hold hands, and at night we'd sleep in twin beds, we'd stay like brother and sister and talk till morning. I'd like to live with Rirette, it's so charming, women living together; she has fat, smooth shoulders; I was miserable when she was in love with Fresnel, and it worried me to think he petted her, that he passed his hands slowly over her shoulders and thighs and she sighed. I wonder what her face must look like when she's stretched out like that, all naked, under a man, feeling hands on her flesh. I wouldn't touch her for all the money in the world, I wouldn't know what to do with her, even if she wanted, even if she said, "I want it!" I wouldn't know how, but if I were invisible I'd like to be there when somebody was doing it to her and watch her face (I'd be surprised if she still looked like Minerva) and stroke her spread knees gently, her pink knees and hear her groan. Dry throated, Lulu gave a short laugh: sometimes you think about things like that. Once she pretended Pierre wanted to rape Rirette. And I helped him, I held Rirette in my arms. Yesterday. She had fire in her cheeks, we were sitting on her sofa, one against the other, her legs were pressed together, but we didn't say anything, we'll never say anything. Henri began to snore and Lulu hissed. I'm here, I can't sleep, I'm upset and he snores, the fool. If he were to take me in his arms, beg me, if he told me, "You are all mine, Lulu, I love you, don't go!" I'd make the sacrifice for him, I'd stay, yes, I'd stay with him all my life to give him pleasure.

II

Rirette sat on the terrace of the *Dôme* and ordered a glass of port. She felt weary and angry at Lulu:

And their port has a taste of cork, Lulu doesn't care because she drinks coffee, but still you can't drink coffee at aperitif time; here they drink coffee all day or café-crème because they don't have a cent, God that must annoy them, I couldn't do it, I'd chuck the whole place in the customer's faces, these people don't need to keep up with anybody. I don't know why she always meets me in Montparnasse, it would be just as close if she met me at the Café de la Paix or the Pam-Pam, and it wouldn't take me so far from my work; impossible to imagine how sad it makes me feel to see these faces all the time, as soon as I have a minute to spare, I have to come here, it's not so bad on the terrace, but inside it smells like dirty underwear and I don't like failures.

Even on the terrace I feel out of place because I'm clean, it must surprise everybody that passes to see me in the middle of these people here who don't even shave and women who look like I don't know what. They must wonder, "What's she doing there?" I know rich Americans sometimes come in the summer, but it seems they're stopping in England now, what with the government we've got, that's why the commerce-de-luxe isn't going so well, I sold a half less than last year at this same time, and I wonder how the others make out, because I'm the best salesgirl, Mme. Dubech told me so, I feel sorry for the little Yonnel girl, she doesn't know how to sell, she can't have made a cent commission this month, and when you're on your feet all day you like to relax a little in a nice place, with a little luxury and a little art and stylish help. You like to close your eyes and let yourself go and then you like to have nice soft music, it wouldn't cost so much to go dancing at the *Ambassadeurs* sometimes; but the waiters here are so impudent, you can tell they're used to handling a cheap crowd, except the little one with brown hair who serves me, he's nice; I think Lulu must like to be surrounded with all these failures, it would scare her to go into a chic place, fundamentally, she isn't sure of herself, it frightens her as soon as there's a man with good manners, she didn't like Louis; well, she ought to be comfortable here, some of them don't even have collars, with their shoddy appearance and their pipes and the way they look at you, they don't even try to hide it, you can see they don't have enough money to pay for a woman, but that isn't what's lacking in the neighborhood, it's disgusting; you'd think they're going to eat you and they couldn't even tell you nicely that they want you, to carry it off in a way to make you feel good.

The waiter came: "Did you want dry port, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, please."

He spoke again, looking friendly, "Nice weather we're having."

"Not too soon for it," Rirette said.

"That's right. You'd think winter wouldn't ever end."

He left and Rirette followed him with her eyes. "I like that waiter," she thought, he knows his place, he doesn't get familiar, but he always has something to say to me, a little special attention.

A thin, bent young man was watching her steadily; Rirette shrugged her shoulders and turned her back on him: When they want to make eyes at a woman they could at least change their

underwear. I'll tell him that if he says anything to me. I wonder why she doesn't leave. She doesn't want to hurt Henri, I think that's too stupid: a woman doesn't have the right to spoil her life for some impotent. Rirette hated impotents, it was physical. She's got to leave, she decided, her happiness is at stake, I'll tell her she can't gamble with her happiness. Lulu, you don't have the right to gamble with your happiness. I won't say anything to her, it's finished, I told her a hundred times, you can't make people happy if they don't want to be. Rirette felt a great emptiness in her head, because she was so tired, she looked at the port, all sticky in the glass, like a liquid caramel and a voice in her repeated, "Happiness, happiness," and it was a beautifully grave and tender world. And she thought that if anybody had asked her opinion in the *Paris-Soir* contest she would have said it was the most beautiful word in the French language. Did anyone think of it? They said energy, courage, but that's because they were men, there should have been a woman, the women could find it, there should have been two prizes, one for men and one for women and the most beautiful name would have been Honor; one for the women and I'd have won, I'd have said Happiness. Happiness and Honor. I'll tell her, Lulu, you don't have the right to miss out on your happiness. Your Happiness, Lulu, your Happiness. Personally, I think Pierre is very nice, first, he's a real man, and besides, he's intelligent and that never spoils anything, he has money, he'd do anything for her. He's one of those men who knows how to smooth out life's little difficulties, that's nice for a woman; I like people who know how to command, it's a knack, but he knows how to speak to waiters and head waiters; they obey him, I call that a dominant personality. Maybe that's the thing that's most lacking in Henri. And then there's the question of health, with the father she had, she should take care, it's charming to be slender and light and never to be hungry or sleepy, to sleep four hours a night and run all over Paris all day selling material but it's silly, she ought to follow a sensible diet, not eat too much at one time, but more often and at regular hours. She'll see when they send her to the sanatorium for ten years.

She stared perplexedly at the clock over the Montparnasse intersection, it said 11:20. I don't understand Lulu, she's got a funny temperament, I could never find out whether she liked men or whether they disgusted her; still, she ought to be happy with Pierre, that gives her a change, anyhow, from the one she had last year, from her Rabut, *Rebut* I called him. This memory

amused her but she held back her smile because the thin young man was still watching her, she caught him by surprise when she turned her head. Rabut had a face dotted with blackheads and Lulu amused herself by removing them for him, pressed on the skin with her nails: It's sickening, but it's not her fault, Lulu doesn't know what a good-looking man is, I love cute men, first their things are so pretty, their men's shirts, their shoes, their shiny ties, it may be crude, but it's so sweet, so strong, a sweet strength, it's like the smell of English tobacco and eau de cologne and their skin when they've just shaved, it isn't . . . it isn't like a woman's skin, you'd think it was cordova leather, and their strong arms close around you and you put your head on their chest, you smell their sweet strong odor of well-groomed men, they whisper sweet words to you; they have nice things, nice rough cowhide shoes, they whisper, "Darling, dearest darling," and you feel yourself fainting; Rirette thought of Louis who left her last year and her heart tightened; A man in love with himself, with a pile of little mannerisms, a ring and gold cigarette case and full of little manias . . . but they can be rough sometimes, worse than women. The best thing would be a man about forty, someone who still took care of himself, with grey hair on the sides, brushed back, very dry, with broad shoulders, athletic, but who'd know life and who'd be good because he'd suffered. Lulu is only a kid, she's lucky to have a friend like me, because Pierre's beginning to get tired and some people would take advantage of it if they were in my place; I always tell him to be patient, and when he gets a little sweet on me I act like I'm not paying attention, I begin to talk about Lulu and I always have a good word for her, but she doesn't deserve the luck she has, she doesn't realize; I wanted her to live alone a little the way I did when Louis went away, she'd see what it was like to go back alone to her room every evening, when you've worked all day and find the room empty and dying to put your head on a shoulder. Sometimes you wonder where you find the courage to get up the next morning and go back to work and be seductive and gay and make everybody feel good when you'd rather die than keep on with that life.

The clock struck 11:30. Rirette thought of happiness, the bluebird, the bird of happiness, the rebel bird of love. She gave a start. Lulu is half an hour late, that's usual. She'll never leave her husband, she doesn't have enough will power for that. At heart, it's mainly because of respectability that she stays with

Henri: she cheats on him but so long as they call her "Madame," she doesn't think it matters. She can say anything against him she wants but you can't repeat it the next day, she'd burn up. I did everything I could and I've told her everything I had to tell her, too bad for her.

A taxi stopped in front of the *Dôme* and Lulu stepped out. She was carrying a large valise and her face was solemn.

"I left Henri," she called.

She came nearer, bent under the weight of the valise. She was smiling.

"What?" Rirette gasped, "you don't mean. . . ."

"Yes," Lulu said. "Finished, I dropped him."

Rirette was still incredulous. "He knows? You told him?"

Lulu's eyes clouded. "And how!" she said.

"Well, well . . . my own little Lulu!"

Rirette did not know what to think, but in any case, she supposed Lulu needed encouragement.

"That's good news," she said. "How brave you were."

She felt like adding: you see, it wasn't so hard. But she restrained herself. Lulu let herself be admired: she had rouged her cheeks and her eyes were bright. She sat and put the valise down near her. She was wearing a grey wool coat with a leather belt, a light yellow sweater with a rolled collar. She was bare-headed. She recognized immediately the blend of guilt and amusement she was plunged in; Lulu always made that impression on her. What I like about her, Rirette thought, is her vitality.

"In two shakes," Lulu said, "I told him what I thought. He was struck dumb."

"I can't get over it," said Rirette. "But what came over you, darling? Yesterday evening I'd have bet my last franc you'd never leave him."

"It's on account of my kid brother, I don't mind him getting stuck up with me but I can't stand it when he starts on my family."

"But how did it happen?"

"Where's the waiter?" Lulu asked, stirring restlessly on the chair. "The *Dôme* waiters aren't ever there when you want them. Is the little brown-haired one serving us?"

"Yes," Rirette said, "did you know he's mad about me?"

"Oh? Look out for the woman in the washroom then, he's always mixed up with her. He makes passes at her but I think he just does it to see the women go into the toilets; when they

come out he looks hard enough to make you blush. By the way, I've got to leave you for a minute, I have to go down and call Pierre, I'd like to see his face! If you see the waiter, order a café-crème for me: I'll only be a minute and then I'll tell you everything."

She got up, took a few steps and came back towards Rirette. "Dearest Lulu," said Rirette, taking her by the hands.

Lulu left her and stepped lightly across the terrace. Rirette watched her. I never thought she could do it. How gay she is, she thought, a little scandalized, it's good for her to walk out on her husband. If she had listened to me she'd have done it long ago. Anyhow, it's thanks to me; fundamentally, I have a lot of influence on her.

Lulu was back a few minutes later.

"Pierre was bowled over," she said, "He wanted the details but I'll give them to him later, I'm lunching with him. He says maybe we can leave tomorrow night."

"How glad I am, Lulu," Rirette said. "Tell me quickly. Did you decide last night?"

"You know, I didn't decide anything," Lulu said modestly, "It was decided all by itself." She tapped nervously on the table. "Waiter! Waiter! God, he annoys me. I'd like a café-crème."

Rirette was shocked. In Lulu's place and under circumstances as serious as this she wouldn't have lost time running after a café-crème. Lulu was charming, but it was amazing how futile she could be, like a bird.

Lulu burst out laughing. "If you'd seen Henri's face!

"I wonder what your mother will say?" said Rirette seriously.

"My mother? She'll be en-chan-ted," Lulu said with assurance. "He was impolite with her, you know, she was fed up. Always complaining because she didn't bring me up right, that I was this, I was that, that you could see I was brought up in a barn. You know, what I did was a little because of her."

"But what happened?"

"Well, he slapped Robert."

"You mean Robert was in your place?"

"Yes, just passing by this morning because mother wants to apprentice him with Gompez. I think I told you. So, he stopped in while we were eating breakfast and Henri slapped him."

"But why?" Rirette asked, slightly annoyed. She hated the way Lulu told stories.

"They had an argument," Lulu said vaguely, "and the boy

wouldn't let himself be insulted. He stood right up to him. 'Old asshole,' he called him, right to his face. Because Henri said he was poorly raised, naturally, that's all he can say. I thought I'd die laughing. Then Henri got up, we were eating in the kitchenette, and smacked him, I could have killed him!"

"So you left?"

"Left?" Lulu asked, amazed. "Where?"

"I thought you left him then. Look, Lulu, you've got to tell me these things in order, otherwise I don't understand. Tell me," she added, suspiciously, "you really left him, that's all true?"

"Of course. I've been explaining to you for an hour."

"Good. So Henri slapped Robert. Then what?"

"Then," Lulu said, "I locked him on the balcony, it was too funny! He was still in his pajamas, tapping on the window but he didn't dare break the glass because he's as mean as dirt. If I had been in his place, I'd have broken up everything, even if I had to cut my hands to pieces. And the Texiers came in. Then he started smiling through the window acting as if it were a joke."

The waiter passed; Lulu seized his arm:

"So there you are, waiter. Would it trouble you too much to get me a café-crème?"

Rirette was annoyed and she smiled knowingly at the waiter but the waiter remained solemn and bowed with guilty obsequiousness. Rirette was a little angry at Lulu: she never knew the right tone to use on inferiors, sometimes she was too familiar, sometimes too dry and demanding.

Lulu began to laugh.

"I'm laughing because I can still see Henri in his pajamas on the balcony; he was shivering with cold. Do you know how I managed to lock him out? He was in the back of the kitchenette, Robert was crying and he was making a sermon. I opened the window and told him, 'Look, Henri! There's a taxi that just knocked over the flower woman.' He came right out; he likes the flower woman because she told him she was Swiss and he thinks she's in love with him. 'Where? Where?' he kept saying. I stepped back quietly, into the room, and closed the window. Then I shouted through the glass, 'That'll teach you to be a brute to my brother.' I left him on the balcony more than an hour, he kept watching us with big round eyes, he was green with rage. I stuck my tongue out at him and gave Robert candy; after that I brought my things into the kitchenette and got dressed in front of Robert because I know Henri hates that: Robert kissed my

arms and neck like a little man, he's so charming, we acted as if Henri weren't there. On top of all that, I forgot to wash."

"And Henri outside the window. It's too funny for words," Rirette said, bursting with laughter.

Lulu stopped laughing. "I'm afraid he'll catch cold," she said seriously. "You don't think when you're mad." She went on gaily, "He shook his fist at us and kept talking all the time but I didn't understand half of what he said. Then Robert left and right after that the Texiers rang and I let them in. When he saw them he was all smiles and bowing at them and I told them, 'Look at my husband, my big darling, doesn't he look like a fish in an aquarium?' The Texiers waved at him through the glass, they were a little surprised but they didn't let on."

"I can see it all," Rirette said, laughing. "Haha! Your husband on the balcony and the Texiers in the kitchenette. . . ." She wanted to find the right comic and picturesque words to describe the scene to Lulu, she thought Lulu did not have a real sense of humor, but the words did not come.

"I opened the window," Lulu said, "and Henri came in. He kissed me in front of the Texiers and called me a little clown. 'Oh, the little clown,' he said, 'she wanted to play a trick on me.' And I smiled and the Texiers smiled politely, everybody smiled. But when they left he hit me on the ear. Then I took a brush and hit him in the corner of the mouth with it: I split his lip."

"Poor girl," Rirette said with tenderness.

But with a gesture Lulu dismissed all compassion. She held herself straight, shaking her brown curls combatively and her eyes flashed lightning.

"Then we talked it over: I washed his mouth with a towel and then I told him I was sick of it, that I didn't love him any more and that I was leaving. He began to cry. He said he'd kill himself. But that didn't work any more: you remember, Rirette, last year, when there was all that trouble in the Rhineland, he sang the same tune every day: 'There's going to be a war, I'm going to enlist and I'll be killed and you'll be sorry, you'll regret all the sorrow you've caused me.' 'That's enough,' I told him, 'you're impotent, they wouldn't take you.' Anyhow, I calmed him down because he was talking about locking me up in the kitchenette, I swore I wouldn't leave before a month. After that he went to the office, his eyes were all red and there was a piece of cloth sticking to his lip, he didn't look too good. I did the housework, I

put the lentils on the stove and packed my bag. I left him a note on the kitchen table."

"What did you write?"

"I said," Lulu said proudly, "The lentils are on the stove. Help yourself and turn off the gas. There's ham in the icebox. I'm fed up and I'm leaving. Goodbye."

They both laughed and two passers-by turned around. Rirette thought they must present a charming sight and was sorry they weren't sitting on the terrace of the *Viel* or the *Café de la Paix*. When they finished laughing, they were silent a moment and Rirette realized they had nothing more to say to each other. She was a little disappointed.

"I've got to run," Lulu said, rising; "I meet Pierre at noon. What am I going to do with my bag?"

"Leave it with me," Rirette said, "I'll check it with the woman in the ladies' room. When will I see you again?"

"I'll pick you up at your place at two, I have a pile of errands to do: I didn't take half my things, Pierre's going to have to give me money."

Lulu left and Rirette called the waiter. She felt grave and sad enough for two. The waiter ran up: Rirette already noticed that he always hurried when she called him.

"That's five francs," he said. He added a little dryly, "You two were pretty gay, I could hear you laughing all the way back there."

Lulu hurt his feelings, thought Rirette, spitefully. Blushing, she said, "My friend is a little nervous this morning."

"She's very charming," the waiter said soulfully. "Thank you very much, mademoiselle."

He pocketed the six francs and went off. Rirette was a little amazed, but noon struck and she thought it was time for Henri to come back and find Lulu's note: this was a moment full of sweetness for her.

III

"I'd like all that to be sent *before tomorrow evening*, to the Hotel du Théâtre, Rue Vandamme." Lulu told the cashier, putting on the air of a great lady. She turned to Rirette:

"It's all over. Let's go."

"What name?" the cashier asked.

"Mme. Lucienne Crispin."

Lulu threw her coat over her arm and began to run; she ran down the wide staircase of the Samaritain. Rirette followed her, almost falling several times because she didn't watch her step: she had eyes only for the slender silhouette of blue and canary yellow dancing before her! It's true, she does have an obscene body . . . Each time Rirette saw Lulu from behind or in profile, she was struck by the obscenity of her shape though she could not explain why; it was an impression. She's supple and slender, but there's something indecent about her, I don't know what. She does everything she can do to display herself, that must be it. She says she's ashamed of her behind and still she wears skirts that cling to her rump. Her tail is small, yes, a lot smaller than mine, but you can see more of it. It's all around, under her thin back, it fills the skirt, you'd think it was poured in, and besides it jiggles.

Lulu turned around and they smiled at each other. Rirette thought of her friend's indiscreet body with a mixture of reprobation and languor: tight little breasts, a polished flesh, all yellow—when you touched it you'd swear it was rubber—long thighs, a long, common body with long legs; the body of a Negress, Rirette thought, she looks like a Negress dancing the rumba. Near the revolving door a mirror gave Rirette the reflection of her own full body. I'm more the athletic type, she thought, taking Lulu's arm, she makes a better impression than I do when we're dressed, but naked, I'm sure I'm better than she is.

They stayed silent for a moment, then Lulu said:

"Pierre was simply charming. You've been charming too, Rirette, and I'm very grateful to both of you."

She said that with a constrained air, but Rirette paid no attention: Lulu never knew how to thank people, she was too timid.

"What a bore," Lulu said suddenly, "I have to buy a brassiere."

"Here?" Rirette asked. They were just passing a lingerie shop.

"No. But I thought of it because I saw them. I go to Fisher's for my brassieres."

"Boulevard Montparnasse?" Rirette cried. "Look out, Lulu," she went on gravely, "better not hang around the Boulevard Montparnasse, especially now: we'd run into Henri and that would be most unpleasant."

"Henri?" said Lulu, shrugging her shoulders; "Of course not. Why?"

Indignation flushed purple on Rirette's cheeks and temples.

"You're still the same, Lulu, when you don't like something, you deny it, pure and simple. You want to go to Fisher's so you insist Henri won't be on the Boulevard Montparnasse. You know very well he goes by every day at six, it's his way home. You told me that yourself: he goes up the Rue de Rennes and waits for the bus at the corner of the Boulevard Raspail."

"First, it's only five o'clock," Lulu said, "and besides, maybe he didn't go to the office: the note I wrote must have knocked him out."

"But, Lulu," Rirette said suddenly, "You know there's another Fisher's not far from the Opera, on the Rue du Quatre Septembre."

"Yes," Lulu said weakly, "but it's so far to go there."

"Well, I like that; so far to go. It's only two minutes from here. it's a lot closer than Montparnasse."

"I don't like their things."

Rirette thought with amusement that all the Fishers sold the same things.

But Lulu was incomprehensibly obstinate: Henri was positively the last person on earth she would want to meet now and you'd think she was purposely throwing herself in his way.

"Well," she said indulgently, "if we meet him, we meet him, that's all. He isn't going to eat us."

Lulu insisted on going to Montparnasse on foot; she said she needed air. They followed the Rue de Seine, then the Rue de L'Odéon and the Rue de Vaugirard. Rirette praised Pierre and showed Lulu how perfect he had been under the circumstances.

"How I love Paris," Lulu said, "I'm going to miss it!"

"Oh be quiet, Lulu, when I think how lucky you are to go to Nice and then you say how much you'll miss Paris."

Lulu did not answer, she began looking right and left sadly, searching.

When they came out of Fisher's they heard six o'clock strike. Rirette took Lulu's elbow and tried to hurry her along, but Lulu stopped before Baumann the florist.

"Look at those azaleas, Rirette. If I had a nice living room I'd have them everywhere."

"I don't like potted plants," Rirette said.

She was exasperated. She turned her head toward the Rue

de Rennes and sure enough, after a minute, she saw Henri's great stupid silhouette appear. He was bare-headed, and wearing a brown tweed sport coat. Rirette hated brown: "There he is, Lulu, there he is," she said hurriedly.

"Where?" Lulu asked. "Where is he?"

She was scarcely more calm than Rirette.

"Behind us, on the other side of the street. Run and don't turn around."

Lulu turned around anyhow.

"I see him," she said.

Rirette tried to drag her away, but Lulu stiffened and stared at Henri. At last she said, "I think he saw us."

She seemed frightened, suddenly yielded to Rirette and let herself be taken away quietly.

"Now for Heaven's sake, Lulu, don't turn around again," Rirette said breathlessly. "We'll turn down the first street on the right, Rue Delambre."

They walked very quickly, jostling the passers-by. At times Lulu held back a little, or sometimes it was she who dragged Rirette. But they had not quite reached the corner of the Rue Delambre when Rirette saw a large brown shadow behind Lulu; she knew it was Henri and began shaking with anger. Lulu kept her eyes lowered, she looked sly and determined. She's regretting her mistake, but it's too late. Too bad for her.

They hurried on; Henri followed them without a word. They passed the Rue Delambre and kept walking in the direction of the Observatoire. Rirette heard the squeak of Henri's shoes; there was also a sort of light, regular rattle that kept time with their steps: it was his breathing (Henri always breathed heavily, but never that much; he must have run to catch up with them or else it was emotion).

We must act as if he weren't there, Rirette thought. Pretend not to notice his existence. But she could not keep from looking out of the corner of her eye. He was white as a sheet and his eyelids were so lowered they seemed shut. Almost looks like a sleepwalker, thought Rirette with a sort of horror. Henri's lips were trembling and a little bit of pink gauze trembled on the lower lip. And the breathing—that hoarse, even breathing, now ending with a sort of nasal music. Rirette felt uncomfortable: she was not afraid of Henri, but sickness and passion always frightened her a little. After a moment, Henri put his hand out gently

and took Lulu's arm. Lulu twisted her mouth as if she were going to cry and pulled it away, shuddering.

Henri went "Phew!"

Rirette had a mad desire to stop: she had a stitch in the side and her ears were ringing. But Lulu was almost running; she too looked like a sleepwalker. Rirette had the feeling that if she let go of Lulu's arm and stopped, they would both keep on running side by side, mute, pale as death, their eyes closed.

Henri began to speak. With a strange, hoarse voice he said: "Come back with me."

Lulu did not answer. Henri said again, in the same toneless voice:

"You are my wife. Come back with me."

"You can see she doesn't want to go back," Rirette answered between her teeth. "Leave her alone."

He did not seem to hear her. "I am your husband," he repeated. "I want you to come back with me."

"For God's sake let her alone," Rirette said sharply. "Bothering her like that won't do any good, so shut up and let her be."

"She is my wife," he said, "she belongs to me, I want her to come back with me."

He had taken Lulu's arm and this time Lulu did not shake him off.

"Go away," Rirette said.

"I won't go away, I'll follow her everywhere, I want her to come back home."

He spoke with effort. Suddenly he made a grimace which showed his teeth and shouted with all his might:

"You belong to me!"

Some people turned around, laughing. Henri shook Lulu's arm, curled back his lips and howled like an animal. Luckily an empty taxi passed. Rirette waved at it and the taxi stopped. Henri stopped too. Lulu wanted to keep on walking but they held her firmly, each by one arm.

"You ought to know," said Rirette, pulling Lulu towards the street, "You'll never get her back with violence."

"Let her alone, let my wife alone," Henri said, pulling in the opposite direction. Lulu was limp as a bag of laundry.

"Are you getting in or not?" the taxi driver called impatiently.

Rirette dropped Lulu's arm and rained blows on Henri's hand. But he did not seem to feel them. After a moment he let go and began to look at Rirette stupidly. Rirette looked at him

too. She could barely collect her thoughts, an immense sickness filled her. They stayed, eye to eye, for a few seconds, both breathing heavily. Then Rirette pulled herself together, took Lulu by the waist and drew her to the taxi.

"Where to?" the driver asked.

Henri had followed. He wanted to get in with them. But Rirette pushed him back with all her strength and closed the door quickly.

"Drive, drive!" she told the chauffeur. "We'll tell you the address later."

The taxi started up and Rirette dropped to the back of the car. How vulgar it all was, she thought. She hated Lulu.

"Where do you want to go, Lulu?" she asked sweetly.

Lulu did not answer. Rirette put her arms around her and became persuasive.

"You must answer me. Do you want me to drop you off at Pierre's?"

Lulu made a movement Rirette took for acquiescence. She leaned forward: "11 Rue Messine."

When Rirette turned around again, Lulu was watching her strangely.

"What the . . .," Rirette began.

"I hate you," Lulu screamed, "I hate Pierre, I hate Henri. What do you all have against me? You're torturing me."

She stopped short and her features clouded.

"Cry," Rirette said with calm dignity, "cry, it'll do you good."

Lulu bent double and began to sob. Rirette took her in her arms and held her close. From time to time she stroked her hair. But inside she felt cold and distrustful. Lulu was calm when the cab stopped. She wiped her eyes and powdered her nose.

"Excuse me," she said gently, "it was nerves. I couldn't bear seeing him like that, it hurt me."

"He looked like an orangoutang," said Rirette; once more serene.

Lulu smiled.

"When will I see you again?" Rirette asked.

"Oh, not before tomorrow. You know Pierre can't put me up because of his mother. I'll be at the Hotel du Théâtre. You could come early, around nine, if it doesn't put you out, because after that I'm going to see Mama."

She was pale and Rirette thought sadly of the terrible ease with which she could break down.

"Don't worry too much tonight," she said.

"I'm awfully tired," Lulu said, "I hope Pierre will let me go back early, but he never understands those things."

Rirette kept the taxi and was driven home. For a moment she thought she'd go to the movies, but she had no heart for it. She threw her hat on a chair and took a step towards the window. But the bed attracted her, all white, all soft and moist in its shadowy hollows. To throw herself on it, to feel the caress of the pillow against her burning cheeks. I'm strong. I did everything for Lulu and now I'm all alone and no one does anything for me. She had so much pity for herself that she felt a flood of sobs mounting in her throat. They're going to go to Nice and I won't see them any more. I'm the one who made them happy but they won't think about me. And I'll stay here working eight hours a day selling artificial pearls in Burma's. When the first tears rolled down her cheeks she let herself fall softly on the bed. "Nice," she repeated, weeping bitterly, "Nice . . . in the sunlight . . . on the Riviera. . . ."

IV

"Phew!"

Black night. You'd think somebody was walking around the room: a man in slippers. He put one foot out cautiously, then the other, unable to avoid a light cracking of the floor. He stopped, there was a moment of silence, then, suddenly transported to the other end of the room, he began his aimless, idiotic walking again. Lulu was cold, the blankets were much too light. She said *Phew* aloud and the sound of her voice frightened her.

Phew! I'm sure he's looking at the sky and the stars now, he's lighting a cigarette, he's outside, he said he liked the purple color of the Paris sky. With little steps, he goes back, with little steps: he feels poetic just after he's done it, he told me, and light as a cow that's just been milked, he doesn't think any more about it—and me, I'm defiled. It doesn't surprise me that he's pure now that he left his own dirt here, in the blackness, there's a hand towel full of it and the sheet's wet in the middle of the bed, I can't stretch out my legs because I'll feel the wet on my skin, what filth and him all dry, I heard him whistle under my window when he left; he was down there dry and fresh in his fine clothes and topcoat, you must admit he knows how to dress, a woman would be proud to go out with him, he was under the window

Guilty?

and I was naked in the blackness and I was cold and rubbed my belly with my hands because I thought I was still wet. I'll come up for a minute, he said, just to see your room. He stayed two hours and the bed creaked—this rotten little iron bed. I wonder where he found out about this hotel, he told me he spent two weeks here once, that I'd be all right here, these are funny rooms, I saw two of them, I never saw such little rooms cluttered up with furniture, cushions and couches and little tables, it stinks of love, I don't know whether he stayed here two weeks but he surely didn't stay alone; he can't have much respect for me to stick me in here. The bellboy laughed when we went up, an Algerian, I hate those people, he looked at my legs, then he went into the office, he must have thought, That's it, they're going to do it, and imagined all sorts of dirty things, they say it's terrible what they do with women down there; if they ever get hold of one she limps for the rest of her life; and all the time Pierre was bothering me I was thinking about that Algerian who was thinking about what I was doing and thinking a lot of dirtiness worse than it was. Somebody's in this room!

Measure but Guilty?

Lulu held her breath but the creaking stopped immediately. I have a pain between my thighs, it itches, I want to cry and it will be like that every night except tomorrow night because we'll be on the train. Lulu bit her lip and shuddered because she remembered she had groaned. It's not true, I didn't groan, I simply breathed hard a little because he's so heavy, when he's on me he takes my breath away. He said, "You're groaning, you're coming." I hate people to talk to me when I'm doing that, I wish they'd forget but he never stops saying a lot of dirty things. I didn't groan, in the first place, I can't have any pleasure, it's a fact, the doctor said so, unless I do it to myself. He won't believe it, they never want to believe it, they all said: "It's because you got off to a bad start, I'll teach you"; I let them talk, I knew what the trouble was, it's medical; but that provokes them.

Someone was coming up the stairs. Someone coming back. God, don't let him come back. He's capable of doing it if he feels like it again. It isn't him, those are heavy steps—or else—Lulu's heart jumped in her breast—if it was the Algerian, he knows I'm alone, he's going to knock on the door, I can't, I can't stand that, no, it's the floor below, it's a man going in, he's putting his key in the lock, he's taking his time, he's drunk, I wonder who lives in this hotel, it must be a fine bunch; I met a redhead this afternoon, on the stairs, she had eyes like a dope fiend. I didn't groan.

Of course, he did manage to bother me with all his feeling around, he knows how; I have a horror of men who know how, I'd rather sleep with a virgin. Those hands going right to where they want, pressing a little, not too much . . . they take you for an instrument they're proud of knowing how to play. I hate people to bother me, my throat's dry, I'm afraid and I have a bad taste in my mouth and I'm humiliated because they think he dominates me, I'd like to slap Pierre when he put on his elegant airs and says, "I've got technique." My God, to think that's life, that's why you get dressed and wash and make yourself pretty and all the books are written about that and you think about it all the time and finally that's what it is, you go to a room with somebody who half smothers you and ends up by wetting your stomach. I want to sleep. Oh, if I could only sleep a little bit, tomorrow I'll travel all night, I'll be all in. Still I'd like to be a little fresh to walk around Nice; they say it's so lovely, little Italian streets and colored clothes drying in the sun, I'll set myself up with my easel and I'll paint and the little girls will come to see what I'm doing. Rot! (She had stretched out a little and her hip touched the damp spot in the sheet.) That's all he brought me here for. Nobody, nobody loves me. He walked beside me and I almost fainted and I waited for one tender word, he could have said, "I love you." I wouldn't have gone back to him, of course, but I'd have said something nice, we would have parted good friends, I waited and waited, he took my arm and I let him, Rirette was furious, it's not true he looked like an orangoutang but I knew she was thinking something like that, she was watching him out of the corner of her eye, nastily, it's amazing how nasty she can be, well, in spite of that, when he took my arm I didn't resist but it wasn't me he wanted, he wanted his wife because he married me and he's my husband; he always depreciated me, he said he was more intelligent than I and everything that happened is all his fault, he didn't need to treat me so high and mighty, I'd still be with him. I'm sure he doesn't miss me now, he isn't crying, he's raving, that's what he's doing and he's glad to have the bed all to himself so he can stretch his long legs out. I'd like to die. I'm so afraid he'll think badly of me; I couldn't explain anything to him because Rirette was between us, talking, talking, she looked hysterical. Now she's glad, she's complimenting herself on her courage, how rotten that is with Henri who's gentle as a lamb. I'll go. They can't make me leave him like a dog. She jumped out of bed and turned the switch. My stockings and slip are enough. She was in

Notice the break

M

such a hurry that she did not even take the trouble to comb her hair. And the people who see me won't know I'm naked under my heavy grey coat, it comes down to my feet. The Algerian—she stopped, her heart pounding—I'll have to wake him up to open the door. She went down on tiptoe—but the steps creaked one by one; she knocked at the office window.

"Who is it?" the Algerian asked. His eyes were red and his hair tousled, he didn't look very frightening.

"Open the door for me," Lulu said dryly.

Fifteen minutes later she rang at Henri's door.

V

"Who's there?" Henri asked through the door.

"It's me."

He doesn't answer, he doesn't want to let me in my own home. But I'll knock on the door till he opens, he'll give in because of the neighbors. After a minute the door was half opened and Henri appeared, pale, with a pimple on his nose; he was in pajamas. He hasn't slept, Lulu thought tenderly.

"I didn't want to leave like that, I wanted to see you again."

Henri still said nothing. Lulu entered, pushing him aside a little. How stupid he is, he's always in your way, he's looking at me with round eyes with his arms hanging, he doesn't know what to do with his body. Shut up, shut up, I see you're moved and you can't speak. He made an effort to swallow his saliva and Lulu had to close the door.

"I want us to part good friends," she said.

He opened his mouth as if to speak, turned suddenly and fled. What's he doing? She dared not follow him. Is he crying? Suddenly she heard him cough: he's in the bathroom. When he came back she hung about his neck and pressed her mouth against his: he smelled of vomit. Lulu burst out sobbing.

"I'm cold," Henri said.

"Let's go to bed," she said, weeping. "I can stay till tomorrow morning."

They went to bed and Lulu was shaken with enormous sobs because she found her room and bed clean and the red glow in the window. She thought Henri would take her in his arms but he did nothing: he was sleeping stretched out full length as if someone had put a poker in the bed. He's as stiff as when he

talks to a Swiss. She took his head in her two hands and stared at him. "You are pure, pure." He began to cry.

"I'm miserable," he said, "I've never been so miserable."

"I haven't either," Lulu said.

They wept for a long time. After a while she put out the light and laid her head on his shoulder. If we could stay like that forever: pure and sad as two orphans; but it isn't possible, it doesn't happen in life. Life was an enormous wave breaking on Lulu, tearing her from the arms of Henri. Your hand, your big hand. He's proud of them because they're big, he says that descendants of old families always have big limbs. He won't take my waist in his hand any more. He tickled me a little but I was proud because he could almost make his fingers meet. It isn't true that he's impotent—he's pure, pure and a little lazy. She smiled through her tears and kissed him under the chin.

"What am I going to tell my parents?" Henri asked. "My mother'll die when she hears."

Mme. Crispin would not die, on the contrary, she would triumph. They'll talk about me, at meals, all five of them, blaming me, like people who know a lot about things but don't want to say everything because of the kid who's sixteen and she's too young to talk about certain things in front of her. She'll laugh inside herself because she knows it all, she always knows it all and she detests me. All this muck. And appearances are against me.

"Don't tell them right away," she pleaded, "tell them I'm at Nice for my health."

"They won't believe me."

She kissed Henri quickly all over his face.

"Henri, you weren't nice enough to me."

"That's true," Henri said, "I wasn't nice enough. Neither were you," he reflected, "you weren't nice enough."

"I wasn't. Ah!" Lulu said, "how miserable we are!" She cried so loudly she thought she would suffocate: soon it would be day and she would leave. You never, never do what you want, you're carried away.

"You shouldn't have left like that," said Henri.

Lulu sighed. "I loved you a lot, Henri."

"And now you don't?"

"It isn't the same."

"Who are you leaving with?"

"People you don't know."

"How do you know people I don't know?" Henri asked angrily, "Where did you meet them?"

"Never mind, darling, my little Gulliver, you aren't going to act like a husband now?"

"You're leaving with a man," Henri said, weeping.

"Listen, Henri, I swear I'm not, I swear, men disgust me now. I'm leaving with a family, with friends of Rirette, old people. I want to live alone, they'll find a job for me; Oh Henri, if you knew how much I needed to live alone, how it all disgusts me."

"What?" Henri asked, "what disgusts you?"

"Everything!" She kissed him. "You're the only one that doesn't disgust me, darling."

She passed her hands under Henri's pajamas and caressed his whole body. He shuddered under her icy hands but he did not turn away, he said only, "I'm going to get sick."

Surely, something was broken in him.

At seven o'clock, Lulu got up, her eyes swollen with tears. She said wearily, "I have to go back there."

"Back where?"

"Hotel du Théâtre, Rue Vandamme. A rotten hotel."

"Stay with me."

"No, Henri, please, don't insist. I told you it was impossible."

The flood carries you away; that's life; we can't judge or understand, we can only let ourselves drift. Tomorrow I'll be in Nice. She went to the bathroom to wash her eyes with warm water. She put on her coat, shivering. It's like fate. I only hope I can sleep on the train tonight, or else I'll be completely knocked out when I get to Nice. I hope he got first-class tickets; that'll be the first time I ever rode first class. Everything is always like that: for years I've wanted to take a long trip first class, and the day it happens it works out so that I can't enjoy it. She was in a hurry to leave now, for these last moments had been unbearable.

"What are you going to do with that Gallois person?" she asked.

Gallois had ordered a poster from Henri, Henri had made it and now Gallois didn't want it any more.

"I don't know," Henri said.

He was crouched under the covers, only his hair and the end of his ear was visible. Slowly and softly, he said, "I'd like to sleep for a week."

"Goodbye, darling," Lulu said.

"Goodbye."

She bent over him, drawing aside the covers a little, and kissed him on the forehead. She stayed a long while on the landing without deciding to close the door of the apartment. After a moment, she turned her eyes away and pulled the knob violently. She heard a dry noise and thought she was going to faint: she had felt like that when they threw the first shovelful of earth on her father's casket.

Henri hasn't been nice. He could have gotten up and gone as far as the door with me. I think I would have minded less if he had been the one who closed it.

VI

"She did that!" said Rirette, with a far-off look. "She did that!"

It was evening. About six Pierre had called Rirette and she had met him at the *Dôme*.

"But you," Pierre said, "weren't you supposed to see her this morning at nine?"

"I saw her."

"She didn't look strange?"

"No indeed," Rirette said, "I didn't notice anything. She was a little tired but she told me she hadn't slept after you left because she was so excited about seeing Nice and she was a little afraid of the Algerian bellboy. . . . Wait . . . she even asked me if I thought you'd bought first-class tickets on the train, she said it was the dream of her life to travel first class. No," Rirette decided, "I'm sure she didn't have anything like that in mind; at least not while I was there. I stayed with her for two hours and I can tell those things, I'd be surprised if I missed anything. You tell me she's very close-mouthed but I've known her for four years and I've seen her in all sort of situations. I know Lulu through and through."

"Then the Texiers made her mind up. It's funny. . . ." He mused a few moments and suddenly began again. "I wonder who gave them Lulu's address. I picked out the hotel and she'd never heard of it before."

He toyed distractedly with Lulu's letter and Rirette was annoyed because she wanted to read it and he hadn't offered it to her.

"When did you get it?" she asked, finally.

"The letter? . . ." He handed it to her with simplicity. "Here,

you can read it. She must have given it to the concierge around one o'clock."

It was a thin, violet sheet such as is sold in cigar stores:

Dearest Darling,

The Texiers came (I don't know who gave them the address) and I'm going to cause you a lot of sorrow, but I'm not going, dearest, darling Pierre; I am staying with Henri because he is too unhappy. They went to see him this morning, he didn't want to open the door and Mme. Texier said he didn't look human. They were very nice and they understood my reasons, they said all the wrong was on his side, that he was a bear but at heart he wasn't bad. She said he needed that to make him understand how much he needed me. I don't know who gave them the address, they didn't say, they must have happened to see me when I was leaving the hotel this morning with Rirette. Mme. Texier said she knew she was asking me to make an enormous sacrifice but that she knew me well enough to know that I wouldn't sneak out. I'll miss our lovely trip to Nice very much, darling, but I thought you would be less unhappy because I am still yours. I am yours with all my heart and all my body and we shall see each other as often as before. But Henri would kill himself if he didn't have me any more. I am indispensable to him; I assure you that it doesn't amuse me to feel such a responsibility. I hope you won't make your naughty little face which frightens me so, you wouldn't want me to be sorry, would you? I am going back to Henri soon, I'm a little sick when I think that I'm going to see him in such a state but I will have the courage to name my own conditions. First, I want more freedom because I love you and I want him to leave Robert alone and not say anything bad about Mama any more, ever. Dearest, I am so sad, I wish you could be here, I want you, I press myself against you and I feel your caresses in all my body. I will be at the Dôme tomorrow at five.

LULU

"Poor Pierre."

Rirette took his hand.

"I'll tell you," Pierre said, "I feel sorry for her. She needed air and sunshine. But since she decided that way. . . . My mother made a frightful scene," he went on. "The villa belongs to her, she didn't want me to take a woman there."

"Ah?" Rirette said, in a broken voice, "Ah? So everything's all right, then, everybody's happy!"

She dropped Pierre's hand: without knowing why she felt flooded with bitter regret.