The Childhood of a Leader

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MME. Portier told mamma: “Your little boy looks good enough to eat. He’s simply adorable in his little angel’s costume.”

M. Bouffardier drew Lucien between his knees and stroked his arms: “A real little girl,” he said, smiling. “What’s your name? Jacqueline, Lucienne, Margot?”

Lucien turned red and said, “My name is Lucien.” He was no longer quite sure about not being a little girl: a lot of people had kissed him and called him mademoiselle, everybody thought he was so charming with his gauze wings, his long blue robe, small bare arms and blond curls: he was afraid that the people would suddenly decide he wasn’t a little boy any more; he would have protested in vain, no one would listen to him, they wouldn’t let him take off his dress any more except to sleep and every morning when he woke up he would find it at the foot of his bed and when he wanted to wee-wee during the day, he’d have to lift it up like Nenette and sit on his heels. Everybody would say: my sweet little darling; maybe it’s happened already and I *am* a little girl; he felt so soft inside that it made him a little sick and his voice came out of his mouth like a flute and he offered flowers to everybody in rounded, curved gestures; he wanted to kiss his soft upper arm. He thought: it isn’t real. He liked things that weren’t real, but he had a better time on Mardi Gras: they dressed him up as Pierrot,

he ran and jumped and shouted with Riri and they hid under the tables.

His mother gave him a light tap with her lorgnette. “I’m proud of my little boy.” She was impressive and beautiful, the fattest and biggest of all these ladies.

When he passed in front of the long buffet covered with a white table-cloth, his papa who was drinking a glass of champagne, lifted him up and said, “Little man!” Lucien felt like crying and saying, “No!” He asked for orangeade because it was cold and they had forbidden him to drink it. But they poured him some in a tiny glass. It had a pithy taste and wasn’t as cold as they said: Lucien began to think about the orangeade with castor oil he swallowed when he was sick.

He burst out sobbing and found it comforting to sit between papa and mamma in the car. Mamma pressed Lucien against her, she was hot and perfumed and all in silk. From time to time the inside of the car grew white as chalk, Lucien blinked his eyes, the violets mamma was wearing on her corsage came out of the shadows and Lucien suddenly smelled their perfume. He was still sobbing a little but he felt moist and itchy, somewhat pithy like the orangeade; he would have liked to splash in his little bath-tub and have mamma wash him with the rubber sponge. They let him sleep in papa and mamma’s room because he was a little baby; he laughed and made the springs of his little bed jingle and papa said, “The child is over-excited.” He drank a little orange-blossom water and saw papa in shirt-sleeves.

The next day Lucien was sure he had forgotten something. He remembered the dream he had very clearly: papa and mamma were wearing angels’ robes, Lucien was sitting all naked on his pot beating a drum, papa and mamma flew around him; it was a nightmare. But there had been something before the dream, Lucien must have wakened. When he tried to remember, he saw a long black tunnel lit by a small blue lamp like the night-light they turned on in his parents’ room every evening. At the very bottom of this dark blue night something went past—something white. He sat on the ground at mamma’s feet and took his drum. Mamma

asked him, “Why are you looking at me like that, darling?” He lowered his eyes and beat on his drum, crying, “Boom, boom, taraboom.” But when she turned her head he began to scrutinize her minutely as if he were seeing her for the first time. He recognized the blue robe with the pink stuff and the face too. Yet it wasn’t the same. Suddenly he thought he had it; if he thought about it a tiny bit more, he would find what he was looking for. The tunnel lit up with a pale grey light and he could see something moving. Lucien was afraid and cried out. The tunnel disappeared. “What’s the matter, little darling?” Mamma asked. She was kneeling close to him and looked worried. “I’m having fun,” Lucien said. Mamma smelled good but he was afraid she would touch him: she looked funny to him, papa too. He decided he would never sleep in their room any more.

Mamma noticed nothing the following day. Lucien was always under her feet, as usual, and he gossiped with her like a real little man. He asked her to tell him Little Red Riding-hood and mamma took him on her knees. She talked about the wolf and Little Red Riding-hood’s grandmother, with finger raised, smiling and grave; Lucien looked at her and said, “And then what?” And sometimes he touched the little hairs on the back of her neck; but he wasn’t listening, he was wondering if she were his real mother. When she finished, he said, “Mamma, tell me about when you were a little girl.” And mamma told him; but maybe she was lying. Maybe she was a little boy before and they put dresses on her—like Lucien, the other night—and she kept on wearing them to act like a little girl. Gently he felt her beautiful fat arms which were soft as butter under the silk. What would happen if they took off mamma’s dress and she put on papa’s pants? Maybe right away she’d grow a black moustache. He clasped mamma’s arms with all his might; he had a feeling she was going to be transformed into a horrible beast before his eyes—or maybe turn into a bearded lady like the one in the carnival. She laughed, opening her mouth wide, and Lucien saw her pink tongue and the back of her throat: it was dirty, he wanted to spit in it. “Hahaha!” Mamma said, “how you hug me, little man. Hug me tight. As tight as you love me.” Lucien

took one of her lovely hands with the silver rings on it and covered it with kisses. But the next day when she was sitting near him holding his hands while he was on the pot and said to him, “Push, Lucien, push, little darling . . . please.” He suddenly stopped pushing and asked her, a little breathlessly, “But you’re my real mother, aren’t you?” She said, “Silly,” and asked him if it wasn’t going to come soon. From the day Lucien was sure she was playing a joke on him and he never again told her he would marry her when he grew up. But he was not quite sure what the joke was: maybe one night in the tunnel, robbers came and took papa and mamma and put those two in their place. Or maybe it was really papa and mamma but during the day they played one part and at night they were all different. Lucien was hardly surprised on Christmas Eve when he suddenly woke up and saw them putting toys in front of the fire-place. The next day they talked about Father Christmas and Lucien pretended he believed them: he thought it was their rôle, they must have stolen the toys. He had scarlatina in February and had a lot of fun.

After he was cured, he got in the habit of playing orphan. He sat under the chestnut tree in the middle of the lawn, filling his hands with earth, and thought: I’m an orphan. I’m going to call myself Louis. I haven’t eaten for six days. Germaine, the maid, called him to lunch and at table he kept on playing; papa and mamma noticed nothing. He had been picked up by robbers who wanted to make a pickpocket out of him. After he had eaten he would run away and denounce them. He ate and drank very little; he had read in *L’Auberge de l’Ange Gardien* that the first meal of a starving man should be light. It was amusing because everybody was playing. Papa and mamma were playing papa and mamma; mamma was playing worried because her little darling wasn’t eating, papa was playing at reading the paper and sometimes shaking his finger in Lucien’s face saying, “Badaboom, little man!” And Lucien was playing too, but finally he didn’t know at what. Orphan? Or Lucien? He looked at the water bottle. There was a little red light dancing in the bottom of the water and he would have sworn papa’s hand was in the water bottle, enormous,

luminous, with little black hairs on the fingers. Lucien suddenly felt that the water bottle was playing at being a water bottle. He barely touched his food and he was so hungry in the afternoon that he stole a dozen plums and almost had indigestion. He thought he had enough of playing Lucien.

Still, he could not stop himself and it seemed to him that he was always playing. He wanted to be like M. Bouffardier who was so ugly and serious. When M. Bouffardier came to dinner, he bent over mamma's hand and said, "Your servant, dear madame," and Lucien planted himself in the middle of the salon and watched him with admiration. But nothing serious happened to Lucien. When he fell down and bumped himself, he sometimes stopped crying and wondered, "Do I really hurt?" Then he felt even sadder and his tears flowed more than ever. When he kissed mamma's hand and said, "Your servant, dear madame," she rumpled his hair and said, "It isn't nice, little mouse, you mustn't make fun of grown-ups," and he felt all discouraged. The only important things he could find were the first and third Fridays of the month. Those days a lot of ladies came to see mamma and two or three were always in mourning; Lucien loved ladies in mourning especially when they had big feet. Generally, he liked grown-ups because they were so respectable—and you could never imagine they forgot themselves in bed or did all the other things little boys do, because they have so many dark clothes on their bodies and you can't imagine what's underneath. When they're all together they eat everything and talk and even their laughs are serious, it's beautiful, like at mass. They treated Lucien like a grown-up person. Mme. Couffin took Lucien on her lap and felt his calves, declaring, "He's the prettiest, cutest one I've seen." Then she questioned him about his likes and dislikes, kissed him and asked him what he would do when he was big. And sometimes he answered he'd be a great general like Joan of Arc and he'd take back Alsace-Lorraine from the Germans, or sometimes he wanted to be a missionary. As he spoke, he believed what he said. Mme. Besse was a large, strong woman with a slight moustache. She romped with Lucien, tickled him and called him "my little doll."

Lucien was overjoyed, he laughed easily and squirmed under the ticklings; he thought he was a little doll, a charming little doll for the grown-ups and he would have liked Mme. Besse to undress him and wash him like a rubber doll and send him bye-bye in a tiny little cradle. And sometimes Mme. Besse asked, "And does my little doll talk?" and she squeezed his stomach suddenly. Then Lucien pretended to be a mechanical doll and said, "Crick!" in a muffled voice and they both laughed.

The curé who came to the house every Saturday asked him if he loved his mother. Lucien adored his pretty mamma and his papa who was so strong and good. He answered, "Yes," looking the curé straight in the eyes with a little air of boldness that made everybody laugh. The curé had a face like a raspberry, red and lumpy with a hair on each lump. He told Lucien it was very nice and that he should always love his mamma; then he asked who Lucien preferred, his mother or God. Lucien could not guess the answer on the spot and he began to shake his curls and stamp his feet shouting, "Baroom, tarataraboom!" and the grown-ups continued their conversation as though he did not exist. He ran to the garden and slipped out by the backdoor; he had brought his little reed cane with him. Naturally, Lucien was never supposed to leave the garden, it was forbidden; usually Lucien was a good little boy but that day he felt like disobeying. He looked defiantly at the big nettle-patch; you could see it was a forbidden place; the wall was black, the nettles were naughty, harmful plants, a dog had done his business just at the foot of the nettles; it smelled of plants, dog dirt and hot wine. Lucien lashed at the nettles with his cane crying "I love my mamma, I love my mamma." He saw the broken nettles hanging sadly, oozing a white juice, their whitish, down necks had unravelled in breaking, he heard a small solitary voice which cried, "I love my mamma, I love my mamma"; a big blue fly was buzzing around: a horse-fly, Lucien was afraid of it—and a forbidden, powerful odour, putrid and peaceful, filled his nostrils. He repeated, "I love my mamma," but his voice seemed strange, he felt deep terror and ran back into the salon like a flash. From that day on, Lucien understood that he did not love his

mamma. He did not feel guilty but redoubled his niceties because he thought he should pretend to love his parents all his life, or else he was a naughty little boy. Mme. Fleurier found Lucien more and more tender and just then there was the war and papa went off to fight and mamma was glad, in her sorrow, that Lucien was so full of attention; in the afternoons, when she rested on her beach-chair in the garden because she was so full of sorrow, he ran to get her a cushion and slipped it beneath her head or put a blanket over her legs and she protested, laughing, "But I'll be too hot, my little man, how sweet you are!" He kissed her furiously, all out of breath, saying, "My own mamma," and sat down at the foot of the chestnut tree.

He said, "chestnut tree," and waited. But nothing happened. Mamma was stretched out on the verandah, all tiny at the bottom of a heavy stifling silence. There was a smell of hot grass, you could play explorer in the jungle; but Lucien did not feel like playing. The air trembled about the red crest of the wall and the sunlight made burning spots on the earth and on Lucien's hands. "Chestnut tree!" It was shocking: when Lucien told mamma, "My pretty little mamma" she smiled and when he called Germaine "stinkweed" she cried and went complaining to mamma. But when he said "chestnut tree," nothing at all happened. He muttered between his teeth, "Nasty old tree," and was not reassured, but since the tree did not move he repeated, louder, "Nasty old tree, nasty old chestnut tree, you wait, you just wait and see!" and he kicked it. But the tree stayed still—just as though it were made of wood.

That evening at dinner Lucien told mamma, "You know, mamma, the trees, well . . . they're made out of wood," making a surprised little face which mamma liked.

But Mme. Fleurier had received no mail at noon. She said dryly, "Don't act like a fool."

Lucien became a little roughneck. He broke his toys to see how they were made, he whittled the arm of a chair with one of papa's old razors, he knocked down a Tanagra figure in the living-room to see if it were hollow and if there were anything inside; when he

walked he struck the heads from plants and flowers with his cane: each time he was deeply disappointed, things were stupid, nothing really and truly existed. Often mamma showed him flowers and asked him, “What’s the name of this?” But Lucien shook his head and answered, “That isn’t anything, that doesn’t have any name.” All that wasn’t worth bothering with. It was much more fun to pull the legs off a grasshopper because they throbbed between your fingers like a top and a yellow cream came out when you pressed its stomach. But even so, the grasshoppers didn’t make any noise. Lucien would have liked to torture an animal that cried when it was hurt, a chicken for instance, but he didn’t dare go near them. M. Fleurier came back in March because he was a manager and the general told him he would be much more useful at the head of his factory than in the trenches like just anybody. He thought Lucien had changed very much and said he didn’t recognize his little man any more. Lucien had fallen into a sort of somnolence; he answered quickly, he always had a finger in his nose or else he breathed on his fingers and smelled them and he had to be begged to do his little business. Now he went alone to the bathroom; he had only to leave the door half open and from time to time, mamma or Germaine came to encourage him. He stayed whole hours on the throne and once he was so bored he went to sleep. The doctor said he was growing too quickly and prescribed a tonic. Mamma wanted to teach Lucien new games but Lucien thought he played enough as it was and anyhow all games were the same; it was always the same thing. He often pouted; it was also a game and rather amusing. It hurt mamma, you felt all sad and resentful, you got a little deaf and your mouth was pursed up and your eyes misty, inside it was warm and soft like when you’re under the sheets at night and smell your own odour; you were alone in the world. Lucien could no longer leave his broodings and when papa put on his mocking voice to tell him, “You’re going to hatch chickens,” Lucien rolled on the ground and sobbed. He still went to the salon when mamma was having visitors, but since they had cut off his curls the grown-ups paid less attention to him unless it was to point out a moral for him

and tell him instructive stories. When his cousin Riri and Aunt Bertha, his pretty mamma, came to Férolles because of the bombings, Lucien was very glad and tried to teach him how to play. But Riri was too busy hating the Boches and he still smelled like a baby even though he was six months older than Lucien; he had freckles and didn't always understand things very well. However, Lucien confided to him that he walked in his sleep. Some people get up at night and talk and walk around still sleeping: Lucien had read that in the *Petit Explorateur* and he thought there must be a real Lucien who talked, walked, and really loved his parents at night, only as soon as morning came, he forgot everything and began to pretend to be Lucien.

In the beginning Lucien only half believed this story, but one day they went near the nettles and Riri showed Lucien his wee-wee and told him, "Look how big it is, I'm a big boy. When it'll be all big I'll be a man and I'll go and fight the Boches in the trenches."

Lucien thought Riri was funny and he burst out laughing.

"Let's see yours," Riri said. They compared and Lucien's was smaller but Riri cheated: he pulled his to make it longer. "I have the biggest," Riri said.

"Yes, but I'm a sleep-walker," Lucien said calmly. Riri didn't know what a sleep-walker was and Lucien had to explain it to him. When he finished, he thought, "Then it's true I'm a sleep-walker," and he had a terrible desire to cry. Since they slept in the same bed they agreed that Riri would stay up the next night and watch Lucien when Lucien got up and remember all he said. "You wake me up after a while," Lucien said, "to see if I remember anything I did."

That night, Lucien, unable to sleep, heard sharp snores and had to wake up Riri.

"Zanzibar!" Riri said.

"Wake up, Riri, you have to watch me when I get up."

"Let me sleep," Riri said in a thick, pasty voice. Lucien shook him and pinched him under his shirt and Riri began to jump around and he stayed awake, his eyes open and a funny smile on

his lips. Lucien thought about a bicycle his father was to buy him, he heard a train whistle and suddenly the maid came in and opened the curtains; it was eight o'clock in the morning. Lucien never knew what he did during the night. But God knew because God saw everything. Lucien knelt on the *prie-dieu* and forced himself to behave so that his mamma would congratulate him after mass but he hated God: God knew more about Lucien than Lucien himself. God knew that Lucien didn't love his mamma or papa and that he pretended to be good and touched himself in bed at night.

Luckily, God couldn't remember everything because there were so many little boys in the world. When Lucien tapped his forehead and said, "Picotin," right away God forgot everything He had seen. Lucien also undertook to persuade God that he loved his mamma. From time to time he said in his head, "How I love my dear mamma!" There was always a little corner in him which wasn't quite persuaded and of course God saw that corner. In that case, He won. But sometimes you could absorb yourself so completely in what you were saying. You said very quickly, "Oh how I love my mamma," pronouncing it carefully and you saw mamma's face and felt all tender, you thought vaguely, vaguely, that God was watching you and afterwards you didn't think about it any more, you were all creamy with tenderness and then there were words dancing in your ears: mamma, MAMMA, MAMMA. That lasted only an instant, of course; it was like Lucien trying to balance a chair on his feet. But if, at that moment, you said "Pacota," God had lost: He had only seen Good and what he saw engraved itself in His memory forever. But Lucien tired of this game because he had to make too much effort and besides you never knew whether God had won or lost. Lucien had nothing more to do with God. When he made his first communion, the curé said he was the best-behaved little boy and the most pious of all the catechism class. Lucien grasped things quickly and he had a good memory but his head was full of fog.

Sundays were a bright spot. The fog lifted when Lucien went walking with his father on the Paris road. He had on his

handsome sailor suit and they met workers who saluted papa and Lucien. Papa went up to them and they said, "Good morning, M. Fleurier," and also, "Good morning, Master Fleurier." Lucien liked the workers because they were grown-ups but not like the others. First, they called him master. And they wore caps and had short nails and big hands which always looked chapped and hurt. They were responsible and respectful. You mustn't pull old Bouligaud's moustache: papa would have scolded Lucien. But when he spoke to papa, old Bouligaud took off his cap and papa and Lucien kept their hats on and papa spoke in a loud voice, smiling and somewhat testy.

"So, we're waiting for our boy, are we, Bouligaud? When does he get leave?"

"At the end of the month, Monsieur Fleurier, thank you, Monsieur Fleurier."

Old Bouligaud looked happy and he wasn't allowed to slap Lucien on the rear and call him Toad, like M. Bouffardier. Lucien hated M. Bouffardier because he was so ugly. But when he saw old Bouligaud he felt all tender and wanted to be good. Once, coming back from the walk, papa took Lucien on his knees and explained to him what it was to be a boss. Lucien wanted to know how papa talked to the workers when he was at the factory and papa showed him how you had to do it and his voice was all changed.

"Will I be a boss too?" Lucien asked.

"Yes, indeed, my little man, that's what I made you for."

"And who will I command?"

"Well, when I'm dead you'll be the boss of my factory and you'll command my workers."

"But they'll be dead too."

"Well, you'll command their children and you must know how to make yourself obeyed and liked."

"And how will I make myself be liked, papa?"

Papa thought a little and said, "First, you must know them all by name."

Lucien was deeply touched and when the foreman Morel's son came to the house to announce that his father had two fingers cut

off, Lucien spoke seriously and gently with him, looking him straight in the eye and calling him Morel. Mamma said she was proud to have such a good, sensitive little boy. After that came the armistice, papa read the papers aloud every evening, everybody was talking about the Russians and the German government and reparations and papa showed Lucien the countries on the map: Lucien spent the most boring year of his life; he liked it better when the war was still going on; now everybody looked lost and the light you saw in Mme. Coffin's eyes went out. In October 1919 Mme. Fleurier made him attend the Ecole Saint-Joseph as a day-student.

It was hot in the Abbé Geromet's office. Lucien was standing near the abbé's arm-chair, he had his hands clasped behind him and was deeply bored. "Isn't mamma going to go soon?" But Mme. Fleurier had not yet thought of leaving. She was seated on the very edge of a green arm-chair and stretched out her ample bosom to the abbé; she spoke quickly and she had her musical voice she used when she was angry and didn't want to show it. The abbé spoke slowly and the words seemed much longer in his mouth than in other people's, you might think he was sucking them the way you suck barley-sugar before swallowing it. He explained to mamma that Lucien was a good little boy and polite and a good worker but so terribly indifferent to everything and Mme. Fleurier said that she was very disappointed because she thought a change would do him good. She asked if he played, at least, during recess. "Alas, madame," the old priest answered, "even games do not seem to interest him. He is sometimes turbulent and even violent but he tires quickly; I believe he lacks perseverance." Lucien thought: they're talking about me. They were two grown-ups and he was the subject of their conversation, just like the war, the German government or M. Poincaré; they looked serious and they reasoned out his case. But even this thought did not please him. His ears were full of his mother's little singing words, the sucked and sticky words of the abbé, he wanted to cry. Luckily the bell rang and they let him go. But during

geography class he felt enervated and asked Abbé Jacquin permission to leave the room because he needed to move around.

First, the coolness, the solitude and the good smell of the toilet calmed him. He squatted down simply to clear his conscience but he didn't feel like it; he raised his head and began reading the inscriptions which covered the door. Someone had written in blue pencil *Barataud is a louse*. Lucien smiled: it was true, Barataud was a louse, he was small and they said he'd grow a little but not much because his father was little, almost a dwarf. Lucien wondered if Barataud had read this inscription and he thought not: otherwise it would be rubbed out. Barataud would have wet his finger and rubbed the letters until they disappeared. Lucien rejoiced a little, imagining that Barataud would go to the toilet around four o'clock and that he would take down his velvet pants and read *Barataud is a louse*. Maybe he had never thought he was so small . . . Lucien promised himself to call him a louse starting the next day at recess. He got up, and on the right-hand wall read another inscription written in the same blue pencil: *Lucien Fleurier is a big bean-pole*. He wiped it out carefully and went back to class. It's true, he thought, looking around at his schoolmates, they're all smaller than I am. He felt uncomfortable. Big bean-pole. He was sitting at his little desk of holly-wood. Germaine was in the kitchen, mamma hadn't come home yet. He wrote "big bean-pole" on a sheet of white paper to re-establish the spelling. But the words seemed too well-known and made no effect on him.

He called, "Germaine! Germaine!"

"What do you want now?" Germaine asked.

"Germaine, I'd like you to write on this paper: Lucien Fleurier is a big bean-pole."

"Have you gone out of your mind, Monsieur Lucien?"

He put his arms around her neck. "Be nice, Germaine."

Germaine began to laugh and wiped her fat fingers on her apron. He did not look while she was writing, but afterwards he carried the paper to his room and studied it for a long time. Germaine's writing was pointed, Lucien thought he heard a dry voice saying in his ear: big bean-pole. He thought, "I'm big." He

was crushed with shame: big as Barataud was small and the others laughed behind his back. It was as if someone had cast a spell over him: until then it had seemed natural to see his friends from above. But now it seemed he had been suddenly condemned to be big for the rest of his life. That evening he asked his father if a person could shrink if he wanted to with all his might. M. Fleurier said no: all the Fleuriers had been big and strong and Lucien would grow still bigger. Lucien was without hope. After his mother tucked him in he got up and went to look at himself in the mirror. "I'm big." But he looked in vain, he could not see it, he seemed neither big nor little. He lifted up his night-shirt a little and saw his legs; then he imagined Costil saying to Hébrard: Say, look at those long bean-poles, and it made him feel funny. He was cold, he shivered and someone said, "The bean-pole has goose-flesh!" Lucien lifted his shirt-tail very high and they all saw his naval and his whole business and then he ran and slipped into bed. When he put his hand under his shirt he thought that Costil saw him and was saying, Look what the big bean-pole's doing! He squirmed and turned in bed, breathing heavily. Big bean-pole! Big bean-pole! until he made a little acid itching come beneath his fingers.

The following days, he wanted to ask the abbé's permission to sit in the rear of the class. It was because of Boisset, Winckelmann and Costil who were behind him and could look at the back of his neck. Lucien felt the back of his neck but he could not see it and often even forgot about it. But while he was answering the abbé as well as he could and was reciting the tirade from *Don Diego*, the others were behind him watching the back of his neck and they could be laughing and thinking, "How thin he is, he has two cords to his neck." Lucien forced himself to make his voice swell and express the humiliation of Don Diego. He could do what he wanted with his voice; but the back of his neck was always there, peaceful, inexpressive, like someone resting, and Boisset saw it. He dared not change his seat because the last row was reserved for the dunces, but the back of his neck and his shoulder-blades were constantly itching and he was obliged to scratch unceasingly.

Lucien invented a new game: in the morning, when he took his bath, he imagined someone was watching him through the keyhole, sometimes Costil, sometimes old Bouligaud, sometimes Germaine. Then he turned all around for them to see him from all sides and sometimes he turned his rear towards the door, going down on all fours so that it would look all plump and ridiculous; M. Bouffardier was coming on tiptoe to give him an enema. One day when he was in the bathroom he heard sounds; it was Germaine rubbing polish on the buffet in the hall. His heart stopped beating, he opened the door quietly and went out, his trousers round his heels, his shirt rolled up around his back. He was obliged to make little hops in order to go forward without losing his balance. Germaine looked at him calmly: "What are you doing, running a sack race?" she asked. Enraged, he pulled up his trousers and ran and threw himself on his bed. Mme. Fleurier was heart-broken. She often told her husband, "He was so graceful when he was little and now look how awkward he is, if that isn't a shame." M. Fleurier glanced carelessly at Lucien and answered "It's his age." Lucien did not know what to do with his body; no matter what he did, he felt this body existing on all sides at once, without consulting him. Lucien indulged himself by imagining he was invisible and then he took the habit of looking through keyholes to see how the others were made without their knowing it. He saw his mother while she was washing. She was seated on the *bidet,* she seemed asleep and she had surely forgotten her body and her face, because she thought that no one saw her. The sponge went back and forth by itself over this abandoned flesh; she moved lazily and he felt she was going to stop somewhere along the way. Mamma rubbed a face-cloth with a piece of soap and her hand disappeared between her legs. Her face was restful, almost sad; surely she was thinking of something else, about Lucien's education or M. Poincaré. But during this time she *was* this gross pink mass, this voluminous body hanging over the porcelain *bidet*. Another time, Lucien removed his shoes and climbed all the way up to the eaves. He saw Germaine. She had on a long green chemise which fell to her feet, she was combing

her hair before a small round mirror and she smiled softly at her image. Lucien began to laugh uncontrolledly and had to climb down hurriedly. After that he smiled and made faces at himself in front of the mirror in the salon and after a moment was seized with terrible fears.

Lucien finally went completely asleep but no one noticed except Mme. Coffin who called him her sleeping beauty; a great air bubble he could neither swallow nor spit out was always in his half-open mouth: it was his *yawning*; when he was alone the bubble grew larger, caressing his palate and tongue; his mouth opened wide and tears ran down his cheeks: these were very pleasant moments. He did not amuse himself as much in the bathroom but to make up for it he liked very much to sneeze, it woke him up and for an instant he looked around him, exhilarated, then dozed off again. He learned to recognize different sorts of sleep: in winter, he sat before the fire-place and stretched his head toward the blaze; when it was quite red and roasted it suddenly emptied; he called that "head sleeping." On Sunday morning, on the other hand, he went to sleep by the feet: he got into his bath, slowly lowered himself and sleep climbed in ripples all along his legs and thighs. Above the sleeping body, all white and swollen like a stewed chicken at the bottom of the water, a little blond head was enthroned, full of wise words, templum, templi, templo, iconoclasts. In class, sleep was white and riddled with flashes: First: Lucien Fleurier. "What was the third estate? Nothing." First, Lucien Fleurier, second, Winckelmann; Pellereau was first in algebra; he had only one testicle, the other one hadn't come down; he made them pay two sous to see and ten to touch. Lucien gave the ten sous, hesitated, stretched out his hand and left without touching, but afterwards his regrets were so great that sometimes they kept him awake for more than an hour. He was less good in geology than in history. First, Winckelmann, second, Fleurier. On Sundays he went bicycling with Costil and Winckelmann. Through russet, heat-crushed country-sides, the bicycles skidded in the marrowy dust; Lucien's legs were active and muscular but the sleepy odour of the roads went to his head;

he bent over the handle-bars; his eyes grew pink and half closed. He had the honour prize three times in a row. They gave him *Fabiola, or The Church in the Catacombs,* the *Gènie du Christianisme* and the *Life of Cardinal Lavigerie*. Costil, back from the long vacation, taught them all *De Profondis Morpionibus* and the *Artilleur de Metz*. Lucien decided to do better and consulted his father's *Larousse Médical* on the article "Uterus"; then he explained to them how women were made; he even made a sketch on the board and Costil declared it disgusting; but after that they could hear no mention of "tubes" without bursting out laughing and Lucien thought with satisfaction that in all of France you couldn't find a second-class student and perhaps even a rhetoric student who knew female organs as well as he.

It was like a flash of magnesium when the Fleuriers moved to Paris. Lucien could no longer sleep because of the movies, cars and streets. He learned to distinguish a Voisin from a Packard, a Hispano-Suiza from a Rolls and he spoke frequently of them. He had been wearing long pants for more than a year. His father sent him to England as a reward for his success in the first part of the *baccalauréat*; Lucien saw plains swollen with water and white cliffs, he boxed with John Latimer and learned the over-arm stroke, but, one fine day, he woke up to find himself asleep; it had come back; he went somnolently back to Paris. The elementary mathematics class in the Lycée Condorcet had thirty-seven pupils. Eight of these pupils said they knew all about women and called the others virgins. The Enlightened scorned Lucien until the first of November, but on All Saints' Day, Lucien went walking with Garry, the most experienced of them all and negligently showed him proof of such anatomical knowledge that Garry was astonished. Lucien did not enter the group of the enlightened because his parents did not allow him out at night, but he had powerful relations among them.

On Thursdays, Aunt Berthe and Riri came to lunch at Rue Raynouard. She had grown enormous and sad and spent her time sighing; but since her skin had remained very fine and white, Lucien would have liked to see her naked. He thought about it in

bed at night; it would be a winter day, in the Bois de Boulogne; he would come upon her naked in a copse, her arms crossed on her breast, shivering with goose-flesh. He imagined that a near-sighted passer-by touched her with his cane and said, "Well, what can that be?" Lucien did not get along too well with his cousin: Riri had become a very handsome young man, a little too elegant. He was taking philosophy at Lakanal and understood nothing of mathematics. Lucien could not keep himself from thinking that Riri, seven years ago, still did number two in his pants and after that walked with his legs wide apart like a duck and looked at his mother with candid eyes saying, "No, mamma, I didn't do it, I promise." And he had some repugnance about touching Riri's hand. Yet he was very nice to him and explained his mathematics courses; sometimes he had to make a great effort not to lose patience because Riri was not very intelligent. But he never let himself be carried away and kept always a calm, poised voice. Mme. Fleurier thought Lucien had much tact but Aunt Berthe showed him no gratitude. When Lucien proposed to give Riri a lesson she blushed a little, moved about on her chair, saying, "No, you're very kind, my little Lucien, but Riri is too big a boy. He can if he wants; but he must not get in the habit of counting on others." One night Mme. Fleurier told Lucien brusquely, "You think Riri's grateful for what you're doing for him? Well, don't kid yourself, my boy: he thinks you're stuck-up, your Aunt Berthe told me so." She had assumed her musical voice and familiar air; Lucien realized she was mad with rage. He felt vaguely intrigued but could find nothing to answer. The next day and the day after that he had a lot of work and the whole episode left his mind.

On Sunday morning he set his pen down brusquely and wondered, "Am I stuck-up?" It was eleven o'clock; sitting in his study Lucien watched the pink cretonne designs which lined the walls; on his left cheek he felt the dry and dusty warmth of the first April sunlight, on his right cheek he felt the heavy, stifling heat of the radiator. "Am I stuck-up?" It was hard to answer. Lucien first tried to remember his last conversation with Riri and to judge his own attitude impartially. He had bent over Riri and

smiled at him, saying, “You get it? If you don’t catch on, don’t be afraid to say so, and we’ll start again.” A little later he had made an error in a delicate problem and said, gaily, “That’s one on me.” It was an expression he had taken from M. Fleurier which amused him: “But was I stuck-up when I said that?” By dint of searching, he suddenly made something round and white appear, soft as a bit of cloud: it was his thought of the other day: he had said, “Do you get it?” and it was in his head but it couldn’t be described. Lucien made desperate efforts to *look* at this bit of cloud and he suddenly felt as though he were falling into it head first, he found himself in the mist and became mist himself, he was no more than a damp white warmth which smelled of linen. He wanted to tear himself from this mist and come back but it came with him. He thought, “I’m Lucien Fleurier, I’m in my room, I’m doing a problem in physics, it’s Sunday.” But his thoughts melted into banks of white fog. He shook himself and began counting the cretonne characters, two shepherdesses, two shepherds and Cupid. Then suddenly he told himself, “I am . . .” and there was a slight click: he had awakened from his long somnolence.

It was not pleasant. The shepherds had jumped back; it seemed to Lucien that he was looking at them from the wrong end of a telescope. In place of his stupor, so sweet to him, and which lost itself in its own folds, there was now a small, wide-awake perplexity which wondered, “Who am I?”

“Who am I? I look at the bureau, I look at the note-book. My name is Lucien Fleurier but that’s only a name. I’m stuck-up. I’m not stuck-up. I don’t know, it doesn’t make sense.”

“I’m a good student. No. That’s a lie: a good student likes to work—not me. I have good marks but I don’t like to work. I don’t hate it, either, I don’t give a damn. I don’t give a damn about anything. I’ll never be a boss.” He thought with anguish, “But what will I be?” A moment passed; he scratched his cheek and shut his left eye because the sun was in it: “What am I, *I* . . .?” There was this fog rolling back on itself, indefinite. “I!” He looked into the distance; the word rang in his head and then perhaps it was possible to make out something, like the top of a pyramid

whose side vanished, far off, into the fog. Lucien shuddered and his hands trembled. "Now I have it!" he thought, "Now I have it! I was sure of it: *I don't exist!*"

During the months that followed, Lucien often tried to go back to sleep but did not succeed: he slept well and regularly nine hours a night and the rest of the time was more lively and more and more perplexed: his parents said he had never been so healthy. When he happened to think he did not have the stuff to make a boss he felt romantic and wanted to walk for hours under the moon; but his parents still did not allow him out at night. Often, then, he would stretch out on his bed and take his temperature: the thermometer showed 98.6 or 98.7 and Lucien thought with bitter pleasure that his parents found him looking fine. "I don't exist." He closed his eyes and let himself drift: "Existence is an illusion because I *know* I don't exist, all I have to do is plug my ears and not think about anything and I'll become nothingness." But the illusion was tenacious. Over other people, at least, he had the malicious superiority of possessing a secret: Garry, for instance, didn't exist any more than Lucien. But it was enough to see him snorting tempestuously in the midst of his admirers: you could see right away he thought his own existence as solid as iron. Neither did M. Fleurier exist—nor Riri—nor anyone—the world was a comedy without actors.

Lucien, who had been given an "A" for his dissertation on "Morality and Science," dreamed of writing a "Treatise on Nothingness" and he imagined that people, reading it, would disappear one after the other like vampires at cock-crow. Before beginning this treatise, he wanted the advice of the Baboon, his philosophy prof. "Excuse me, Sir," he said at the end of a class, "could anyone claim that we don't exist?"

The Baboon said no. "Goghito," he said, "ergo zum. You exist because you doubt your existence."

Lucien was not convinced but he gave up his work. In July, he was given, without fanfare, his *baccalauréat* in mathematics and left for Férolles with his parents. The perplexity still did not leave him: it was like wanting to sneeze.

Old Bouligaud had died and the mentality of M. Fleurier's workers had changed a lot. Now they were drawing large salaries and their wives bought silk stockings. Mme. Bouffardier cited frightful examples to Mme. Fleurier: "My maid tells me she saw that little Ansiaume girl in the cook-shop. She's the daughter of one of your husband's best workers, the one we took care of when she lost her mother. She married a fitter from Beaupertuis. Well, she ordered a twenty-franc chicken. And so arrogant! Nothing's good enough for them: they want to have everything we have." Now, when Lucien took short Sunday walks with his father, the workers barely touched their caps on seeing them and there were even some who crossed over so as not to salute them. One day Lucien met Bouligaud's son who did not even seem to recognize him. Lucien was a little excited about it: here was a chance to prove himself a boss. He threw an eagle eye on Jules Bouligaud and went toward him, his hands behind his back. But Bouligaud did not seem intimidated: he turned vacant eyes to Lucien and passed by him, whistling. "He didn't recognize me," Lucien told himself. But he was deeply disappointed and, in the following days, thought more than ever that the world did not exist.

Mme. Fleurier's little revolver was put away in the left-hand drawer of her dressing-table. Her husband made her a present of it in September, 1914, before he left for the front. Lucien took it and turned it around in his hand for a long while: it was a little jewel, with a gilded barrel and a butt inlaid with mother of pearl. He could not rely on a philosophical treatise to persuade people they did not exist. Action was needed, a really desperate act which would dissolve appearances and show the nothingness of the world in full light. A shot, a young body bleeding on the carpet, a few words scribbled on a piece of paper: "I kill myself because I do not exist. And you too, my brothers, you are nothingness!" People would read the newspaper in the morning and would see "An adolescent has dared!" And each would feel himself terribly troubled and would wonder, "And what about me? Do I exist?" There had been similar epidemics of suicide in history, among others after the publication of *Werther*. Lucien thought how

"martyr" in Greek meant "witness." He was too sensitive for a boss but not for a martyr. As a result, he often entered his mother's room and looked at the revolver; he was filled with agony. Once he even bit the gilded barrel, gripping his fingers tightly around the butt. The rest of the time he was very gay for he thought that all true leaders had known the temptation of suicide. Napoleon, for example. Lucien did not hide from himself the fact that he was touching the depths of despair but he hoped to leave this crisis with a tempered soul and he read the *Memorial de Saint-Hélène* with interest. Yet he had to make a decision: Lucien set the thirtieth of September as the end of his hesitations. The last days were extremely difficult: surely the crisis was salutary, but it required of Lucien a tension so strong that he thought he would break, one day, like a glass. He no longer dared to touch the revolver; he contented himself with opening the drawer, lifting up his mother's slips a little and studying at great length the icy, headstrong little monster which rested in a hollow of pink silk. Yet he felt a sharp disappointment when he decided to live and found himself completely unoccupied. Fortunately, the multiple cares of going back to school absorbed him: his parents sent him to the Lycée Saint-Louis to take preparatory courses for the Ecole Centrale. He wore a fine red-bordered cap with an insignia and sang:

> *C'est le piston qui fait marcher les machines*
> *C'est le piston qui fait marcher les wagons . . .*

This new dignity of *piston* filled Lucien with pride; and then his class was not like the others: it had traditions and a ceremonial; it was a force. For instance, it was the usual thing at the end of the French class for a voice to ask, "What's a *cyrard?*" and everybody answered softly, "A *con!*" After which the voice repeated, "What's an *agro?*" and they answered a little louder, "A *con!*" Then M. Béthune, who was almost blind and wore dark glasses, said wearily, "Please, gentlemen!" There were a few moments of absolute silence and the students looked at each other with smiles

of intelligence, then someone shouted, “What’s a *piston?*” and they all roared, “A great man!” At those times Lucien felt galvanized. In the evening he told his parents the various incidents of the day in great detail and when he said, “Then the whole class started laughing . . .” or “the whole class decided to put Meyrinez in quarantine,” the words, in passing, warmed his mouth like a drink of liquor. Yet the first months were very hard: Lucien missed his maths and physics and then, individually, his schoolmates were not too sympathetic: they were on scholarships, mostly grinds, untidy and ill-mannered.

“There isn’t one,” he told his father, “I could make a friend of.”

“Young men on scholarships,” M. Fleurier said dreamily, “represent an intellectual élite and yet they’re poor leaders: they have missed one thing.”

Hearing him talk about “poor leaders,” Lucien felt a disagreeable pinching in his heart and again thought of killing himself during the weeks that followed, but he had not the same enthusiasm as he had during vacation. In January, a new student named Berliac scandalized the whole class: he wore coats ringed in green or purple, in the latest styles, little round collars and trousers that are seen in tailors’ engravings, so narrow that one wondered how he could even get into them. From the beginning, he was classed last in mathematics. “I don’t give a damn,” he said, “I’m literary, I take maths to mortify myself.” After a month he had won everyone’s heart: he distributed contraband cigarettes and told them he had women and showed letters they sent him. The whole class decided he was all right and it would be best to let him alone. Lucien greatly admired his elegance and manners, but Berliac treated Lucien with condescension and called him a “rich kid.”

“After all,” Lucien said one day, “it’s better than being a poor kid.”

Berliac smiled. “You’re a little cynic!” he told him and the next day he let him read one of his poems: “Caruso gobbled raw eyes every evening, otherwise he was sober as a camel. A lady made a

bouquet with the eyes of her family and threw it on the stage. Everyone bows before this exemplary gesture. But do not forget that her hour of glory lasts only twenty-seven minutes: precisely from the first bravo to the extinction of the great chandelier in the Opera (after that she must keep her husband on a leash, winner of several contests, who filled the pink cavities of his orbits with two croix-de-guerre). And note well: all those among us who eat too much canned human flesh shall perish with scurvy."

"It's very good," Lucien said, taken aback—"I get them by a new technique called automatic writing."

Some time later Lucien had a violent desire to kill himself and decided to ask Berliac's advice. "What must I do?" he asked after he had explained the case.

Berliac listened attentively; he was in the habit of sucking his fingers and then coating the pimples on his face with saliva, so that his skin glistened in spots like a road after a rain-storm. "Do what you want," he said, "it makes absolutely no difference." Lucien was a little disappointed but he realized Berliac had been profoundly touched when he asked Lucien to have tea with his mother the next Thursday. Mme. Berliac was very friendly; she had warts and a wine-coloured birth-mark on her left cheek.

"You see," Berliac told Lucien, "we are the real victims of the war." That was also the opinion of Lucien and they agreed that they both belonged to the same sacrificed generation. Night fell, Berliac was lying on his bed, his hands knotted behind his head. They smoked English cigarettes, played gramophone records and Lucien heard the voice of Sophie Tucker and Al Jolson. They grew melancholy and Lucien thought Berliac was his best friend. Berliac asked him if he knew about psychoanalysis; his voice was serious and he looked at Lucien with gravity. "I desired my mother until I was fifteen," he confided.

Lucien felt uncomfortable; he was afraid of blushing and remembered Mme. Berliac's moles and could not understand how anyone could desire her. Yet when she came to bring them toast, he was vaguely troubled and tried to imagine her breasts through the yellow sweater she wore. When she left, Berliac said in a

positive voice, “Naturally, you’ve wanted to sleep with your mother too.” He did not question, he affirmed.

Lucien shrugged. “Naturally,” he said. The next day he was worried, he was afraid Berliac would repeat their conversation. But he reassured himself quickly: After all, he thought, he’s compromised himself more than I. He was quite taken by the scientific turn their confidences had taken and on the following Thursday he read a book on dreams by Freud he found in the Sainte-Geneviève Library. It was a revelation. “So that’s it,” Lucien repeated, roaming the streets, “so that’s it.” Next he bought *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and *Psychopathology of Everyday Life,* and everything became clear to him. This strange feeling of not existing, this long emptiness in his conscience, his somnolence, his perplexities, his vain efforts to know himself which met only a curtain of fog . . . “My God,” he thought, “I have a complex.” He told Berliac how he was when he was a child, imagining he was a sleep-walker and how objects never seemed quite real to him. “I must have,” he concluded, “a very extraordinary complex.”

“Just like me,” said Berliac, “we both have terrific complexes!” They got the habit of interpreting their dreams and their slightest gestures; Berliac always had so many stories to tell that Lucien suspected him of inventing them, or at least enlarging them. But they got along well and approached the most delicate subjects with objectivity; they confessed to each other that they wore a mask of gaiety to deceive their associates but at heart were terribly tormented. Lucien was freed from his worries. He threw himself greedily into psychoanalysis because he realized it was something that agreed with him and now he felt reassured, he no longer needed to worry or to be always searching his conscience for palpable manifestations of his character. The true Lucien was deeply buried in his subconscious; he had to dream of him without ever seeing him, as an absent friend.

All day Lucien thought of his complexes and with a certain pride he imagined the obscure world, cruel and violent, that rumbled beneath the mists of his consciousness. “You

understand," he told Berliac, "in appearance I was a sleepy kid, indifferent to everything, somebody not too interesting. And even inside, you know, it seemed to be so much like that that I almost let myself be caught. But I knew there was something else."

"There's *always* something else," Berliac answered.

They smiled proudly at each other; Lucien wrote a poem called *When the Fog Lifts* and Berliac found it excellent, but he reproached Lucien for having written it in regular verse. Still, they learned it by heart and when they wished to speak of their libidos they said willingly:

"The great crabs wrapped in the mantle of fog," then simply, "crabs," winking an eye. But after a while, Lucien, when he was alone at night, began to find all that a little terrifying. He no longer dared look his mother in the face and when he kissed her before going to bed he was afraid some shadowy power would deviate his kiss and drop it on Mme. Fleurier's mouth, it was as if he carried a volcano within himself. Lucien treated himself with caution in order not to violate the sumptuous, sinister soul he had discovered. Now he knew the price of everything and dreaded the terrible awakening. "I'm afraid of myself," he said. For six months he had renounced solitary practices because they annoyed him and he had too much work but he returned to them: everyone had to follow their bent; the books of Freud were filled with stories of unfortunate young people who became neurotic because they broke too quickly with their habits. "Are we going to go crazy?" he asked Berliac. And in fact, on certain Thursdays they felt strange; shadows had cunningly slipped into Berliac's room; they smoked whole packs of scented cigarettes, and their hands trembled. Then one of them would rise without a word, tiptoe to the door and turn the switch. A yellow light flooded the room and they looked at each other with defiance.

Lucien was not late in noticing that his friendship with Berliac was based on a misunderstanding; surely no one was more sensitive than he to the pathetic beauty of the Œdipus complex but in it he saw especially the sign of a power for passion which later he would like to use toward different ends. On the other

hand, Berliac seemed to be content with his state and had no desire to leave it. “We’re screwed,” he said proudly, “We’re flops. We’ll never do anything.”

“Never anything,” Lucien answered in echo. But he was furious.

After Easter vacation Berliac told him he had shared his mother’s room in a hotel in Dijon: he had risen very early in the morning, went to the bed on which his mother still was sleeping and gently lifted up the covers. “Her night-gown was up,” he grinned. Hearing these words, Lucien could not keep himself from scorning Berliac a little and he felt quite alone. It was fine to have complexes but you had to know how to get rid of them eventually. How would a man be able to assume responsibilities and take command if he still had an infantile sexuality? Lucien began to worry seriously: he would have liked to take the advice of some competent person but he did not know whom to see. Berliac often spoke to him about a surrealist named Bergère who was well versed in psychoanalysis and who seemed to have a great ascendancy over him; but he had never offered to introduce him to Lucien. Lucien was also very disappointed because he had counted on Berliac to get women for him; he thought that the possession of a pretty mistress would naturally change the course of his ideas. But Berliac spoke no more of his lady friends.

Sometimes they went along the boulevards and followed women, never daring to speak to them: “What do you expect, old man?” Berliac said. “We aren’t the kind that pleases. Women feel something frightening in us.”

Lucien did not answer; Berliac began to annoy him. He often made jokes in very bad taste about Lucien’s parents, he called them M. and Mme. Dumollet. Lucien understood very well that a surrealist scorned the bourgeoisie in general, but Berliac had been invited several times by Mme. Fleurier who had treated him with confidence and friendship: lacking gratitude, a simple attention to decency would have kept him from speaking of her in that manner. And then Berliac was terrible with his mania for borrowing money and never returning it; in a café he only

proposed to pay the round once out of five. Lucien told him plainly one day that he didn't understand, and that between friends, they should share all expenses. Berliac looked at him deeply and said, "I thought so: you're an anal," and he explained the Freudian relation to him; fæces equal gold and the Freudian theory of guilt. "I'd like to know one thing," he said, "until what age did your mother wipe you?" They nearly fought.

From the beginning of May, Berliac began to cut school: Lucien went to meet him after class, in a bar on Rue des Petits-Champs where they drank Crucifix Vermouths. One Tuesday afternoon Lucien found Berliac sitting in front of an empty glass. "Oh, there you are," Berliac said. "Listen, I've got to beat it, I have an appointment with the dentist at five. Wait for me, he lives near here and it'll only take half an hour."

"All right," Lucien answered, dropping into a chair. "François, give me a white vermouth."

Just then a man came into the bar and smiled surprisedly at seeing them. Berliac blushed and got up hurriedly. "Who can that be?" Lucien wondered.

Berliac, shaking hands with the stranger, stood so as to hide Lucien; he spoke in a low, rapid voice, the other answered clearly, "Indeed not, my friend, you'll always be a fool." At the same time he raised himself on tiptoe and looked at Lucien over Berliac's head with calm assurance. He could have been thirty-five; he had a pale face and magnificent white hair: "It's surely Bergère," Lucien thought, his heart pounding, "How handsome he is!"

Berliac had taken the man with white hair by the elbow with an air of timid authority.

"Come with me," he said, "I'm going to the dentist, just across the way."

"But you were with a friend, weren't you?" the other answered, his eyes not leaving Lucien's face. "You should introduce us."

Lucien got up, smiling, "Caught!" he thought; his cheeks were burning. Berliac's neck disappeared into his shoulders and for a second Lucien thought he was going to refuse. "So introduce

me," he said gaily. But as soon as he had spoken the blood rushed to his temples and he wished the ground would swallow him.

Berliac turned around and, without looking at anyone, muttered "Lucien Fleurier, a friend from the lycée, Monsieur Achille Bergère."

"I admire your works," Lucien said feebly.

Bergère took his hand in his own long, delicate fingers and motioned him to sit down. Bergère enveloped Lucien with a tender, warm look; he was still holding his hand. "Are you worried?" he asked gently.

"I *am* worried," he answered distinctly. It seemed he had just undergone the trials of an initiation. Berliac hesitated an instant then angrily sat down again, throwing his hat on the table. Lucien burned with a desire to tell Bergère of his attempted suicide; this was someone to whom one had to speak of things abruptly and without preparation. He dared not say anything because of Berliac; he hated Berliac.

"Do you have any *raki?*" Bergère asked the waiter.

"No, they don't," Berliac said quickly; "It's a nice little place but all they have to drink is vermouth."

"What's that yellow stuff you have in the bottle?" Bergère asked with an ease full of softness.

"White Crucifix," the waiter answered.

"All right, I'll have some of that."

Berliac squirmed on his chair: he seemed caught between a desire to show off his friends and the fear of making Lucien shine at his expense. Finally he said, in a proud and dismal voice, "He wanted to kill himself."

"My God!" Bergère said, "I should hope so!"

There was another silence: Lucien had lowered his eyes modestly but he wondered if Berliac wasn't soon going to clear out: Bergère suddenly looked at his watch. "What about your dentist?" he asked.

Berliac rose ungraciously. "Come with me, Bergère," he begged, "it isn't fair."

"No, you'll be back. I'll keep your friend company."

Berliac stayed for another moment, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Go on," Bergère said imperiously, "You'll meet us here."

When Berliac had gone, Bergère got up and sat next to Lucien. Lucien told him of his suicide at great length; he also explained to him that he had desired his mother and that he was a sadistic-anal and that fundamentally he didn't love anything and that everything in him was a comedy. Bergère listened without a word, watching him closely, and Lucien found it delicious to be understood. When he finished, Bergère passed his arm familiarly around his shoulders and Lucien smelled a scent of eau-de-cologne and English tobacco.

"Do you know, Lucien, how I would describe your condition?"

Lucien looked at Bergère hopefully; he was not disappointed.

"I call it," Bergère said, "Disorder."

Disorder: the word had begun tender and white as moonlight but the final "order" had the coppered flash of a trumpet.

"Disorder," Lucien said.

He felt as grave and uneasy as the time he told Riri he was a sleep-walker. The bar was dark but the door opened wide on the street, on the luminous spring-time mist; under the discreet perfume Bergère gave off, Lucien perceived the heavy odour of the obscure room, an odour of red wine and damp wood. "Disorder," he thought; "what good will that do me?" He did not know whether a dignity or new sickness had been discovered in him; near his eyes he saw the quick lips of Bergère veiling and unveiling incessantly the sparkle of a gold tooth.

"I like people in disorder," Bergère said, "and I think you are extraordinarily lucky. For after all, that has been given you. You see all these swine? They're pedestrians. You'd have to give them to the red ants to stir them up a little. Do you know they have the consciousnesses of beasts?"

"They eat men," Lucien said.

"Yes, they strip skeletons of the human meat."

"I see," Lucien said. He added, "And I? What must I do?"

"Nothing, for God's sake," Bergère said with a look of comic fear. "Above all, don't sit down. Unless," he said laughing, "it's on a tack. Have you read Rimbaud?"

"N-no," Lucien said.

"I'll lend you the *Illuminations*. Listen, we must see each other again. If you're free on Thursday, stop in and see me around three. I live in Montparnasse, 9 Rue Campagne-Première."

The next Thursday Lucien went to see Bergère and he went back almost every day throughout May. They agreed to tell Berliac that they saw each other once a week, because they wanted to be frank with him and yet avoid hurting his feelings.

Berliac showed himself to be completely out of sorts; he asked Lucien, grinning, "So, are you going steady? He gave you the worry business and you gave him the suicide business: a great game, what?"

Lucien protested, "I'd have you know that it was you who talked about my suicide first."

"Oh," Berliac said, "it was only to spare you the shame of telling it yourself."

Their meetings became more infrequent. "Everything I liked about him," Lucien told Bergère one day, "he borrowed from you, I realize it now."

"Berliac is a monkey," Bergère said, laughing, "that's what always attracted me. Did you know his maternal grandmother was a Jewess? That explains a lot of things."

"Rather," Lucien answered. After an instant he added, "Besides, he's very charming."

Bergère's apartment was filled with strange and comical objects: hassocks whose red velvet seats rested on the legs of painted wooden women, Negro statuettes, a studded chastity belt of forged iron, plaster breasts in which little spoons had been planted; on the desk a gigantic bronze louse and a monk's skull stolen from the Mistra Ossuary served as paper-weights. The walls were papered with notices announcing the death of the surrealist Bergère. In spite of all this, the apartment gave the impression of intelligent comfort and Lucien liked to stretch out on the deep

divan in the den. What particularly surprised Lucien was the enormous quantity of practical jokes Bergère had accumulated on a shelf; solid liquids, sneezing powder, itching powder, floating sugar, an imitation turd and a bride's garter. While Bergère spoke, he took the artificial turd between his fingers and considered it with gravity. "These jokes," he said, "have a revolutionary value. They disturb. There is more destructive power in them than in all the works of Lenin." Lucien, surprised and charmed, looked by turns at this handsome tormented face with hollow eyes and these long delicate fingers gracefully holding a perfectly imitated excrement. Bergère spoke often of Rimbaud and the "systematic disordering of all the senses." "When you will be able, in crossing the Place de la Concorde, to see distinctly and at will a kneeling Negress sucking the obelisk, you will be able to tell yourself that you have torn down the scenery and you are saved." He lent him the *Illuminations,* the *Chants de Maldoror* and the works of the Marquis de Sade. Lucien tried conscientiously to understand them, but many things escaped him and he was shocked because Rimbaud was a pæderast. He told Bergère who began to laugh. "But why, my little friend?"

Lucien was very embarrassed. He blushed and for a minute began to hate Bergère with all his might, but he mastered it, raised his head and said with simple frankness, "I'm talking nonsense."

Bergère stroked his hair; he seemed moved; "These great eyes full of trouble," he said, "these doe's eyes. . . . Yes, Lucien, you talked nonsense. Rimbaud's pæderasty is the first and genial disordering of his sensitivity. We owe his poems to it. To think that there are specific objects of sexual desire and that these objects are women because they have a hole between their legs, is the hideous and wilful error of the pedestrian. Look!" He took from his desk a dozen yellowing photos and threw them on Lucien's knees. Lucien gazed on horrible naked whores, laughing with toothless mouths, spreading their legs like lips and darting between their thighs something like a mossy tongue. "I got the collection for three francs at Bou-Saada," Bergère said. "If you kiss the behind of one of those women, you're a regular guy and everybody will say

you're a he-man. Because they're women, do you understand? I tell you the first thing to convince yourself of is that *everything* can be an object of sexual desire, a sewing-machine, a measuring-glass, a horse or a shoe. I," he smiled, "have made love with flies. I know a marine who used to sleep with ducks. He put the head in a drawer, held them firmly by the feet and hoop-la!" Bergère pinched Lucien's ear distractedly and concluded, "The duck died and the battalion ate it."

Lucien emerged from these conversations with his face on fire; he thought Bergère was a genius but sometimes he woke up at night, drenched in sweat, his head filled with monstrous obscene visions, and he wondered if Bergère was a good influence on him. "To be alone," he cried, wringing his hands, "to have no one to advise me, to tell me if I'm on the right path." If he went to the very end, if he really practised the disordering of the senses, would he lose his footing and drown? One day Bergère had spoken to him of André Breton: Lucien murmured, as if in a dream, "Yes, but afterwards, if I could never come back."

Bergère started. "Come back? Who's talking about coming back? If you go insane, so much the better. After that, as Rimbaud says, '*viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs*'."

"That's what I thought," Lucien said sadly. He had noticed that these long chats had the effect opposite from the one wished for by Bergère: as soon as Lucien caught himself showing the beginnings of a fine sensation or an original impression, he began to tremble: "Now it's starting," he thought. He would willingly have wished to have only the most banal, stupid perceptions; he felt comfortable only in the evenings with his parents: that was his refuge. They talked about Briand, the bad faith of the Germans, of cousin Jeanne's confinements, and the cost of living; Lucien voluptuously exchanged good common sense with them. One day after leaving Bergère, he was entering his room and mechanically locked the door and slid the bolt. When he noticed this gesture he forced himself to laugh at it but that night he could not sleep: he had just understood he was afraid.

However, nothing in the world would have stopped him from seeing Bergère. “He fascinates me,” he told himself. And then he had a lively appreciation of the fellowship, so delicate and so particular, which Bergère had been able to establish between them. Without dropping a virile, almost rude tone of voice, Bergère had the artistry to make Lucien feel, and, in a way of speaking, touch his tenderness: for instance, he reknotted his tie and scolded him for being so untidy; he combed his hair with a gold comb from Cambodia. He made Lucien discover his own body and explained to him the harsh and pathetic beauty of youth: “You are Rimbaud,” he told him, “he had your big hands when he came to Paris to see Verlaine. He had this pink face of a young healthy peasant and this long slim body of a fair-haired girl.”

He made Lucien unbutton his collar and open his shirt, then led him, confused, before a mirror and made him admire the charming harmony of his red cheeks and white throat; then he caressed Lucien’s hips with a light hand and added, sadly, “We should kill ourselves at twenty.”

Often, now, Lucien looked at himself in mirrors and he learned to enjoy his young awkward grace. “I am Rimbaud,” he thought in the evenings, removing his clothing with gestures full of gentleness, and he began to believe that he would have the short and tragic life of a too-beautiful flower. At these times, it seemed to him that he had known, long before, similar impressions and an absurd image came to his mind: he saw himself again, small, with a long blue robe and angel’s wings, distributing flowers at a charity sale. He looked at his long legs. “Is it true I have such a soft skin?” he thought with amusement. And once he ran his lips over his forearm from the wrist to the elbow, along a charming blue vein.

One day, he had an unpleasant surprise going to Bergère’s: Berliac was there, busy cutting with a knife fragments of a blackish substance that looked like a clod of earth. The two young people had not seen each other for ten days: they shook hands coldly. “See that?” Berliac said, “that’s hasheesh. We’re going to put it in

these pipes, between two layers of light tobacco; it gives a surprising effect. There's some for you," he added.

"No thanks," Lucien said, "I don't care for it."

The other two laughed and Berliac insisted, looking ugly: "But you're crazy, old man, you've got to take some. You can't imagine how pleasant it is."

"I told you no," Lucien said. Berliac said no more, merely smiled with a superior air and Lucien saw Bergère was smiling too. He tapped his foot and said, "I don't want any, I don't want to knock myself out, I think it's crazy to stupefy yourself with that stuff." He had let that go in spite of himself, but when he realized the range of what he had just said and imagined what Bergère must think of him, he wanted to kill Berliac and tears came to his eyes.

"You're a bourgeois," said Berliac, shrugging his shoulders, "you pretend to swim but you're much too afraid of going out of your depth."

"I don't want to get in the drug habit," Lucien said in a calmer voice; "one slavery is like another and I want to stay clear."

"Say you're afraid to get into it," Berliac answered violently.

Lucien was going to slap him when he heard the imperious voice of Bergère. "Let him alone, Charles," he told Berliac, "he's right. His fear of being involved is *also* disorder." They both smoked, stretched out on the divan, and an odour of Armenian paper filled the room. Lucien sat on a red velvet hassock and watched them in silence. After a time, Berliac let his head fall back and fluttered his eyelids with a moist smile. Lucien watched him with rancour and felt humiliated. At last Berliac got up and walked unsteadily out of the room: to the end he had the funny, sleeping and voluptuous smile on his lips.

"Give me a pipe," Lucien said hoarsely.

Bergère began to laugh. "Don't bother," he said, "don't worry about Berliac. Do you know what he's doing now?"

"I don't give a damn," Lucien said.

"Well, I'll tell you anyhow. He's vomiting," Bergère said calmly. "That's the only effect hasheesh ever had on him. The rest is a

joke, but I make him smoke it sometimes because he wants to show off and it amuses me."

The next day Berliac came to the lycée and wanted to show off in front of Lucien. "You don't exactly go out on a limb, do you?" he said. But he found out to whom he was talking.

"You're a little show-off," Lucien answered; "maybe you think I don't know what you were doing in the bathroom yesterday? You were puking, old man!"

Berliac grew livid. "Bergère told you?"

"Who do you think?"

"All right," Berliac stammered, "but I wouldn't have thought Bergère would screw his old friends with new ones."

Lucien was a little worried. He had promised Bergère not to repeat anything. "All right, all right," he said, "he didn't screw you, he just wanted to show me it didn't work."

But Berliac turned his back and left without shaking hands. Lucien was not too glad when he met Bergère. "What did you say to Berliac?" Bergère asked him neutrally. Lucien lowered his head without answering: he felt overwhelmed. But suddenly he felt Bergère's hand on his neck: "It doesn't make any difference. In any case, it had to end: comedians don't amuse me very long."

Lucien took heart; he raised his head and smiled: "But I'm a comedian, too," he said, blinking his eyes.

"Yes, but you're pretty," Bergère answered, drawing him close. Lucien let himself go; he felt soft as a girl and tears were in his eyes. Bergère kissed his cheeks and bit his ear, sometimes calling him "my lovely little scoundrel" and sometimes "my little brother," and Lucien thought it was quite pleasant to have a big brother who was so indulgent and understanding.

M. and Mme. Fleurier wanted to meet this Bergère of whom Lucien spoke so much and they invited him to dinner. Everyone found him charming, including Germaine who had never seen such a handsome man; M. Fleurier had known General Nizan who was Bergère's uncle and he spoke of him at great length. Also, Mme. Fleurier was only too glad to confide Lucien to Bergère for the spring vacation. They went to Rouen by car; Lucien wanted to

see the cathedral and the *hôtel-de-ville,* but Bergère flatly refused. “That rubbish?” he asked insolently. Finally, they spent two hours in a brothel on the Rue des Cordeliers and Bergère was a scream: he called all the tarts “mademoiselle,” nudging Lucien under the table, then he agreed to go up with one of them but came back after five minutes: “Get the hell out,” he gasped, “it’s going to be rough.”

They paid quickly and left. In the street Bergère told what happened; while the woman had her back turned he threw a handful of itching powder on the bed, then told her he was impotent and came down again. Lucien had drunk two whiskies and was a little tight; he sang the *Artilleur de Metz* and *De Profondis Morpionibus*; he thought it wonderful that Bergère was at the same time so profound and so childish.

“I only reserved one room,” Bergère said when they arrived at the hotel, “but there’s a big bathroom.”

Lucien was not surprised: he had vaguely thought during the trip that he would share the room with Bergère without dwelling too much on the idea. Now that he could no longer retreat he found the thing a little disagreeable, especially because his feet were not clean. As the bags were being brought up, he imagined that Bergère would tell him, “How dirty you are, you’ll make the sheets black.” And he would answer insolently, “Your ideas of cleanliness are really bourgeois.”

But Bergère shoved him into the bathroom with his bag, saying, “Get yourself ready in there, I’m going to undress in the room.”

Lucien took a foot-bath and a sitz bath. He wanted to go to the toilet but he did not dare and contented himself with urinating in the wash-basin; then he put on his night-shirt and the slippers his mother had lent him (his own were full of holes) and knocked. “Are you ready?” he asked.

“Yes, yes, come in.” Bergère had slipped a black dressing-gown over sky-blue pyjamas. The room smelled of eau-de-cologne.

“Only one bed?” Lucien asked.

Bergère did not answer: he looked at Lucien with a stupor that ended in a great burst of laughter. “Look at that shirt!” he said,

laughing, "what did you do with your night-cap? Oh no, that's really too funny. I wish you could see yourself."

"For two years," Lucien said, angrily, "I've been asking my mother to buy me pyjamas."

Bergère came toward him. "That's all right. Take it off," he said in a voice to which there was no answer, "I'll give you one of mine. It'll be a little big but it'll be better than that."

Lucien stayed rooted in the middle of the room, his eyes riveted on the red and green lozenges of the wall-paper. He would have preferred to go back into the bathroom but he was afraid to act like a fool and with a brisk motion tossed the shirt over his head. There was a moment of silence: Bergère looked at Lucien, smiling, and Lucien suddenly realized he was naked in the middle of the room wearing his mother's pom-pommed slippers. He looked at his hands—the big hands of Rimbaud—he wanted to clutch them to his stomach and cover that at least, but he pulled himself together and put them bravely behind his back. On the walls, between two rows of lozenges, there was a small violet square going back farther and farther.

"My word," said Bergère, "he's as chaste as a virgin: look at yourself in the mirror, Lucien, "you're blushing as far as your chest. But you're still better like that than in a night-shirt."

"Yes," Lucien said with effort, "but you never look good when you're naked. Quick, give me the pyjamas."

Bergère threw him silk pyjamas that smelled of lavender and they went to the bed. There was a heavy silence: "I'm sick," Lucien said, "I want to puke."

Bergère did not answer and Lucien smelled whisky in his throat. "He's going to sleep with me," he thought. And the lozenges on the wall-paper began to spin while the stifling smell of eau-de-cologne gagged him. "I shouldn't have said I'd take the trip." He had no luck: twenty times, these last few days, he had almost discovered what Bergère wanted of him and each time, as if on purpose, something happened to turn away his thought. And now he was there, in this man's bed, awaiting his good pleasure. "I'll take my pillow and go and sleep in the bathroom." But he did

not dare; he thought of Bergère's ironic look. He began to laugh, "I'm thinking about the whore a while ago," he said, "she must be scratching now." Bergère still not answer him; Lucien looked at him out of the corner of his eye: he was stretched out innocently on his back, his hands under his head. Then a violent fury seized Lucien, he raised himself on one elbow and asked him, "Well, what are you waiting for? You didn't bring me here to string beads!"

It was too late to regret his words: Bergère turned to him and studied him with an amused eye. "Look at that angel-faced little tart. Well, my boy, I didn't make you say it: I'm the one you're counting on to disorder your little senses." He looked at him an instant longer, their faces almost touching, then he took Lucien in his arms and caressed his breast beneath the pyjama shirt. It was not unpleasant, it tickled a little, only Bergère was frightening: he looked foolish and repeated with effort, "You aren't ashamed, little pig, you aren't ashamed, little pig!" like the gramophone records in a railway station announcing the arrivals and departures. In contrast, Bergère's hand was swift and light and seemed to be an entire person. It gently grazed Lucien's breast like the caress of warm water in a bath. Lucien wanted to catch this hand, tear it from him and twist it, but Bergère would have laughed: look at that virgin. The hand slid slowly along his belly, stopped a moment to untie the knot of the draw-string which held the trousers. He let him continue: he was heavy and soft as a wet sponge and he was terribly afraid. Bergère had thrown back the covers and put his head on Lucien's breast as though he were listening for a heart-beat.

Lucien belched twice in a row and he was afraid of vomiting on the handsome, silver hair so full of dignity. "You're pressing on my stomach," he said. Bergère raised himself a little and passed his hand under Lucien's back; the other hand caressed no longer, it provoked.

"You have beautiful little buttocks," Bergère said suddenly.

Lucien thought he was having a nightmare. "Do you like them?" he said cutely.

But Bergère suddenly let him go and raised his head with a spiteful look. "Damned little teaser," he said angrily, "wants to play Rimbaud and I've been playing with him for an hour and can't even excite him."

Tears of rage came to Lucien's eyes and he pushed Bergère away with all his might. "It isn't my fault," he hissed, "you made me drink too much, I want to puke."

"All right, go! Go!" Bergère said, "and take your time." Between his teeth he added, "Charming evening."

Lucien pulled up his trousers, slipped on the black dressing-gown and left. When he had closed the bathroom door he felt so alone and abandoned that he burst out sobbing. There were no handkerchiefs in the pocket of the dressing-gown so he wiped his eyes and nose with toilet paper. In vain he pushed his fingers down his throat; he could not vomit. Then he dropped his trousers mechanically and sat down on the toilet, shivering. "The bastard," he thought, "the bastard." He was atrociously humiliated but he did not know whether he was ashamed for having submitted to Bergère's caresses or for not getting excited. The corridor on the other side of the door cracked and Lucien started at each sound but could not decide to go back into the room. "I have to go back," he thought, "I must, or else he'll laugh at me—with Berliac!" and he rose half-way, but as soon as he pictured the face of Bergère and his stupid look, and heard him saying, "You aren't ashamed, little pig?" he fell back on the seat in despair. After a while he was seized with violent diarrhœa which soothed him a little: "It's going out by the back," he thought, "I like that better." In fact, he had no further desire to vomit. "He's going to hurt me," he thought suddenly and thought he was going to faint. Finally, he got so cold his teeth began to chatter: he thought he was going to be sick and stood up brusquely.

Bergère watched him constrainedly when he went back; he was smoking a cigarette and his pyjamas were open and showed his thin torso. Lucien slowly removed his slippers and dressing-gown and slipped under the covers without a word.

"All right?" asked Bergère.

Lucien shrugged. "I'm cold."

"Want me to warm you up?"

"You can try," Lucien said. At that instant he felt himself crushed by an enormous weight. A warm, soft mouth, like a piece of raw beef-steak, was thrust against his own. Lucien understood nothing more, he no longer knew where he was and he was half smothering, but he was glad because he was warm. He thought of Mme. Besse who pressed her hand against his stomach and called him "my little doll" and Hébrard who called him "big bean-pole" and the baths he took in the morning imagining that M. Bouffardier was going to come in and give him an enema and he told himself, "I'm his little doll!"

Then Bergère shouted in triumph. "At last!" he said, "you've decided. All right," he added, breathing heavily, "we'll make something out of you." Lucien slipped out of his pyjamas.

The next day they awoke at noon. The bell-boy brought them breakfast in bed and Lucien thought he looked haughty. "He thinks I'm a fairy," he thought with a shudder of discomfort. Bergère was very nice, he dressed first and went and smoked a cigarette in the old market-place while Lucien took his bath. "The thing is," he thought, rubbing himself carefully with a stiff brush, "that it's boring." Once the first moment of terror had passed and he realized that it did not hurt as much as he expected, he had sunk into dismal boredom. He kept hoping it would be over and he could sleep but Bergère had not left him a moment's peace before four in the morning. "I've got to finish my trig problem, anyhow," he told himself. And he forced himself not to think of his work any more.

The day was long. Bergère told him about the life of Lautréamont, but Lucien did not pay much attention; Bergère annoyed him a little. That night they slept in Caudebec and naturally Bergère disturbed him for a good while, but, around one in the morning, Lucien told him sharply that he was sleepy and Bergère, without getting angry, let him be. They returned to Paris towards the end of the afternoon. All in all, Lucien was not displeased with himself.

His parents welcomed him with open arms: "I hope you at least said thank you to M. Bergère?" his mother asked.

He stayed a while to chat with them about the Normandy country-side and went to bed early. He slept like an angel, but on awakening the next day he seemed to be shivering inside. He got up and studied his face for a long time in the mirror. "I'm a pæderast," he told himself. And his spirits sank.

"Get up, Lucien," his mother called through the door, "you go to school this morning."

"Yes, mamma," he answered docilely, but let himself drop back onto the bed and began to stare at his toes. "It isn't right, I didn't realize, I have no experience." A man had sucked those toes one after the other. Lucien violently turned his face away: "He knew. What he made me do has a name. It's called sleeping with a man and he knew it." It was funny—Lucien smiled bitterly—for whole days you could ask yourself: am I intelligent, am I stuck-up and you can never decide. And on top of that there were labels which got stuck onto you one fine morning and you had to carry them for the rest of your life: for instance, Lucien was tall and blond, he looked like his father, he was the only son and, since yesterday, he was a pæderast. They'd say about him: "Fleurier, you know, the tall blond who loves men?" And people would answer, "Oh yes, the big fairy? Sure, I know who he is."

He dressed and went out but he did not have the heart to go to the lycée. He went down Avenue Lamballe as far as the Seine and followed the quais. The sky was pure, the streets smelled of green leaves, tar and English tobacco. A dreamed-of time to wear clean clothes on a well-washed body and new soul. The people had a moral look; Lucien alone felt suspicious and unusual in this spring-time. "The fatal bent," he thought, "I started with an Œdipus complex, after that I became sadistic-anal and now the pay-off, I'm a pæderast; where am I going to stop?" Evidently, his case was not yet very grave: he had not derived much pleasure from Bergère's caresses. "But suppose I get in the habit?" he thought with anguish. "I could never do without it, it'll be like morphine!" He would become a tarnished man, no one would

have anything to do with him, his father's workers would laugh when he gave them orders. Lucien imagined his frightful destiny with complacency. He saw himself at thirty-five, gaunt, painted, and already an old gentleman with a moustache and the Legion d'Honneur, raising his cane with a terrible look: "Your presence here, sir, is an insult to my daughters."

Then suddenly he hesitated and stopped playing: he had just remembered a phrase of Bergère's. At Caudebec during the night, Bergère had said, "So, tell me—are you beginning to get a taste for it?" What did he mean? Naturally, Lucien was not made of wood and after so much caressing . . . "But that doesn't prove anything," he said, worried. But they said that men like that were amazing when it came to spotting other people like them, almost a sixth sense.

For a long while Lucien watched a policeman directing traffic at the *Pont d'Iéna*. "Could that policeman excite me?" He stared at the blue trousers of the agent and imagined muscular, hairy thighs. "Does that do anything to me?" He left, very much comforted. "It's not too bad," he thought, "I can still escape. He took advantage of my Disorder but I'm not really a pæderast." He tried the experiment with every man who crossed his path and each time the result was negative. "Ouf!" he thought, "it was close!" It was a warning, nothing more. He must never start again because a bad habit is taken quickly and then he must absolutely cure himself of these complexes. He resolved to have himself psychoanalysed by a specialist without telling his parents. Then he would find a mistress and become a man like the others.

Lucien was beginning to reassure himself when suddenly he thought of Bergère: even now, at this very moment Bergère was existing somewhere in Paris, delighted with himself and his head full of memories. "He knows how I'm made, he knows my mouth, he said: 'you have an odour I shall not forget'; he'll go and brag to his friends and say 'I had him' as if I were a girl. Maybe even now he's telling about his nights to—Lucien's heart stopped beating—to Berliac! If he does that I'll kill him: Berliac hates me, he'll tell the whole class, and I'll be sunk, they won't even shake my hand.

I’ll say it isn’t true.” Lucien told himself wildly, “I’ll bring charges, I’ll say he raped me!” Lucien hated Bergère with all his strength: without him, without this scandalous irremediable consciousness, everything would have been all right, no one would have known and even Lucien himself would eventually have forgotten it. “If he would die suddenly! Dear God, I pray you make him die tonight without telling anybody. Dear God let this whole business be buried, you don’t want me to be a pæderast. But he’s got me!” Lucien thought with rage. “I’ll have to go back to him and do whatever he wants and tell him I like it or else I’m lost!” He took a few more steps, then added, as a measure of precaution, “Dear God, make Berliac die, too.”

Lucien could not take it upon himself to return to Bergère. During the weeks that followed, he thought he met him at every step and, when he was working in his room, he jumped at the sound of the bell; at night he had fearful nightmares: Bergère was raping him in the middle of the Lycée Saint-Louis school-yard, all the pistons were there watching and laughing. But Bergère made no attempt to see him again and gave no sign of life. “He only wanted my body,” Lucien thought vexedly. Berliac had disappeared as well and Guigard, who sometimes went to the races with him on Sundays, told Lucien he had left Paris after a nervous break-down.

Lucien grew a little calmer: his trip to Rouen affected him as an obscure, grotesque dream attached to nothing; he had almost forgotten the details, he kept only the impression of a dismal odour of flesh and eau-de-cologne and an intolerable weariness. M. Fleurier sometimes asked what had happened to his friend Bergère: “We’ll have to invite him to Férolles to thank him.”

“He went to New York,” Lucien finally answered. Sometimes he went boating on the Marne with Guigard and Guigard’s sister taught him to dance. “I’m waking up,” he thought, “I’m being reborn.” But he still often felt something weighing on his back like a heavy burden: his complexes: he wondered if he should go to Vienna and see Freud: “I’ll leave without any money,” on foot if I have to, I’ll tell him I haven’t a cent but I’m a case. One hot

afternoon in June, he met the Baboon, his old philosophy prof, on the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

"Well, Fleurier," the Baboon said, "you're preparing for Centrale?"

"Yes Sir," Lucien said.

"You should be able," the Baboon said, "to orient yourself toward a study of literature. You were good in philosophy——"

"I haven't given it up," Lucien said, "I've done a lot of reading this year, Freud, for instance. By the way," he added, inspired, "I'd like to ask you, Monsieur, what do you think about psychoanalysis?"

The Baboon began to laugh: "A fad," he said, "which will pass. The best part of Freud you will find already in Plato. For the rest," he added, in a voice that brooked no answer, "I'll tell you I don't have anything to do with that nonsense. You'd be better off reading Spinoza."

Lucien felt himself delivered of an enormous weight and he returned home on foot, whistling. "It was a nightmare," he thought, "nothing more is left of it." The sun was hard and hot that day, but Lucien raised his eyes and gazed at it without blinking: it was the sun of the whole world and Lucien had the right to look it in the face; he was saved! "Nonsense," he thought, "it was nonsense! They tried to drive me crazy but they didn't get me." In fact he had never stopped resisting: Bergère had tripped him up in his reasoning, but Lucien had sensed, for instance, that the pæderasty of Rimbaud was a stain, and when that little shrimp Berliac wanted to make him smoke hasheesh Lucien had dressed him down properly: "I risked losing myself," he thought, "but what protected me was my moral health!" That evening, at dinner, he looked at his father with sympathy. M. Fleurier had square shoulders and the slow heavy gestures of a peasant with something racial in them and his grey boss's eyes, metallic and cold. "I look like him," Lucien thought. He remembered that the Fleuriers, father and son, had been captains of industry for four generations: "Say what you want, the family exists!" And he thought proudly of the moral health of the Fleuriers.

Lucien did not present himself for the examinations at the Ecole Centrale that year and the Fleuriers left very shortly for Férolles. He was charmed to find the house again, the garden, the factory, the calm and poised little town. It was another world: he decided to get up early in the mornings and take long walks through the country. "I want," he told his father, "to fill my lungs with pure air and store up health for next year." He accompanied his mother to the Bouffardiers and the Besses and everyone thought he had become a big, well-poised and reasonable boy. Hébrard and Winckelmann, who were taking law courses in Paris, had come back to Férolles for a vacation. Lucien went out with them several times and they talked about the jokes they used to play on Abbé Jacquemart, their long bicycle trips and they sang the *Artilleur de Metz* in harmony. Lucien keenly appreciated the rough frankness and solidity of his old friends and he reproached himself for having neglected them. He confessed to Hébrard that he did not care much for Paris, but Hébrard could not understand it: his parents had entrusted him to an abbé and he was very much held in check; he was still dazzled by his visits to the Louvre and the evening he had spent at the Opera. Lucien was touched by this simplicity; he felt himself the elder brother of Hébrard and Winckelmann and he began to tell himself that he did not regret having had such a tormented life: he had gained experience. He told them about Freud and psychoanalysis and amused himself by shocking them a little. They violently criticized the theory of complexes but their objections were naïve and Lucien pointed it out to them, then he added that from a philosophical view-point it was easy to refute the errors of Freud. They admired him greatly but Lucien pretended not to notice it.

M. Fleurier explained the operation of the factory to Lucien. He took him on a visit through the central buildings and Lucien watched the workers at great length. "If I should die," M. Fleurier said, "you'd have to take command of the factory at a moment's notice."

Lucien scolded him and said, "Don't talk like that, will you please, papa." But he was serious for several days in a row

thinking of the responsibilities which would fall on him sooner or later.

They had long talks about the duties of the boss and M. Fleurier showed him that ownership was not a right but a duty: "What are they trying to give us, with their class struggle," he said, "as though the interests of the bosses and the workers were just the opposite. Take my case, Lucien, I'm a little boss, what they call small fry. Well, I make a living for a hundred workers and their families. If I do well, they're the first ones to profit. But if I have to close the plant, there they are in the street. *I don't have a right,*" he said forcefully, "to do bad business. And that's what I call the solidarity of classes."

All went well for more than three weeks; he almost never thought of Bergère; he had forgiven him: he simply hoped never to see him again for the rest of his life. Sometimes, when he changed his shirt, he went to the mirror and looked at himself with astonishment: "A man has desired this body," he thought. He passed his hands slowly over his legs and thought: "A man was excited by these legs." He touched his back and regretted not being another person to be able to caress his own flesh like a piece of silk. Sometimes he missed his complexes: they had been solid, heavy, their enormous sombre mass had balanced him. Now it was finished, Lucien no longer believed in it and he felt terribly unstable. Yet it was not so unpleasant, it was rather a sort of very tolerable disenchantment, a little upsetting, which could, if necessary, pass for *ennui*. "I'm nothing," he thought, "but it's because nothing has soiled me. Berliac was soiled and caught. I can stand a little uncertainty: it's the price of purity."

During a walk, he sat down on a hillock and thought: "For six years I slept, and then one fine day I came out of my cocoon." He was animated and looked affably around the country-side. "I'm built for action," he thought. But in an instant his thought of glory faded. He whispered, "Let them wait a while and they'll see what I'm worth." He had spoken with force but the words rolled on his lips like empty shells. "What's the matter with me?" He did not *want* to recognize this odd inquietude, it had hurt him too much

before. He thought, "It's this silence . . . this land . . ." Not a living being, save crickets laboriously dragging their black and yellow bellies in the dust. Lucien hated crickets because they always looked half dead. On the other side of the road, a greyish stretch of land, crushed, creviced, ran as far as the river. No one saw Lucien, no one heard him; he sprang to his feet and felt that his movements would meet with no resistance, not even that of gravity. Now he stood beneath a curtain of grey clouds; it was as though he existed in a vacuum. "This silence . . ." he thought. It was more than silence, it was nothingness. The country-side was extraordinarily calm and soft about Lucien, inhuman: it seemed that it was making itself tiny and was holding its breath so as not to disturb him. "*Quand l'artilleur de Metz revint en garnison . . .*" The sound died on his lips as a flame in a vacuum: Lucien was alone, without a shadow and without echo, in the midst of this too discreet nature which meant nothing. He shook himself and tried to recapture the thread of his thought. "I'm built for action. First, I can bounce back: I can do a lot of foolishness but it doesn't go far because I always spring back." He thought, "I have moral health." But he stopped, making a grimace of disgust, it seemed so absurd to him to speak of "moral health" on this white road crossed by dying insects. In rage, Lucien stepped on a cricket, under his sole he felt a little elastic ball and, when he raised his foot, the cricket was still alive: Lucien spat on it.

"I'm perplexed, I'm perplexed. It's like last year." He began to think about Winckelmann who called him "the ace of aces," about M. Fleurier who treated him like a man, Mme. Besse who told him, "This is the big boy I used to call my little doll, I wouldn't dare say it now, he frightens me." But they were far, far away and it seemed the real Lucien was lost, that there was only a white and perplexed larva. "What am I?" Miles and miles of land, a flat, chapped soil, grassless, odourless, and then, suddenly springing straight from this grey crust, the bean-pole, so unwonted that there was even no shadow behind it. "What am I?" The question had not changed since the previous vacation, it was as if it waited for Lucien at the very spot he had left it; or, it wasn't a question,

but a condition. Lucien shrugged his shoulders. "I'm too scrupulous," he thought, "I analyse myself too much."

The following days he forced himself to stop analysing: he wanted to let himself be fascinated by things, lengthily he studied egg-cups, napkin-rings, trees, and shop-fronts; he flattered his mother very much when he asked her if she would like to show him her silver service; he thought he was looking at silver and behind the look throbbed a little living fog. In vain Lucien absorbed himself in conversation with M. Fleurier, this abundant, tenacious mist, whose opaque inconsistency falsely resembled light, slipped *behind* the attention he gave his father's words: this fog was himself. From time to time, annoyed, Lucien stopped listening, turned away, tried to catch the fog and look it in the face: he found only emptiness, the fog was still *behind*.

Germaine came in tears to Mme. Fleurier: her brother had bronchiopneumonia. "My poor Germaine," Mme. Fleurier said, "and you always said how strong he was!" She gave her a month's holiday and, to replace her, brought in the daughter of one of the factory workers, little Berthe Mozelle who was seventeen. She was small, with blond plaits rolled about her head; she limped slightly. Since she came from Concarneau, Mme. Fleurier begged her to wear a lace coif, "That would be so much nicer." From the first days, each time she met Lucien, her wide blue eyes reflected a humble and passionate adoration and Lucien realized she worshipped him. He spoke to her familiarly and often asked her "Do you like it here?" In the hallways he amused himself making passes at her to see if they had an effect. But she touched him deeply and he drew a precious comfort from this love; he often thought with a sting of emotion of the image Berthe must make of him. "By the simple fact that I hardly look like the young workers she goes out with." On a pretext he took Winckelmann into the pantry and Winckelmann thought she was well built: "You're a lucky dog," he concluded, "I'd look into it if I were you." But Lucien hesitated: she smelled of sweat and her black blouse was eaten away under the arms. One rainy day in September M. Fleurier drove into Paris and Lucien stayed in his room alone. He

lay down on his bed and began to yawn. He seemed to be a cloud, capricious and fleeting, always the same, always something else, always diluting himself in the air. “I wonder why I exist?” He was there, he digested, he yawned, he heard the rain tapping on the window-panes and the white fog was unravelling in his head: and then? His existence was a scandal and the responsibilities he would assume later would barely be enough to justify it. “After all, I didn’t ask to be born,” he said. And he pitied himself. He remembered his childhood anxieties, his long somnolence, and they appeared to him in a new light: fundamentally, he had not stopped being embarrassed with his life, with this voluminous, useless gift, and he had carried it in his arms without knowing what to do with it or where to set it down. “I have spent my time regretting I was born.” But he was too depressed to push his thoughts further; he rose, lit a cigarette and went down into the kitchen to ask Berthe to make some tea.

She did not see him enter. He touched her shoulder and she started violently. “Did I frighten you?” he asked.

She looked at him fearfully, leaning both hands on the table, and her breast heaved: after a moment she smiled and said, “It scared me, I didn’t think anybody was there.”

Lucien returned her smile with indulgence and said, “It would be very nice if you’d make a little tea for me.”

“Right away, Monsieur Lucien,” the girl answered and she fled to the stove: Lucien’s presence seemed to make her uncomfortable.

Lucien remained on the door-step, uncertain. “Well,” he asked paternally, “do you like it here with us?” Berthe turned her back on him and filled a pan at the spigot. The sound of the water covered her answer. Lucien waited a moment and when she had set the pan on the gas-range he continued, “Have you ever smoked?”

“Sometimes,” the girl answered, warily. He opened his pack of Cravens and held it out to her. He was not too pleased: he felt he was compromising himself; he shouldn’t make her smoke. “You want . . . me to smoke?” she asked, surprised.

“Why not?”

“Madame will scold me.”

Lucien had an unpleasant impression of complicity. He began to laugh and said, “We won’t tell her.”

Berthe blushed, took a cigarette with the tips of her fingers and put it in her mouth. Should I offer to light it? That wouldn’t be right. He said to her, “Well, aren’t you going to light it?” She annoyed him; she stood there, her arms stiff, red and docile, her lips bunched around the cigarette like a thermometer stuck in her mouth.

She finally took a sulphur match from the tin box, struck it, smoked a few puffs with her eyes half shut and said, “It’s mild.” Then she hurriedly took the cigarette from her mouth and clutched it awkwardly between her five fingers.

“A born victim,” Lucien thought. Yet, she thawed a little when he asked her if she liked her Brittany; she described the different sorts of Breton coifs to him and even sang a song from Rosporden in a soft, off-key voice. Lucien teased her gently but she did not understand the joke and looked at him fearfully: at those times she looked like a rabbit.

He was sitting on a stool and felt quite at ease: “Sit down,” he told her . . .

“Oh no, Monsieur Lucien, not before Monsieur Lucien.”

He took her under the arms and drew her to his knees. “And like that?” he asked.

She let herself go, murmuring, “On your knees!” with an air of ecstasy and reproach with a funny accent and Lucien thought wearily, “I’m getting too much involved, I shouldn’t have gone so far.” He was silent: she stayed on his knees, hot, quiet, but Lucien felt her heart beating. “She belongs to me,” he thought, “I can do anything I want with her.” He let her go, took the tea-pot and went back to his room: Berthe did not make a move to stop him. Before drinking his tea, Lucien washed his hands with his mother’s scented soap because they smelled of armpits.

“Am I going to sleep with her?” In the following days Lucien was absorbed in this small problem; Berthe was always putting

herself in his way, looking at him with the great sad eyes of a spaniel. Morality won out: Lucien realized he risked making her pregnant because he did not have enough experience (impossible to buy contraceptives in Férolles, he was too well known) and he would cause M. Fleurier much worry. He also told himself that later he would have less authority in the factory if one of the worker's daughters could brag he had slept with her. "I don't have the right to touch her." He avoided being alone with Berthe during the last days of September.

"So," Winckelmann asked him, "What are you waiting for?"

"I'm not going to bother," Lucien answered dryly, "I don't like ancillary love."

Winckelmann, who heard the words "ancillary love" for the first time, gave a low whistle and was silent.

Lucien was very satisfied with himself: he had conducted himself like a *chic type* and that repaid many errors. "She was ripe for it," he told himself with a little regret, but on reconsidering it, he thought, "It's the same as though I had her: she offered herself and I didn't want her." And henceforth he no longer considered himself a virgin. These slight satisfactions occupied his mind for several days. Then they, too, melted into the fog. Returning to school in October, he felt as dismal as at the beginning of the previous year.

Berliac had not come back and no one had heard anything about him. Lucien noticed several unknown faces. His right-hand neighbour whose name was Lemordant had taken a year of special mathematics in Poitiers. He was even bigger than Lucien, and with his black moustache, already looked like a man. Lucien met his friends again without pleasure: they seemed childish to him and innocently boisterous: schoolboys. He still associated himself with their collective manifestations but with nonchalance, as was permitted him by his position of *carré*. Lemordant would have attracted him more, because he was mature; but, unlike Lucien, he did not seem to have acquired that maturity through multiple and painful experiences: he was an adult by birth. Lucien often contemplated, with a full satisfaction, that voluminous, pensive

head, neckless, planted awry on the shoulders: it seemed impossible to get anything into it, either through the ears, or the tiny slanting eyes, pink and glassy: "a man with convictions," Lucien thought with respect; and he wondered, not without jealousy, what that certitude could be that gave Lemordant such a full consciousness of himself. "That's how I should be; a rock." He was even a little surprised that Lemordant should be accessible to mathematical reasoning; but M. Husson convinced him when he gave back the first papers: Lucien was seventh and Lemordant had been given a five and seventy-eighth place; all was in order. Lemordant gave no sign; he seemed to expect the worst. His tiny mouth, his heavy cheeks, yellow and smooth, were not made to express feelings: he was a Buddha. They saw him angry only once, the day Loewy bumped into him in the cloak-room.

First, he gave a dozen sharp little growls, and blinked his eyes: "Back to Poland," he said at last, "to Poland you dirty kike, and don't come crapping around here with us." He dominated Loewy with his whole form and his massive chest swayed on his long legs. He finished up by slapping him and little Loewy apologized: the affair ended there.

On Thursdays, Lucien went out with Guigard who took him dancing with his sister's girl friends. But Guigard finally confessed that these hops bored him. "I've got a girl," he confided, "a *première* in Plisnier's, Rue Royale. She has a friend who doesn't have anybody: you ought to come with us Saturday night." Lucien made a scene with his parents and got permission to go out every Saturday; they left the key under the mat for him. He met Guigard around nine o'clock in a bar on the Rue Saint-Honoré. "You wait and see," Guigard said, "Fanny is charming and what's nice about her is she really knows how to dress."

"What about mine?"

"I don't know her; I know she's an apprentice dress-maker and she's just come to Paris from Angoulême. By the way," he added, "don't pull any boners. My name's Pierre Daurat. You, because you're blond, I said you were part English, it's better. Your name's Lucien Bonnières."

"But why?" asked Lucien, intrigued.

"My boy," Guigard answered, "it's a rule. You can do what you like with these girls but never tell your name."

"All right," Lucien said, "what do I do for a living?"

"You can say you're a student, that's better, you understand, it flatters them and then you don't have to spend much money. Of course, we share the expenses; but let me pay this evening; I'm in the habit: I'll tell you what you owe me on Monday."

Immediately Lucien thought Guigard was trying to get a rake-off. "God, how distrustful I've become!" he thought with amusement. Just then Fanny came in: a tall, thin brunette with long thighs and a heavily rouged face. Lucien found her intimidating.

"Here's Bonnières I was telling you about," Guigard said.

"Pleased to meet you," Fanny said with a myopic look. "This is my girl friend Maud."

Lucien saw an ageless little woman wearing a hat that looked like an overturned flower-pot. She was not rouged and appeared greyish after the dazzling Fanny. Lucien was bitterly disappointed but he saw she had a pretty mouth—and then there was no need to be embarrassed with her. Guigard had taken care to pay for the beers in advance so that he could profit from the commotion of their arrival to push the two girls gaily toward the door without allowing them the time for a drink. Lucien was grateful to him: M. Fleurier only gave him a hundred and twenty-five francs a week and out of this money he had to pay his car fare. The evening was amusing; they went dancing in the Latin Quarter in a hot, pink little place with dark corners and where a cocktail cost five francs. There were many students with girls of the same type as Fanny but not as good-looking. Fanny was superb: she looked straight in the eyes of a big man with a beard who was smoking a pipe and said very loudly, "I hate people who smoke pipes at dances." The man turned crimson and put the lighted pipe back in his pocket. She treated Guigard and Lucien with a certain condescension and sometimes told them, "You're a couple of kids," with a gentle, maternal air.

Lucien felt full of ease and sweetness; he told Fanny several amusing little things and smiled while telling them. Finally, the smile never left his face and he was able to hit on a refined tone of voice with touches of devil-may-care and tender courtesy tinged with irony. But Fanny spoke little to him; she took Guigard's chin and pulled his cheeks to make his mouth stand out; when the lips were full and drooling a little, like fruit swollen with juice or like snails, she licked them, saying, "Baby." Lucien was horribly annoyed and thought Guigard was ridiculous: Guigard had rouge near his lips and finger marks on his cheeks. But the behaviour of the other couples was even more negligent: everyone kissed; from time to time the girl from the cloak-room passed among them with a little basket, throwing streamers and multi-coloured balls shouting, "*Olé, les enfants, amusez-vous, Olé, olé!*" and everybody laughed.

At last Lucien remembered the existence of Maud and he said to her, smiling, "Look at those turtle-doves . . ." He pointed to Fanny and Guigard and added, "*nous autres, nobles vieillards . . .*" He did not finish the phrase but smiled so drolly that Maud smiled too. She removed her hat and Lucien saw with pleasure that she was somewhat better than the other women in the dance hall; then he asked her to dance and told her the jokes he played on his professors the year of his *baccalauréat*. She danced well, her eyes were black and serious and she had an intelligent look. Lucien told her about Berthe and said he was full of remorse. "But," he added, "it was better for her."

Maud thought the story about Berthe was poetic and sad, she asked how much Berthe earned from Lucien's parents. "It's not always funny," she added, "for a young girl to be in the family way."

Guigard and Fanny paid no more attention to them, they were caressing each other and Guigard's face was covered with moisture. From time to time Lucien repeated, "Look at those turtle-doves, just look at them!" and he had his sentence ready, "They make me feel like doing it too." But he dared not say it and contented himself with smiling; then he pretended that he and

Maud were old friends, disdainful of love, and he called her "brother" and made as if to slap her on the back.

Suddenly, Fanny turned her head and looked at them with surprise, "Well," she said, "first-graders, how are you doing? Why don't you kiss, you're dying to." Lucien took Maud in his arms; he was a little annoyed because Fanny was watching them: he wanted the kiss to be long and successful but he wondered how people breathed. Finally, it was not as difficult as he thought, it was enough to kiss on an angle, leaving the nostrils clear. He heard Guigard counting "one—two—three—four——" and he let go of Maud at fifty-two. "Not bad for a beginning," Guigard said. "I can do better."

Lucien looked at his wrist-watch and counted: Guigard left Fanny's mouth at the hundred and fifty-ninth second. Lucien was furious and thought the contest was stupid. "I let go of Maud just to be safe," he thought, "but that's nothing, once you know how to breathe you can keep on forever." He proposed a second match and won.

When it was all over, Maud looked at Lucien and said seriously, "You kiss well."

Lucien blushed with pleasure. "At your service," he answered, bowing. Still he would rather have kissed Fanny. They parted around half past twelve because of the last métro. Lucien was joyful; he leaped and danced in the Rue Raynouard and thought, "It's in the bag." The corners of his mouth hurt because he had smiled so much.

He saw Maud every Thursday at six and on Saturday evening. She let herself be kissed but nothing more. Lucien complained to Guigard who reassured him, "Don't worry," Guigard said, "Fanny's sure she'll oblige; but she's young and only had two boys; Fanny says for you to be very tender with her."

"Tender?" Lucien said. "Get a load of that!" They both laughed and Guigard concluded, "That's what you've got to do."

Lucien was very tender. He kissed Maud a lot and told her he loved her, but after a while it became a little monotonous and then he was not too proud of going out with her: he would have liked to

give her advice on how she should dress, but she was full of prejudices and angered quickly. Between kisses, they were silent, gazing at each other and holding hands. "God knows what she's thinking with those strict eyes she has." Lucien still thought of the same thing: this small existence, sad and vague, which was his own, and told himself, "I wish I were Lemordant, there's a man who's found his place!" During those times he saw himself as though he were another person: sitting near a woman who loved him, his hand in hers, his lips still wet from kisses, refusing the humble happiness she offered him: alone. Then he clasped Maud's fingers tightly and tears came to his eyes: he would have liked to make her happy.

One morning in December, Lemordant came up to Lucien; he was holding a paper. "You want to sign?" he asked.

"What is it?"

"Because of the kikes at the Normale Sup; they sent the *Œuvre* a petition against compulsory military training with two hundred signatures. So we're protesting; we need a thousand names at least: we're going to get the *cyrards,* the *flottards,* the *agros,* the *X's,* and the whole works."

Lucien was flattered. "Is it going to be printed?"

"Surely in *Action*. Maybe in *Echo de Paris* besides."

Lucien wanted to sign on the spot but he thought it would not be wise. He took the paper and read it carefully. Lemordant added, "I hear you don't have anything to do with politics: that's your business. But you're French and you've got a right to have your say." When he heard "you've got a right to have your say," Lucien felt an inexplicable and rapid joy. He signed. The next day he bought *Action Française* but the proclamation was not there. It didn't appear until Thursday; Lucien found it on the second page under the headline: YOUTH OF FRANCE SCORES IN TEETH OF INTERNATIONAL JEWRY. His name was there, compressed, definitive, not far from Lemordant's, almost as strange as the names *Flèche* and *Flipot* which surrounded it; it looked unreal. "Lucien Fleurier," he thought, "a peasant name, a real French name." He read the whole series of names starting

with "F" aloud and when it came to his turn he pronounced it as if he did not recognize it. Then he stuffed the newspaper in his pocket and went home happily.

A few days later he sought out Lemordant. "Are you active in politics?" he asked.

"I'm in the League," Lemordant said. "Ever read *Action Française?*"

"Not much," Lucien confessed. "Up to now it didn't interest me but I think I'm changing my mind."

Lemordant looked at him without curiosity, with his impenetrable air. Lucien told him, in a few words, what Bergère had called his "Disorder."

"Where do you come from?" Lemordant asked.

"Férolles. My father has a factory there."

"How long did you stay there?"

"Till form two."

"I see," Lemordant said, "it's very simple, you're uprooted. Have you read Barrès?"

"I read *Colette Baudoche*."

"Not that," Lemordant said impatiently; "I'll bring you the *Déracinés* this afternoon. That's your story. You'll find the cause and cure."

The book was bound in green leather. On the first page was an "*ex libris* André Lemordant" in gothic letters. Lucien was surprised; he had never dreamed Lemordant could have a first name. He began reading it with much distrust: it had been explained to him so many times: so many times had he been lent books with a "Read this, it fits you perfectly." Lucien thought with a sad smile that he was not someone who could be set down in so many pages. The Œdipus complex, the Disorder: what childishness, and so far away! But, from the very first, he was captivated: in the first place, it was not psychology—Lucien had a bellyful of psychology—the young people Barrès described were not abstract individuals or declassed like Rimbaud or Verlaine, nor sick like the unemployed Viennese who had themselves psychoanalysed by Freud. Barrès began by placing them in their

milieu, in their family: they had been well brought up, in the provinces, in solid traditions. Lucien thought Sturel resembled himself. "It's true," he said, "I'm uprooted." He thought of the moral health of the Fleuriers, a health acquired only in the land, their physical strength (his grandfather used to twist a bronze sou between his fingers). He remembered with emotion the dawns in Férolles: he would rise, tiptoe down the stairs so as not to wake his family, straddle his bicycle, and the soft country-side of the Ile de France enveloped him in its discreet caresses. "I've always hated Paris," he thought with force. He also read the Jardin de Bérénice and, from time to time, stopped reading and began to ponder, his eyes vague; thus they were again offering him a character and a destiny, a means of escaping the inexhaustible gossip of his conscience, a method of defining and appreciating himself. And how much he preferred the unconscious, reeking of the soil, which Barrès gave him, to the filthy, lascivious images of Freud. To grasp it, Lucien had only to turn himself away from a sterile and dangerous contemplation of self: he must study the soil and subsoil of Férolles, he must decypher the sense of the rolling hills which descended as far as the Sernette, he must apply himself to human geography and history. Or, simply return to Férolles and live there: he would find it harmless and fertile at his feet, stretched across the country-side, mixed in the woods, the springs, and the grass-like nourishing humus from which Lucien could at last draw the strength to become a leader. Lucien left these long dreams exalted, and sometimes felt as if he had found his road. Now he was silent close to Maud, his arm about her waist, the words, the scraps of sentences resounding in him: "renew tradition," "the earth and the dead"; deep, opaque words, inexhaustible. "How tempting it is," he thought. Yet he dared not believe it: he had already been disappointed too often. He opened up his fears to Lemordant: "It would be too good."

"My boy," Lemordant answered, "you don't believe everything you want to right away: you need practice." He thought a little and said, "You ought to come with us."

Lucien accepted with an open heart, but he insisted on keeping his liberty. "I'll come," he said, "but I won't be involved. I want to see and think about it."

Lucien was captivated by the camaraderies of the young *Camelots*; they gave him a cordial, simple welcome and he immediately felt at ease in their midst. He soon knew Lemordant's "gang"; about twenty students almost all of whom wore velvet berets. They held their meetings on the second floor of the Polder beer-hall where they played bridge and billiards. Lucien often went there to meet them and soon he realized they had adopted him, for he was always greeted with shouts of "*Voilà le plus beau!*" or "Our National Fleurier!" But it was their good humour which especially captured Lucien: nothing pedantic or austere; little talk of politics. They laughed and sang, that was all; they shouted or beat the tables in honour of the student youth. Lemordant himself smiled without dropping an authority which no one would have dared question. Lucien was more often silent, his look wandering over these boisterous, muscular young people. "This is strength," he thought. Little by little he discovered the true sense of youth in the midst of them: it was not in the affected grace Bergère appreciated; youth was the future of France. However, Lemordant's friends did not have the troubled charm of adolescence: they were adults and several wore beards. Looking closely he found an air of parenthood in all of them: they had finished with the wanderings and uncertainties of their age, they had nothing more to learn, they were made. In the beginning their light-hearted, ferocious jokes somewhat shocked Lucien: one might have thought them without conscience. When Rémy announced that Mme. Dubus, the wife of the radical leader, had her legs cut off by a lorry, Lucien expected them to render a brief homage to their unfortunate adversary. But they all burst out laughing and slapped their thighs, saying: "The old carrion!" and "What a fine lorry driver!" Lucien was a little taken back but suddenly he understood that this great, purifying laughter was a refusal: they had scented danger, they wanted no cowardly pity and they were firm. Lucien began to laugh too. Little by little their

pranks appeared to him in their true light: there was only the shell of frivolity; at heart it was the affirmation of a right: their conviction was so deep, so religious, that it gave them the right to appear frivolous, to dismiss all that was not essential with a whim, a pirouette. Between the icy humour of Charles Maurras and the jokes of Desperreau, for instance (he carried in his pocket an old condom end which he called Blum's foreskin) there was only a difference of degree.

In January the University announced a solemn meeting in the course of which the degree of *doctor honoris causa* was to be bestowed on two Swedish mineralogists. "You're going to see something good," Lemordant told Lucien, giving him an invitation card. The big amphitheatre was packed. When Lucien saw the President of the Republic and the Rector enter at the sound of the *Marseillaise,* his heart began to pound, he was afraid for his friends. Just then a few young people rose from their seats and began to shout. With sympathy Lucien recognized Rémy, red as a beet, struggling between two men who were pulling his coat, shouting, "France for the French!" But he was especially pleased to see an old gentleman, with the air of a precocious child, blowing a little horn. "How healthy it is," he thought. He keenly relished this odd mixture of headstrong gravity and turbulence which gave the youngest an air of maturity and the oldest an impish air. Soon Lucien himself tried to joke. He had some success and when he said of Herriot, "There's no more God if he dies in his bed," he felt the birth of a sacred fury in him. Then he gritted his teeth and, for a moment, felt as convinced, as strict, as powerful as Rémy or Desperreau. "Lemordant is right," he thought, "you need practice, it's all there." He also learned to avoid discussions: Guigard, who was only a republican, overwhelmed him with objections. Lucien listened to him politely but, after a while, shut up. Guigard was still talking, but Lucien did not even look at him any more: he smoothed the fold in his trousers and amused himself by blowing smoke-rings with his cigarette and looking at women. Nevertheless, he heard a few of Guigard's objections, but they quickly lost their weight and

slipped off him, light and futile. Guigard finally was quiet, quite impressed.

Lucien told his parents about his new friends and M. Fleurier asked him if he was going to be a *Camelot*. Lucien hesitated and gravely said, "I'm tempted, I'm really tempted."

"Lucien, I beg you, don't do it," his mother said, "they're very excitable and something bad can happen so quickly. Don't you see you can get in trouble or be put in prison? Besides, you're much too young to be mixed up in politics."

Lucien answered her only with a firm smile and M. Fleurier intervened, "Let him alone, dear," he said gently, "let him follow his own ideas; he has to pass through it."

From that day on it seemed to Lucien that his parents treated him with a certain consideration. Yet he did not decide; these few weeks had taught him much: by turn he considered the benevolent curiosity of his father, Mme. Fleurier's worries, the growing respect of Guigard, the insistence of Lemordant and the impatience of Rémy and, nodding his head, he told himself, "This is no small matter." He had a long conversation with Lemordant and Lemordant well understood his reasons and told him not to hurry. Lucien still was nostalgic: he had the impressions of being only a small gelatinous transparency trembling on the seat in a café and the boisterous agitation of the *Camelots* seemed absurd to him. But at other times he felt hard and heavy as a rock and he was almost happy.

He got along better and better with the whole gang. He sang them the *Noce à Rebecca* which Hébrard had taught him the previous vacation and everyone thought it was tremendously amusing. Lucien threw out several biting reflections about the Jews and spoke of Berliac who was so miserly: "I always asked myself: why is he so cheap, it isn't possible to be that cheap. Then one day I understood: he was one of the tribe." Everybody began to laugh and a sort of exaltation came over Lucien: he felt truly furious about the Jews and the memory of Berliac was deeply unpleasant to him. Lemordant looked him in the eyes and said, "You're a real one, you are." After that they often asked Lucien:

"Fleurier, tell us a good one about the kikes." And Lucien told the Jewish jokes he learned from his father; all he had to do was begin, "Vun day Levy met Bloom . . ." to fill his friends with mirth.

One day Rémy and Patenôtre told how they had come across an Algerian Jew by the Seine and how they had almost frightened him to death by acting as if they were going to throw him in the water: "I said to myself," Rémy concluded, "what a shame it was Fleurier wasn't with us."

"Maybe it was better he wasn't there," Desperreau interrupted, "he'd have chucked him in the water for good!"

There was no one like Lucien for recognizing a Jew from the nose. When he went out with Guigard he nudged his elbow: "Don't turn around now: the little short one, behind us, he's one of them!"

"For that," Guigard said, "you can really smell 'em out."

Fanny could not stand the Jews either; all four of them went to Maud's room one Thursday and Lucien sang the *Noce à Rebecca*. Fanny could stand no more, she said, "Stop, stop, or I'll wet my pants." And when he had finished, she gave him an almost tender look. They played jokes on him in the Polder beer-hall. There was always someone to say, negligently, "Fleurier who likes the Jews so much . . ." or "Leon Blum, the great friend of Fleurier . . ." and the others waited, in stitches, holding their breath, open-mouthed. Lucien grew red and struck the table, shouting, "God damn . . . !" and they burst out laughing and said, "He bit! He bit! He didn't bite—he swallowed it!"

He often went to political meetings with them and heard Professor Claude and Maxime Real Del Sarte. His work suffered a little from these new obligations, but, since Lucien could not count on winning the Centrale scholarship anyhow, that year, M. Fleurier was indulgent. "After all," he told his wife, "Lucien must learn the job of being a man." After these meetings Lucien and his friends felt hot-headed and were given to playing tricks. Once about ten of them came across a little, olive skinned man who was crossing the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts, reading *Humanité*. They shoved him into a wall and Rémy ordered "Throw down that

paper." The little man wanted to act up but Desperreau slipped behind him and grabbed him by the waist while Lemordant ripped the paper from his grasp with a powerful fist. It was very amusing. The little man, furious, kicked the air and shouted "Let go of me! Let go!" with an odd accent and Lemordant, quite calm, tore up the paper. But things were spoiled when Desperreau wanted to let the man go: he threw himself on Lemordant and would have struck him if Rémy hadn't landed a good punch behind the ear just in time. The man fell against the wall and looked at them all evilly, saying "*Sales Français!*"

"Say that again," Marchesseau demanded coldly. Lucien realized there was going to be some dirty work: Marchesseau could not take a joke when it was a question of France.

"*Sales Français!*" the dago said. He was slapped again and threw himself forward, his head lowered, "*Sales Français, sales bourgeois,* I hate you, I hope you croak, all of you, all of you!" and a flood of other filthy curses with a violence that Lucien never imagined possible. Then they lost patience and all had to step in and give him a good lesson. After a while they let him go and the man dropped against the wall: his breath was a whistle, one punch had closed his left eye and they were all around him, tired of striking him, waiting for him to fall. The man twisted his mouth and spat: "*Sales Français! Sales Français!*"

"You want some more?" Desperreau asked, breathless.

The man didn't seem to hear: he looked at them defiantly with his left eye and repeated, "*Sales Français! Sales Français!*"

There was a moment of hesitation and Lucien realized his friends were going to give it up. Then it was stronger than he was, he leaped forward and struck with all his might. The little man fell to his knees and said nothing more. "Get the hell out," Rémy hissed. They ran, stopping only at Place Saint-Michel: no one was following them. They straightened their ties and brushed each other down.

The evening passed without mention of the incident and the young men were especially nice to each other: they had abandoned the modest brutality which usually veiled their

feelings. They spoke politely to each other and Lucien thought that for the first time they were acting as they acted with their families; but he was enervated: he was not used to fighting thugs in the middle of the street. He thought tenderly of Maud and Fanny.

He could not sleep. "I can't go on," he thought, "following them like an amateur. Everything has been weighed, I *must* join!" He felt grave and almost religious when he announced the good news to Lemordant.

"It's decided," he said, "I'm with you." Lemordant slapped him on the shoulder and the gang celebrated the event by polishing off several bottles. They had recovered their gay and brutal tone and talked only about the incident of the night before.

As they were about to leave, Marchesseau told Lucien simply, "You've got a terrific punch!" and Lucien answered, "He was a Jew."

The day after that he went to see Maud with a heavy Malacca cane he had bought in a shop on the Boulevard St. Michel. Maud understood immediately: she looked at the cane and said, "So you did it?"

"I did it," Lucien smiled.

Maud seemed flattered; personally, she favoured the ideas of the Left, but she was broad-minded. "I think," she said, "there's good in all parties." In the course of the evening, she scratched his neck several times and called him "My little *Camelot*."

A little while after that, one Saturday night, Maud felt tired. "I think I'll go back," she said, "but you can come up with me if you're good: you can hold my hand and be nice to your little Maud who's so tired, and you can tell her stories." Lucien was hardly enthusiastic: Maud's room depressed him with its careful poverty: it was like a maid's room. But it would have been criminal to let such an opportunity pass by. Hardly in the room, Maud threw herself on the bed, saying, "Whew! it feels so good!" Then she was silent, gazing into Lucien's eyes, and puckered her lips. He stretched himself out beside her and she put her hand

over his eyes, spreading her fingers and saying, “Peekaboo, I see you, you know I see you, Lucien!”

He felt soft and heavy; she put her fingers in his mouth and he sucked them, then spoke to her tenderly, “Poor little Maud’s sick, does little Maud have a pain?” and he caressed her whole body; she had closed her eyes and was smiling mysteriously. After a moment he raised her skirt and they made love; Lucien thought, “What a break!”

When it was over Maud said, “Well, if I’d thought that!” She looked at Lucien with a tender reproach. “Naughty boy, I thought you were going to be good!”

Lucien said he was as surprised as she was. “That’s the way it happens,” he said.

She thought a little and then told him seriously, “I don’t regret anything. Before maybe it was purer but it wasn’t so complete.”

In the métro, Lucien thought “I have a mistress.” He was empty and tired, saturated with a smell of absinthe and fresh fish; he sat down, holding himself stiffly to avoid contact with his sweat-soaked shirt; he felt his body to be curdled milk. He repeated forcefully, “I have a mistress.” But he felt frustrated: what he desired in Maud the night before was her narrow, closed face which seemed so unattainable, her slender silhouette, her look of dignity, her reputation for being a serious girl, her scorn of the masculine sex, all those things that made her a strange being, truly *someone else*, hard and definitive, always out of reach, with her clean little thoughts, her modesties, her silk stockings and crêpe dresses, her permanent wave. And all this veneer had melted under his embrace, the flesh remained. He had stretched his lips toward an eyeless face, naked as a belly, he had possessed a great flower of moist flesh. Again he saw the blind beast throbbing in the sheets with rippling, hairy yawns and he thought: that was we two. They had made a single one, he could no longer distinguish his flesh from that of Maud; no one had ever given him that feeling of sickening intimacy, except possibly Riri, when Riri showed him his wee-wee behind a bush or when he had forgotten himself and stayed resting on his belly, bouncing up and down, his

behind naked, while they dried out his pants. Lucien felt some comfort thinking about Guigard: tomorrow he would tell him: "I slept with Maud, she's a sweet little kid, old man, it's in her blood." But he was uncomfortable, and felt naked in the dusty heat of the métro, naked beneath a thin film of clothing, stiff and naked beside a priest, across from two mature women, like a great, soiled bean-pole.

Guigard congratulated him vehemently. He was getting a little tired of Fanny. "She really has a rotten temper. Yesterday she gave me dirty looks all evening." They both agreed: there have to be women like that, because, after all, you couldn't stay chaste until you got married and then they weren't in love and they weren't sick but it would be a mistake to get attached to them. Guigard spoke of real girls with delicacy and Lucien asked him for news of his sister. "She's fine," said Guigard. "She says you're a quitter. You know," he added, with a little abandon, "I'm not sorry I have a sister: you find out things you never could imagine." Lucien understood him perfectly. As a result they spoke often of girls and felt full of poetry and Guigard loved to recite the words of one of his uncles who had had much success with women: "Possibly I haven't always done the right thing in my dog's life, but there's one thing God will witness: I'd rather cut my hands off than touch a virgin." Sometimes they went to see Pierrette, Guigard's girl friend. Lucien liked Pierrette a lot, he talked to her like a big brother, teased her a little and was grateful to her because she had not cut her hair. He was completely absorbed in his political activities; every Sunday morning he went to sell *Action Française* in front of the church in Neuilly. For more than two hours, Lucien walked up and down, his face hard. The girls coming out of mass sometimes raised beautiful frank eyes toward him; then Lucien relaxed a little and felt pure and strong; he smiled at them. He explained to the gang that he respected women and he was glad to find in them the understanding he had hoped for. Besides, they almost all had sisters.

On the seventeenth of April, the Guigards gave a dance for Pierrette's eighteenth birthday, and naturally Lucien was invited.

He was already quite good friends with Pierrette; she called him her dancing-partner and he suspected her of being a little bit in love with him. Mme. Guigard had brought in a caterer and the afternoon promised to be quite gay. Lucien danced with Pierrette several times, then went to see Guigard who was receiving his friends in the smoking-room. "Hello," Guigard said, "I think you all know each other: Fleurier, Simon, Vanusse, Ledoux."

While Guigard was naming his friends, Lucien saw a tall young man with red, curly hair, milky skin and harsh black eye-lashes approaching them hesitantly, and he was overcome with rage. "What's this fellow doing here," he wondered, "Guigard knows I can't stand Jews!" He spun on his heels and withdrew rapidly to avoid introductions. "Who is that Jew?" he asked Pierrette a moment later.

"It's Weill, he's at the Hautes Etudes Commerciales; my brother met him in fencing class."

"I hate Jews," Lucien said.

Pierrette gave a little laugh. "This one's a pretty good chap," she said. "Take me in to the buffet."

Lucien drank a glass of champagne and only had time to set it down when he found himself nose to nose with Guigard and Weill. He glared at Guigard and turned his back, but Pierrette took his arm and Guigard approached him openly: "My friend Fleurier, my friend Weill," he said easily, "there, you're introduced."

Weill put out his hand and Lucien felt miserable. Luckily, he suddenly remembered Desperreau: "Fleurier would have chucked the Jew in the water for good." He thrust his hands in his pockets, turned his back on Guigard and walked away. "I can never set foot in this house again," he thought, getting his coat. He felt a bitter pride. "That's what you call keeping your ideals; you can't live in society any more." Once in the street his pride melted and Lucien grew worried. "Guigard must be furious!" He shook his head and tried to tell himself with conviction, "He didn't have the right to invite a Jew if he invited me!" But his rage had left him; he saw the surprised face of Weill again with discomfort, his outstretched hand, and he felt he wanted a reconciliation: "Pierrette surely

thinks I'm a swine. I should have shaken hands with him. After all, it didn't involve me in anything. Say hello to him and afterwards go right away: that's what I should have done." He wondered if he had time to go back to Guigard's. He would go up to Weill and say, "Excuse me, I wasn't feeling well." He would shake hands and say a few nice words. No. It was too late, his action was irreparable. He thought with irritation, "Why did I need to show my opinions to people who can't understand them?" He shrugged his shoulders nervously: it was a disaster. At that very instant Guigard and Pierrette were commenting on his behaviour; Guigard was saying, "He's completely crazy!" Lucien clenched his fists. "Oh God," he thought, "how I hate them! God how I hate Jews!" and he tried to draw strength from the contemplation of this immense hatred. But it melted away under his look; in vain he thought of Leon Blum who got money from Germany and hated the French, he felt nothing more than a dismal indifference. Lucien was lucky to find Maud home. He told her he loved her and possessed her several times with a sort of rage. "It's all screwed up," he told himself, "I'll never be *anybody.*"

"No, no," Maud said, "stop that, my big darling, it's forbidden!" But at last she let herself go: Lucien wanted to kiss her everywhere. He felt childish and perverse; he wanted to cry.

At school next morning, Lucien's heart tightened when he saw Guigard. Guigard looked sly and pretended not to see him. Lucien was so enraged that he could not take notes: "The bastard," he thought, "the bastard!" At the end of the class, Guigard came up to him; he was pale. "If he says a word," thought Lucien, "I'll knock his teeth in." They stayed side by side for an instant, each looking at the toes of their shoes. Finally, Guigard said in an injured voice, "Excuse me, old man, I shouldn't have done that to you." Lucien started and looked at him with distrust. But Guigard went on painfully, "I met him in the class, you see, so I thought . . . we fenced together and he invited me over to his place, but I understand, you know, I shouldn't have . . . I don't know how it happened, but when I wrote the invitations I didn't think for a second . . ." Lucien still

said nothing because the words would not come out, but he felt indulgent. Guigard, his head bowed, added, “Well, what a boner . . .”

“You big hunk of humbug!” Lucien said, slapping his shoulder, “of course I know you didn’t do it on purpose.” He said generously, “*I* was wrong, too. I acted like a heel. But what do you expect—it’s stronger than I am. I can’t stand them—it’s physical. I feel as though they had scales on their hands. What did Pierrette say?”

“She laughed like mad,” Guigard said pitifully.

“And the guy?”

“He caught on. I said what I could, but he took off fifteen minutes later.” Still humble, he added, “My parents say you were right and you couldn’t have done otherwise because of your convictions.”

Lucien savoured the word “convictions”; he wanted to hug Guigard: “It’s nothing, old man,” he told him; “It’s nothing because we’re still friends.” He walked down the Boulevard Saint-Michel in a state of extraordinary exaltation: he seemed to be himself no longer. He told himself, “It’s funny, it isn’t *me* any more. I don’t recognize myself!” It was hot and pleasant; people strolled by, wearing the first astonished smile of spring-time on their faces. Lucien thrust himself into this soft crowd like a steel wedge; he thought, “It’s not me any more. Only yesterday I was a big, bloated bug like the crickets in Férolles.” Now Lucien felt clean and sharp as a chronometer. He went into La Source and ordered a Pernod. The gang didn’t hang around the Source because the place swarmed with dagos; but dagos and Jews did not disturb Lucien that day. He felt unusual and threatening in the midst of these olive-tinted bodies which rustled like a field of oats in the wind; a monstrous clock leaning on the bar, shining red. He recognized with amusement a little Jew the J. P. had roughed up last term in the Faculté de Droit corridors. The fat and pensive little monster had not kept the mark of the blows, he must have stayed laid up for a while and then regained his round shape; but there was a sort of obscene resignation in him.

He was happy for the time being: he yawned voluptuously; a ray of sunlight tickled his nostrils; he scratched his nose and smiled. Was it a smile? Or rather a little oscillation which had been born on the outside, somewhere in a corner of the place and had come to die on his mouth? All the dagos were floating in dark, heavy water whose eddies jolted their flabby flesh, raised their arms, agitated their fingers and played a little with their lips. Poor bastards! Lucien almost pitied them. What did they come to France for? What sea-currents had brought them and deposited them here? They could dress in clothes from tailors on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in vain; they were hardly more than jelly-fish. Lucien thought, he was not a jelly-fish, he did not belong to that humiliated race. He told himself, "I'm a diver." Then he suddenly forgot the Source and the dagos; he only saw a back, a wide back hunched with muscles going farther and farther away, losing itself, implacable, in the fog. He saw Guigard: Guigard was pale; he followed the back with his eyes and said to an invisible Pierrette, "Well, what a boner . . . !" Lucien was flooded with an almost intolerable joy: this powerful, solitary back was *his own!* And the scene happened yesterday! For an instant, at the cost of a violent effort, he was Guigard, he saw the humility of Guigard and felt himself deliciously terrified. "Let that be a lesson to them!" he thought. The scene changed: it was Pierrette's boudoir, it was happening in the future, Pierrette and Guigard were pointing out a name on the list of invitations. Lucien was not there, but his power was over them. Guigard was saying, "Oh no! Not that one! That wouldn't suit Lucien. Lucien can't stand Jews." Lucien studied himself once more; he thought, "I am Lucien! Somebody who can't stand Jews." He had often pronounced this sentence but today was unlike all other times. Not at all them. Of course, it was apparently a simple statement, as if someone had said, "Lucien doesn't like oysters," or "Lucien likes to dance." But there was no mistaking it: love of dancing might be found in some little Jew who counted no more than a fly: all you had to do was look at that damned kike to know that his likes and dislikes clung to him like his odour, like the reflections of his skin, that they

disappeared with him like the blinking of his heavy eyelids, like his sticky, voluptuous smiles. But Lucien's anti-Semitism was of a different sort: unrelenting and pure, it stuck out of him like a steel blade menacing other breasts. "It's . . . sacred," he thought. He remembered his mother when he was little, sometimes speaking to him in a certain special tone of voice: "Papa is working in his office." This sentence seemed a sacramental formula to him which suddenly conferred a halo of religious obligations on him, such as not playing with his air-gun and not shouting "Taratataraboom!" He walked down the hall on tiptoe as if he were in a cathedral. "Now it's my turn," he thought with satisfaction. Lowering their voices, they said, "Lucien doesn't like Jews," and people would feel paralysed, their limbs transfixed by a swarm of aching little arrows. "Guigard and Pierrette," he said tenderly, "are children." They had been guilty but it sufficed for Lucien to show his teeth and they were filled with remorse; they had spoken in a low voice and walked on tiptoe.

Lucien felt full of self-respect for the second time. But this time he no longer needed the eyes of Guigard; he appeared respectable in his own eyes—in his own eyes which had finally pierced his envelope of flesh, of likes and dislikes, habits and humours. "Where I sought myself," he thought, "I could not find myself." In good faith he took a detailed counting of all he *was*. "But if I could be only what I am I wouldn't be worth any more than that little kike." What could one discover searching in this mucous intimacy if not the sorrow of flesh, the ignoble lie of equality and disorder? "First maxim," Lucien said, "not to try and see inside yourself; there is no mistake more dangerous." The real Lucien—he knew now—had to be sought in the eyes of others, in the frightened obedience of Pierrette and Guigard, the hopeful waiting of all those beings who grew and ripened for him, those young apprentices who would become *his* workers, people of Férolles, great and small, of whom he would one day be the master. Lucien was almost afraid, he felt almost too great for himself. So many people were waiting for him, at attention: and he was and always would be this immense waiting of others. "That's

a leader," he thought. And he saw a hunched, muscular back reappear, then, immediately afterwards, a cathedral. He was inside, walking on tiptoe beneath the sifted light that fell from the windows. "Only this time I am the cathedral!" He stared intently at his neighbour, a tall Cuban, brown and mild as a cigar. He must absolutely find words to express this extraordinary discovery. Quietly, cautiously, he raised his hand to his forehead, like a lighted candle, then drew into himself for an instant, thoughtful and holy, and the words came of themselves, "I HAVE RIGHTS!" Rights! Something like triangles and circles: it was so perfect that it didn't exist, you could trace thousands of circles with a compass in vain, you could never make a single circle. Generations of workers could as well scrupulously obey the commands of Lucien; they would never exhaust his right to command, rights were beyond existence, like mathematical objects and religious dogma. And now Lucien was just that: an enormous bouquet of responsibilities and rights. He had believed that he existed by chance for a long time, but it was due to a lack of sufficient thought. His place in the sun was marked in Férolles long before his birth. They were *waiting* for him long before his father's marriage: if he had come into the world it was to occupy that place: "I exist," he thought, "because I have the right to exist." And, perhaps for the first time, he had a flashing, glorious vision of his destiny. Sooner or later he would go to the Centrale (it made no difference). Then he would drop Maud (she always wanted to sleep with him, it was tiresome; their confused flesh giving off an odour of scorched rabbit-stew in the torrid heat of spring-time—"and then, Maud belongs to everybody: today me, tomorrow somebody else, none of it makes any sense"); he would go and live in Férolles. Somewhere in France there was a bright young girl like Pierrette, a country girl with eyes like flowers who would stay chaste for him: sometimes she tried to imagine her future master, this gentle and terrible man; but she could not. She was a virgin; in the most secret part of her body she recognized the right of Lucien alone to possess her. He would marry her, she would be *his* wife, the tenderest of his rights. When, in the evening,

she would undress with slender, sacred gestures, it would be like a holocaust. He would take her in his arms with the approval of everyone, and tell her, “You belong to me!” What she would show him she would have the right to show to him alone and for him the act of love would be a voluptuous counting of his goods. His most tender right, his most intimate right: the right to be respected to the very flesh, obeyed to the very bed. “I’ll marry young,” he thought. He thought too that he would like to have many children; then he thought of his father’s work; he was impatient to continue it and wondered if M. Fleurier was not going to die soon.

A clock struck noon; Lucien rose. The metamorphosis was complete: a graceful, uncertain adolescent had entered this café one hour earlier; now a man left, a leader among Frenchmen. Lucien took a few steps in the glorious light of a French morning. At the corner of Rue des Ecoles and the Boulevard Saint-Michel he went towards a stationery shop and looked at himself in the mirror: he would have liked to find on his own face the impenetrable look he admired on Lemordant’s. But the mirror reflected only a pretty, headstrong little face that was not yet terrible enough. “I’ll grow a moustache,” he decided.

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