JEANNE D'ASTURIE

LA COULEUR DES DRAPS

Journal d'une jeune fille

Éditions Hiroshima
1948

Translator's Note

My attention was drawn to this slight but well-written work at some point in the 1970s, when I bought a copy together with a few other French erotic books from a bookseller on the South coast of England – probably Brighton, but I can't be sure at this late date. I'd never heard of *La Couleur des draps*, nor its supposed author, Jeanne d'Asturie; it would be about thirty years before Jean-Pierre Dutel would publish his magisterial *Bibliographie des ouvrages érotiques imprimés clandestinement en français entre 1920 et 1970*,[1] and I had yet to acquire a copy of Daniel Becourt's repertoire of legal actions against literature in France in which is included the dates of the 1954 and 1955 prosecutions of the book.[2]

The titlepage of *La Couleur des draps* is as I have it above; it a 16mo measuring approximately 5¾ × 4½ inches, and has ninety-eight pages. It is bound in pink wrappers, printed in black. Since almost all of what is known of the book can be laid to the credit of Jean-Jacques Dutel, I make no apology for

Finding Dutel's description of the book, and the identity of its author, was quite a revelation, and I make no apology for paraphrasing what he wrote.

★★★

Dutel describes it as the original edition of an excellent work by Jean Cau, published under the pseudonym Jeanne d'Asturie. The author's dedication to François Mauriac is distinctly irreverent, addressing him as "My master and my secret friend". In a brief introductory statement, Cau explains that he is publishing the work without any particular purpose, has no intention of altering its contents, and expresses the hope that his female contemporaries will continue to fashion their gods

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[1] J.-P. Dutel, *Bibliographie des ouvrages érotiques imprimés clandestinement en français en-tre 1920 et 1970* (Paris : The Author, 2005), pp. 110-111, entry 1306.)

[2] Daniel Bécourt, (Paris : Cercle de la librairie, 1961), p. 22.

out of butter and dance around their own shadows. He concludes with the enigmatic words: "I have understood."

The identification of Jean Cau as the author rests on a copy bearing a dedication to François Ferran, in which Jeanne d'Asturie acknowledges him as the inspiration for the work. Dutel also records the existence of another presentation copy, dedicated to Raymond Queneau.

The circumstances surrounding the book's publication are particularly interesting. From 1947, Jean Cau was employed as Jean-Paul Sartre's secretary and contributed to *Les Temps Modernes*. Dutel points out that issue no. 27 of that journal had contained an expurgated version of a text entitled *Ma Vie de Prostituée*, the complete edition of which appeared in 1948, also in a pink-covered volume. He suggests that Cau's *La Couleur des draps* was intended, at least in part, as a pastiche of this earlier work. Curiously, despite his regular Saturday-afternoon visits to Dutel's bookshop, where he was a neighbour, Cau had never mentioned the existence of the book.

AVANT–PROPOS

I had decided to keep a regular diary for five years. Yet here I am, having filled my first notebook — a hundred and fifty pages, and I write in a large hand — and I think I have nothing more to say.

My life is quite simple: the days are bright, the nights dark (though sometimes it's the other way round). I'm not a complicated person. This notebook has helped me realise that living is within anyone's reach.

The questions a young girl asks herself fall into two categories:

— "Horizontal" questions;

— "Vertical" questions.

As I wrote, I came to realise that vertical questions vanish as soon as you lie down, while horizontal questions lose all meaning the moment you jump out of bed. Pride makes us pretend not to know that life has an answer to everything, and that we are of no importance, whatever position we happen to be in.

I have no literary talent. "Writers" are as talkative, conceited and cowardly as spoilt rich kids. They deserve a spanking for making life so unnecessarily complicated. Poets most of all, with their habit of scooping out our brains and putting a cloud in their place.

I have no psychological insight. Psychology forgets that we have skin and bones, and that beneath the skin and over the bones there is flesh.

I'm publishing this notebook for no particular reason. I shall change nothing, and I want nothing changed. Let my sisters in womanhood go on sculpting their Gods out of butter and leaping out of their own shadows! As for me, I've understood.

JEANNE D'ASTURIE

1 March. — Yesterday, Saturday, I went dancing at La Coupole. I love dancing, though it makes me feel a little disgusted with myself. A skinny blond man asked me to dance a rumba. I'm always a little wary of rumbas, but he didn't look like a dirty old man. After one turn around the floor, I felt his member, hard and enormous, through his lightweight trousers. The skinny fellow was getting excited, pressing me close against him. His arm slid down my back to the top of my bottom. He thrust his belly forward, pushing against me. I said nothing; I preferred to play dead, to pretend I hadn't noticed a thing. I felt sorry for him. He was sweating. He made sure to stay in the middle of the floor, so that neither the people sitting around it nor the orchestra would notice him. He tried to press his cheek against mine. I tilted my head to the left to stop him. When the band struck up a samba for the third dance, he really let himself go. "Let's dance a samba," he said. Our legs crossed, our bodies bent in opposite directions, while our bellies alone remained pressed together. He was sweating more and more. I stayed limp and lifeless, like a puppet. Then, all of a sudden, he went at it faster, shamelessly, without the slightest restraint, like a madman. I could feel him growing bigger, harder, and his steps grew erratic. He was there. I looked at his face. He was very pale, but his expression never changed. Tiny beads of sweat gathered at his hairline and on the shiny, freshly shaved skin of his chin. Gradually, I could no longer feel him down below. The heat subsided. He went back to dancing properly, though every now and then he still made some daring move, either to make me think nothing had happened or, out of sheer kindness, to give me a thrill — or so he must have imagined. He was eager for the dance to end. When it did, I didn't even thank him. I watched him. He went over to sit with two friends and spoke to them in low voices. All three were laughing. He laughed loudest, trying to convince himself he'd accomplished something extraordinary.

What a triumph! I'd have loved to see what a state he was in down below, the idiot! I can just imagine what he was telling his mates: "Another one who loves being rubbed up against, but won't move her backside a single inch. Filthy little pervert! Hypocrite! Miss Goody Two-shoes!"

The next dance was a tango. A fat man asked me to dance. I accepted. He was a tender soul, as all fat men are. Still supple, he had certainly been a very good dancer when he was young. By the second

time round, we were cheek to cheek. I went on dancing simply to see the expression on the face of the skinny man from the rumba. When we passed him, he gave me a sickly smile. I remained impassive. He was furious. After the tango came a swing. I never venture onto the floor for a swing. I'm afraid of making a fool of myself, and I'm no longer young enough to execute its short, hurried steps, sending my dresses and hair flying.

The dances alternate in the following order: swing, tango, swing, tango, rumba, swing, and so on. When the second tango ends, in the interval before the rumba, the men pick out the girl they would like to ask to dance. They turn, get to their feet, and invite her from a distance with gestures, for fear of being forestalled. Red lights. The drummer launches into his first tam-tams. The Negro shakes his gourds with the most conspiratorial of smiles, while another scrapes two pieces of wood together in such a peculiar way that I feel a chill in my stomach, as herds of ants crawl up my legs towards the fur coat I love so much. The men rush forward, jostle one another, and three of them ask the same girl to dance. She chooses the one she likes best and tells the others, "Excuse me, I'd already promised." A friend of the perverted skinny man asks me to dance. I refuse him curtly, without explanation, and dance with the first man who comes along, a dark-haired fellow, the Parisian-Spanish type. I don't much care for men of the Parisian-Spanish type. They lie, talk too much, behave improperly while giving no sign of it, and get girls into bed by roundabout means: alcohol, drives in the car, surprise parties, and so on and so forth.

To top it all, they're greasy, emotionally complicated, nervous, spiteful, and more boastful than other men about the girls they've managed to get into bed.

Saturday, 7 March. — At a table next to mine, two young men, about seventeen or eighteen. Excitable little office clerks who dress up once a week. Hair plastered with brilliantine, ties in the latest printed designs, broke and condemned to orangeade. When it comes to sex, naturally, they're both perverted and clumsy. I heard one of them say, pointing to a dreamy-looking redhead sitting in front of her glass of Perrier: "That one, you see, she's a little slut. I'll dance a rumba with her, and I bet you she'll go to the ladies' afterwards." The other laughed. "Braggart!" he retorted to his friend. They bet a packet of

Gauloises. The girl went to the ladies'. The little fellow must have been damn good. If he'd been my size, I'd have gladly put his expertise to the test, but he barely came up to my shoulder.

I forgot to mention, apropos of the "Parisian Spaniards", that they're often ill.

17 March. – A visit to Robert. Making love. When it's over, I say:

"That was delicious, de-li-cious."

He mimics my voice and replies:

"That was marvellous, mar-vellous!"

18 March. – Every morning I wash with cold water. To dry myself, I use no towel, just a few physical exercises.

I keep my body firm and maintain excellent physical condition. A stubborn cold last winter did not deter me. Every morning, and again each evening when I undress, I look at myself in the mirror. I find myself beautiful. My body is flawless. The triangle of hair is neat, black, and thick. My breasts are high and firm. Not a hair on my legs. Not a blemish. My belly is flat. I draw it in, and the hair comes alive, rippling like a beast. The result is that, especially in the evening, after posing, admiring myself and caressing myself, I become aroused all on my own. The cold sheets calm me down. In extreme cases, I give myself an enema. The effect is sudden but temporary. Some days, indeed, my excitement is so intense that I experience a half-spasm as soon as the nozzle enters my vagina. It feels so good that I shamefully delay squeezing the bulb. The presence of the nozzle and the fearful anticipation of the jet of cold water that would put an end to my bliss; the pleasure itself, and the possibility—requiring only a squeeze of the bulb—of bringing that bliss to an abrupt end: all this makes for a moment of absolute perfection. Shamefully, yes, I masturbate with the nozzle, until the moment when, half unconscious, I crush the bulb in my hand or between my thighs and come to, drenched, grotesque on my bidet, shattered, shattered.

20 March. – Making love exhausts me and makes me want to eat. Anything at all. If I made love more than three times a week, I'm sure I'd put on weight. It's disgusting. Robert eats after making love, too, lumps of sugar. He stuffs four or five into his mouth, and the sugar crunches between his teeth. I feel as though the noise must wake all

the neighbours on the landing. In a restaurant or café, whenever I see someone eating sugar, I feel like laughing. I'm silly, but I find it obscene. It almost turns me on. I must be terribly hot-blooded.

21 March. – Robert. I ask him, "What are other women like when it comes to making love? Like me?"

"No, less passionate. You, during those ten seconds"—he searches for a word, his expression serious—"at the peak, the summit, you know, you're like a madwoman. You frighten me. You writhe, you go pale, with two red spots on your cheekbones, you buck like mad at the bottom of the bed. I'm frightened, I swear. I try to calm you down. I talk to you as if you were a runaway horse: 'There, there, easy now, it's nothing, it's nothing.' I stroke you, kiss your hair, your forehead. 'There, there, easy now, feeling better?' I ask in a low voice. Fuck you! It's as if I were talking to a snake cut in half."

"And you, aren't you mad?"

"Not in the same way. It doesn't last as long. Three, five seconds. And I don't yell or thrash about."

"You grunt, you weigh me down, and you want to put your hands everywhere at once."

"And your belly! It hollows out, the muscles tighten, just as you raise your arse as if you wanted to gobble me up, bite it off."

I'm ashamed.

"Don't talk like that."

"I'm not saying anything bad. Since we do it, why shouldn't I talk about it? Since everyone does it."

"The words you use are filthy."

"And the bidet isn't filthy when you're having your period—"

I put my hands over my ears. I stop listening.

I start humming and laughing to prevent him from going on.

Yet Robert isn't a pervert. He doesn't ask for complicated positions. But he plunges straight into things, with his words. He illuminates everything, and his light burns your eyes. He hates shadows.

"You women like darkness," he says. "You're all perverts."

He's the one who got me accustomed to making love whenever we feel like it, at any hour of the day. In the afternoon, without drawing

the curtains; in the morning; and at night, with the lights on. At first it embarrassed me, prevented me from giving myself completely. Now I've grown used to it. The light no longer bothers me; quite the opposite. I like seeing him on top of me, his hair tousled, his expression growing increasingly distraught, his eyes opening wide or narrowing as if he were bracing himself for blows, his shirt rucked up in a roll beneath his chin.

He's the one who got me accustomed to walking about the room naked, washing myself in front of him, dressing in front of him. At first I was self-conscious. I avoided turning my back to him, because of my bottom, and watched him in the mirrors.

"You'll love me less if you see me when I'm—"

"Of course not," he replies. "You're so beautiful and so well made that your movements can't spoil you. You can spread your legs to dry yourself, sit on the washbasin; it's never disgusting, because you immediately become perfect again. I can't remember it. Your body is never vulgar. It doesn't stink, it isn't dirty, it isn't misshapen. And it's supple, firm; it doesn't go off on its own to indulge in filthy postures behind your back. Even when I see you from behind, I can tell it belongs to you. There are girls who, when they're naked and show you their arses, immediately give you the impression that they drag them around like some unnecessary burden. You can't see what they're for. It doesn't matter whether they're big, small, pert or drooping. They have an arse that serves no purpose, and useless, for a body, means ugly, do you understand? Like some gigantic wart, that arse, completely useless. Yours is fine. It's modest, in its proper place. Neither proud nor ashamed. A woman's arse is the most perilous part of her body. Beautiful or horrible, there's no middle ground. Breasts can be more or less firm, a waist more or less slender. But the arse is either a marvel or an atrocity. No allowances. You either love it or hate it."

"You love mine."

"Yes, you know that perfectly well. We men get nasty surprises. You see an arse in the street, beneath a dress. It moves, it's cute, it's alive. Good, you say to yourself. You look at the rest: legs, face, breasts. Good! You approach the girl, cinema, and so on. One day, the bed, the body, the arse. Disaster. She's nothing but an arse, and nothing

else. What can you do? She can get dressed again, put on her make-up, have hair down to here—it's over! You never forget."

Robert jumps out of bed, tears off his shirt, and pisses in the wash-basin without a trace of modesty. He washes his prick, examines it, shakes it, and dries it carefully. "Perfect," he says. I watch him. He smiles, lights a cigarette, and slips back into bed. I lay my hand on his prick. It's cold and limp.

"Oh, Robert, you're not beautiful."

"What you like in a man is his hardness, eh?"

We laugh.

"When I'm hard, am I beautiful?"

"Yes."

22 March. – Robert caresses me, kisses me. He wets his thumb and forefinger and toys with the tips of my breasts. Delicious. He kisses me under the arms. I lie still, wanting to scream. He pinches my hips, belly and legs at lightning speed, in little sharp jabs. He scratches at the hair with his fingernails.

"You're wasting your time. I don't want to."

"I know, but it amuses me. Spread your legs a little so I can check."

"No."

He spreads my legs, rummages in the hair. And he smiles at me, looking at me with a roguish, conspiratorial expression. Then he pulls his hand out from under the sheets and holds it aloft.

"Liar!" He kisses me. "Try lying now!"

"The truth! The truth!" He raises his forefinger, which I refuse to look at. "There's the truth!" I hide my face and burst out laughing—of two mouths, there's always one that tells the truth. He presses his thumb and forefinger tightly together, then slowly separates them. "Fig milk. The truth!"

Then he takes me.

Another game:

He examines the forefinger he has just slipped inside me and says, in a falsely serious, thoroughly convinced tone, "Indeed, nothing, zero, absolutely nothing. "Strange, curious how insensitive you are today. Let's see, let's see." He slips his finger in again, as attentive as a doctor.

(I'm wet, it's unbelievable.) "Nothing, zero! All right, all right! In that case, I'm going to sleep." He kisses my forehead, fatherly, and turns his back on me. Soon he pretends to be asleep. His breathing is deliberately regular. We play at seeing who can hold out the longest. I almost always give in first; he's quite capable of falling asleep for real. I press myself against his back, push, fit myself against him, slide my hand under his shirt, unhurriedly, and stop right on his prick. I squeeze it with a gentle pressure. It swells, swells, swells... "Gently," I say, and then, as if talking to myself, "Well, well, how curious, how strange! He gets hard in his sleep. He must be dreaming of women. He's cheating on me in his sleep." At last, he turns over, without a word, opens my legs with three or four sure, automatic thrusts of his knees, takes me, still without a word, until, excited, he whispers in my ear, "Eh? You little minx, that's what you wanted, isn't it? Here you are, take that, here you are!" And he repeats, "Here you are, take that!" until our moans and grunts fall into rhythm.

24 March. – Robert: Immediately after making love, his prick limp but still inside me, he smiles at me. "Hello, darling, how are you?" I inevitably reply, "Hello, how are you?" And we have returned from a long journey, forgotten everything, and are getting to know each other all over again.

26 March. – Do the prick and the two balls that men carry between their thighs get in the way when they walk? And what if the prick (Robert calls it a cock) gets hard in the street, or on the Underground? I'll ask Robert.

30 March. – Robert: "No, it doesn't get in the way. First of all, it isn't between the legs, it's at the bottom of the belly. Secondly, when we get hard, the cock sticks up, and our underpants hold it against the belly. I'll show you. One day you'll touch me on the Underground."

"No."

"Why not?"

"You're a filthy bastard."

"Yes, you like sugar, provided you take it with a pair of tongs. What if I deprived you of sugar?"

"You're not the only one."

"Go ahead, then. I'm not stopping you. You're not the only one either."

As always, the quarrel ends in bed.

"You women are hypocrites."

"Oh?"

"Yes."

"Oh?"

"Your thing"—Robert points his forefinger at my private parts—"your triangle..."

"Well?"

"We run our hands over it, confidently, we scratch and all of a sudden, wham! We plunge inside. There was a trapdoor, a trap. We're caught. It grips, it sticks... Bitches! And to find out whether you want it, we have to go in with a finger, search, rummage around. We have no hesitation, no camouflage. You can see it, feel it, touch it directly, without having to conduct a search."

I'd like to argue with him, but, after all, isn't he right? We women keep everything hidden away in our cellars. I don't know whether that's hypocrisy. That's just how it is. Men are frank, to the point of brutality. They lie, of course, but their bodies are honest. When a woman disgusts them, when they don't desire her, how can they conceal that disgust or lack of desire in bed? (I can manage it, Robert says, thinking of someone else, but only once. And even then! All it takes is for me to open my eyes, and if the girl's face turns my stomach, I'm as good as castrated; I retreat at full speed. Besides, it hasn't happened often, only once or twice. I'd been deceived by the lighting in a dance hall or by a little alcohol. When you're in the girl's bedroom, you're in a fucking awkward position! All you want to do is get the hell out. You'd rather break stones than get down to that sort of work. And, naturally, as luck would have it, the girl turns out to be a volcano. We're martyrs!) A woman can easily conceal her feelings, feign pleasure, raise her bottom, even with an old man or a husband. That enables many of us to live as kept women or as whores...

2 April. – A man sitting opposite me on the bus. Thirty, good-looking. His eyes never leave my face. He tries to position his leg against mine, or at least his foot. I put up with it. He gets all worked

up. You'd think he was sitting on a bed of nails. His knee keeps pressing insistently, asking a question: "Why won't you look at me? Why is your knee made of stone?" I'd bet he'll try to pick me up when we get off. I'm thirsty, and I'd tolerate him buying me an aperitif. His scarf has come undone, revealing a thin gold chain around his neck, holding a medal of the Virgin Mary. And I can't stand men who wear delicate jewellery, especially chains around their necks. I immediately took a dislike to him. When his knee asked the question for the tenth time, I pursed my lips and gave a sharp shrug, without looking at the bloke. He got the message. At the next stop, he got off. All those religious bastards dressed up with chains and medals are either arseholes or idiots. Disgusting! Disgusting!

When I wear my fur coat and boots, I take care over my make-up and hairstyle. There's a violent contrast between the beast, all leather and fur, and the head that emerges from it, upright, perfumed, painted, immaculate. I'm sure it turns men on.

3 April.

Me: Robert, I'm bursting with love.

Robert: You mean you want to fuck.

Robert isn't the sentimental type. He distrusts tears, languishing glances, hands that linger too long. He never sighs. I even think he makes a bit of an effort to play the man. He admires Jean Gabin, George Raft, tough guys in general, and tries to imitate them, to talk their kind of slang. He is both proud and ashamed of being an intellectual. Broad shoulders, squat faces, big fists impress him. In his bedroom, on the wall above his bed, he has nailed up a portrait of Al Capone. He uses a switchblade to cut open books and spread butter on bread. He knows his act is an act, but he plays it anyway. And from time to time, he reverts to being an intellectual. He comes up with complicated sentences, uses unexpected words, talks in elevated language, discusses politics and philosophy. When he is convinced that he has thrown me off balance, that I can no longer make head or tail of what he is saying, he stops, satisfied, and follows up with a story whose vulgarity makes up for its lack of humour, or with a few nonsensical remarks on some random subject. At that point, his happiness is complete, because he thinks I'm completely at sea, as he puts it.

There are plenty of these intellectuals who don't wash properly. Why are they ashamed of being intellectuals? Why this love of big fists, of hard knocks? They despise books and are always carrying one under their arms. They run down literature and spend all day writing it. They seek out the unexpected, the violent, the vulgar because they hope to experience it without quite getting mixed up in it. Deep down, it disgusts them and frightens them. So, they go to the cinema or form little cliques where a tough-guy manner and street slang are compulsory.

They frequent the places in Paris reputed to be rough and disreputable. Naturally, since everybody knows about these places, the real tough customers never set foot in them, and the intellectuals find themselves among other intellectuals, or a few moneyed types, a few Americans doing research into "the underworld".

Robert, I think, knows all this. But if he stopped playing at being a tough guy, he knows he would be nothing more than a wishy-washy intellectual.

4 April. – Things that turn me on: Riding a bicycle in summer. When I'm in heat, the saddle! Oh, the saddle!

One day I rode a man's racing bicycle. They have long, narrow, hard saddles. If the hills hadn't been there from time to time to bring me back to my senses—the fatigue cut me off, as Robert would say—I'd have had to stop behind a tree, in the hollow of a ditch. I couldn't reach the pedals properly, and each time I had to swing my hips from side to side to complete a full turn. This movement chafed my crotch and...

Things that turn me on: Horseback riding. It happened to me once—so good, so good that I wanted the horse. I wrapped both arms around its neck and kissed it as if it were a man.

Things that turn me on: An elevator starting up, powerfully, and going up, up. I get shivers that sear my legs and don't stop until the cage comes smoothly to a halt.

Things that turn me on: This one is more troublesome. Here goes. When I'm sad or unhappy, I feel like praying. I believe in God. Oh, I know, I only turn to Him when things go to hell, but I believe in Him. I go into a church. I love the coolness and the quiet, especially in the afternoon, when the nave is deserted and the altar empty. Now and

then a sacristan, a pale seminarian, or a devout old woman slips furtively past. The silence is absolute. A cough, a chair scraping, muffled footsteps: these sounds are swallowed by the silence as soon as they are born. I kneel, take my head in my hands, and pray. But soon the smell of incense, faded flowers, burnt or still-warm wax, incense above all, fills me with a guilty sense of well-being. I can no longer get back to my prayer. I feel good. On certain summer days, these smells, this coolness, my breasts barely covered as I pressed them against the back of the chair I was kneeling on, this immense quiet, like a sleeping body—I have almost experienced complete spasms. Then I would hurry out and plunge my whole hand into the cold water of the holy-water stoup. I felt a little better as soon as the sunshine, the daylight and the melting faces of passers-by welcomed me at the door.

Robert doesn't have favourite places for caresses, as I do. I like him to kiss my eyes, the hollows of my shoulders, the tops of my breasts, where a woman's skin is at its whitest and silkiest. He, on the other hand, likes caresses with his whole body.

We are more sensitive to caresses than men. They want to fuck, above all.

Once they've finished, they'd go off and play belote if we didn't keep them with us. In bed, they tire more quickly than we do. After six rounds at most, they fall asleep, exhausted. That's when women triumph.

We watch them sleeping. We are victorious. They have worn themselves out on us, covering us with their bodies, pinning us down with their hands; they seem to be our masters. But they collapse, they fall asleep. I listen to Robert sleeping. He doesn't dream, he doesn't move. He's spent. I feel sorry for him—it's curious, why? I admire him: his indifference when he's had his fill, his contempt for my body, his insensitivity have something grand about them. He despises me as a master despises his servant. Yes, but he falls asleep, weak and defenceless. I lie beside him, eyes open, my flesh at peace but never satisfied. I think. Our superiority over men comes from the fact that we fall asleep after they do. And in that moment after making love, we think clearly, precisely because our bodies, at peace, no longer get in our way, and because the sleeping man beside us reminds us that he, and he alone, is the one we must think about. Your job, Robert's body tells me, is

to think about Robert. And our thoughts are more precise, clearer. Love makes them heavier and sharper. How many women make serious decisions after making love, lying beside their snoring men? How many devise stratagems and concoct lies to defeat this pitiful wrestler? Morning comes, and everything is forgotten. But watch out for those who remember: they're dangerous!

8 April. – I visited my sister today. We talked for a long time. What a story she told me! We had got round to confiding in each other, and were talking about love. With some hesitation, she admitted that she had never had an orgasm with Georges, my brother-in-law.

"He doesn't know how? Is he clumsy?"

"Not at all! He's skilful; he gets me going. No good. I don't come. I've never come once since I got married."

She then told me that she'd had a lover for the past three months, a foreman at the Renault factories, thirty years old and very handsome. She'd taken a liking to the fellow and had slept with him to please him.

"And would you believe it, I came like a madwoman, for the first time in my life? And it's still happening now, and it's the same every time. But with Georges, still nothing, nothing. How do you explain that?"

"You don't love Georges."

"Of course I do! I adored him when I married him. Do you think it isn't a bloody tragedy to discover love at thirty-eight? Twenty years wasted! But I'm making up for lost time, you know. I'm going at it twice as hard, three times as hard!"

"Is he your first lover?"

"Yes, and I want to keep him. What if he's the only man I can come with?"

She gets herself so worked up that she makes me want to have a go at her foreman myself. If Robert turns up tonight, he's going to get an earful!

14 April. – A virgin's no fun. I won't make that mistake again.

17 April. – When he enters me – and his entry is always accompanied by pain, and something like disappointment – I say, "No! No!" And even when I'm well prepared, this monstrous "occupation", so certain, so complete, fills me with revulsion for a few seconds. Then, little by little, little by little, I slowly open up. I think of the two leaves

of an immense door of wood and iron swinging open, and soon there is the city, and joy in the city. And it's me who wants it. It's me who holds him there, both hands on his arse, pressing him against me, pushing him deeper inside. I wish he could pass right through me, go deeper, further still, leave nothing untouched. And I utter obscene words, I beg, I ask forgiveness.

"Why do you ask forgiveness while we're fucking?"

"Because I didn't want you enough beforehand."

"That's normal. I enjoy it more, too, once I'm inside you."

"It's not the same. For three or four seconds, I hate you."

"Why do you hate me?"

"I don't know. Don't you hate me at a certain point?"

"No, I resent you."

"Before or after? For me, it's before."

"Afterwards, for me. When you wash yourself and I think you're washing because of that, because of me, I feel ridiculous. And I despise you a little for so readily agreeing to help me indulge my filthy appetites. Do you understand?"

"Your filthy appetites?"

"Yes. I don't actually think of the word, all right, but that's the impression I get. The feeling of having done something filthy. There are women who aren't forgiven for that."

"Do you forgive me?"

"Yes, of course! But God, you can feel such a bloody fool! Take this, for example: when I've come and you haven't had your fill yet, when I finish a few seconds before you and have to keep moving, out of kindness, as though I were still... And I think to myself, 'For God's sake, hurry up and come! I hope I don't go soft all at once! I hope she doesn't notice!'"

"You needn't worry about that. At that point, I don't know where I am."

"Yes, and I feel like a fool and a bastard. Your movements seem out of place, in bad taste. My presence is unnecessary. You could have a carrot cleverly inserted and never know the difference. At that point, I'm a voyeur."

"You're exaggerating. I've tried carrots. It's not the same."

19 April. – Robert. He lets out a howl and pulls away.

"What? What's happening?" I ask, frightened.

"I don't know. It hurts. I've torn it. Fuck! It's bleeding!"

He gets up and examines his cock. I examine it too. It's covered in blood.

"What is it?"

"Right! I see. I've torn my frenulum, the little cord."

He explains:

"Here, look. See that?"

"Yes."

"That's the frenulum, the little cord. It's what pulls the glans back inside the skin, into its sheath."

"So?"

"So it's torn!"

"Won't we be able to do it any more? … Is it serious?"

"No. I'll go to the doctor and have him remove what's left."

"Will it hurt?"

"He'll numb my cock. It happened to a mate of mine."

We carry on examining it. He keeps repeating, "Shit! Shit!" Blood turns me on, and I'm dismayed.

20 April. – The operation went well. Robert explains to me that Jews don't have a sheath (it's called the foreskin) because they're circumcised. Advantages: The cock is always cleaner, less vulnerable to germs. Disadvantage: It's less sensitive. Jews take longer to come. Hence the demands, complications and oddities. I'd like to see a Jewish cock. I'd never have suspected that a man could still come after a piece of his cock had been cut off. Robert assured me—and proved to me—that he still had his foreskin. Perfect. It would have bothered me..

23 April. – I was a little pervert when I was small. I used to put sugar or jam on my pussy, and Tuk-Tuk, our wolfhound, would lick it. If Mummy had caught me, what a beating I'd have got! I also used condensed milk for Pépito, the cat. And he was greedy. He'd lick right

to the end. I was rather fond of Pépito; he seemed to understand. Tuk-Tuk was too rough.

Tuk-Tuk and Pépito, my first lovers! Actually, I lost my virginity at eighteen. He was twenty-two. It hurt terribly. I remember: the bed was made of iron. I got myself so thoroughly tangled up that I put my head between the bars; and while he was penetrating me, I was being strangled, my head hanging over the edge of the bed.

The poor fellow pulled out, terrified. I was screaming, crying, bleeding, and I couldn't get my head free because of my ears. He spread the bars apart. I got dressed, red-faced and silent. I left, consumed with shame and sobs. I never saw him again. For two years, I didn't make love. I'd been penetrated, but I was still a virgin. He hadn't come, so much was I crying and screaming.

At twenty, I met Louis B... Thirty-eight. I liked him. He had good manners and experience; his age inspired confidence, and I loved him. He was clean and discreet. In bed, always clean and discreet. No cries, no grunts. Silent pleasure, very much the grand seigneur. Deep down, I prefer Robert; things are more athletic with him. Eight months of love with Louis B... He was punctual for our meetings, considerate, never irritable. We went to bed as we might go to a restaurant. He fucked conscientiously, without haste or roughness. I remember my astonishment the day I saw his cock, red and erect, standing stiff. I burst out laughing.

"You too? You're like that? No way!"

"Of course I am, my dear." And he quickly turned away to switch off the light and get into bed.

From that day on, I was much less interested in him. He got hard, he did, the refined gentleman, the grand seigneur! Such insolence! Such hypocrisy!

25 April. – Robert is getting better. They've removed his dressing.

When you see a couple in the street—a serious-looking man and a woman trotting along beside him, talking and smiling at each other—it's difficult to imagine that same couple riding each other and panting amid all the slobber and sticky mess. They look so pure, so completely unacquainted with such things! And a dance! What a lie! A hundred blokes with only one thing on their minds: getting their cocks inside.

A hundred women with only one desire: to rub themselves as much as possible. Good God! What a pretty picture! Of course, among the women, a few are as cold as coffins. They're looking for a husband or some bloke with money to pay for the cinema, restaurants, theatre, and so on. Bitches!

27 April. – When I was little, Annie once told me that men's cocks were as big as this. And she showed me a policeman's white truncheon. For months, I lay awake worrying about it. I was convinced there was something wrong with me. Annie kept assuring me that I'd grow wider as I got older, but I was no less worried. Nobody would ever be able to get inside me, I thought. Every day, I felt myself to see if I was getting any bigger. Not a fraction. And if it did get bigger, dust would get in, and what a horrible hole it would be! For three or four years, whenever I thought about what men had inside their flies, I pictured a policeman's white truncheon.

28 April. – Robert is fully recovered. His cock is working perfectly.

1 May. – Robert: "Have you ever been in love with a woman?"

"When I go to bed with Lucienne, we caress each other, kiss each other, press our breasts together."

"Slut."

"Why?"

"What would you say if I caressed Michel, kissed him, and … and so on?"

"That's different."

"Exactly! Different, different! You women allow yourselves every kind of filthy behaviour, shouting all the while, 'It's different!' The result? Only men are bastards! Is that all you do?"

"Yes."

"Liar!"

7 May. – Does Robert love me? Do I love him? I love the way he smokes, the way he shaves, the way he bounds up the stairs. Little things he does, things no one else does quite like him, and which I love simply because they're his. His words, his stories, his voice, his anger, his laughter: I love them all because they're his. But strip all that away—all the words, the laughter, the anger, the gestures—and what's

left? Where is Robert? And yet love is something you can't escape. I want him beside me, under my thumb. But why him?

8 May. – "You're playing with fire, sweetheart. First of all, whether you love me or don't love me—those aren't questions you should be asking. If a bloke spends a year with a girl without shaving, there's something there. What? I haven't a clue. If you ask him, 'Do you love me?', he'll start wondering himself, racking his brains, and eventually tell you yes or no. I'll tell you one thing: if he starts asking himself that question, then 'the feeling he has for you', as you put it, is already distorted, precisely because it's been called into question. If it exists, wondering whether it exists is to doubt it, to destroy it a little already, to entertain the possibility that it might not be there. If it doesn't exist, you'll find out soon enough. In any case, your questions won't bring it into being.

"I don't understand." (And I really don't.) "What if I love you, Robert?"

He shrugged, as though I'd just said something utterly absurd.

"If you love me? What does that mean?"

"That I'm happy with you, that I feel you're close to me even when you're at work or away on a trip."

"For fuck's sake! Why do you call that Love?"

"What else should I call it?"

"Don't call it anything, for God's sake! Don't give it a name! You women have this obsession with putting a label on everything. Or rather, you've got a handful of labels—Love, Happiness, Jealousy, Suffering, and so on—and that's all you have to work with. You give each one a precise meaning and say, 'That's happiness! That's love!' As if you knew what any of it was! And all the time you're looking for situations in which you can tell yourselves you're happy! Desperate! Jealous! You manufacture adventures for yourselves. You go through life the way you go to the theatre: depending on your mood, you treat yourselves to a comedy or a blood-soaked tragedy, and you shed real tears over it! Do you realise that?"

"No! We let things happen to us. You men…"

"Shit, I've had enough. Men, women—what does that even mean? There's you, there's me, we're happy together. That's enough. Don't

try to understand it. It's too complicated, or too simple. Men, women! Just look at them. They're all over the streets. Every last one of them has passions to spare!

"But, Robert…"

"But what, Robert? Don't look at me like that, for Christ's sake! Am I right or not?"

"You're an intellectual. You've thought so much that you've dried up inside. You've worked so hard at refining your sensibility that you've killed it. Or perhaps it's the opposite: you're too sensitive, and you hide it."

"And you don't hide the fact that you're off your rocker, do you? An intellectual, my sensibility! If there's a war tomorrow, your intellectual will be stuffed into a plane or a tank, and my sensibility will be killing men without shedding a tear."

"That's not the point."

"What is the point, then?"

"Finding out what you are."

"But I haven't a clue, for God's sake! I haven't a clue. I do my job, and you're my little girl. Some days I'm a bastard, other days I'm as good as gold. That's all."

"You're a bastard?"

"Of course I am, like everyone else. I keep an eye on myself, try not to be one more than I have to. So, you see, it's a matter of keeping yourself in check."

"So if I tell you I love you, you won't believe me?"

"What's got into you today? What's this crisis? Of course I'd believe you! And if I asked you to explain your Love, we'd be in for a fine old time!"

"It can't be explained!"

"Fine. Then let's say no more about it."

We went to the cinema. Robert wouldn't give in, and, willy-nilly, I had to watch *Hellzapoppin'*.[3]

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[3] *Hellzapoppin'*. A 1941 American musical comedy film directed by H. C. Potter. (*Translators' note.*)

10 May. – Robert, stark naked: "What if I cut them off with a razor? I wouldn't give much for your Love then."

"I'd still love you!"

"You little pervert!"

12 May. – He's right. Love and sex are inseparable.

15 May. – "What do you love about me?" I ask him.

"Your handbag."

"Idiot! Give me a proper answer!"

"All right, then: I love your soul and your body. There you are!"

"Especially the body, eh?"

"The whole package. And you're always asking questions, like a kid!"

"And you're always wriggling out of answering them."

"I'm not wriggling out of anything, but you wear me out. If you were beautiful but stupid, you'd be a big fat zero. If you were intelligent but ugly, you'd be out fishing. If you weren't so exhausting, I'd adore you."

17 May. – Love.

"Say, when did you last have your period?"

"Fifteen days ago!"

"Christ! And there I was, not wearing a hat! We've made a baby! You're bang in your fertile period, you old girl."

"I'm going to wash."

The bidet. A small bar of Palmolive soap, rather worn down. I rub myself with it, holding the soap by one end, pushing it inside and rubbing. And then, all of a sudden:

"Robert?"

"What?"

"I've lost the soap."

"Where?"

"Inside. It slipped through my fingers like a fish."

He bursts out laughing. I laugh too. He leaps onto the bed, choking with laughter, and delivers enormous slaps to the pillow.

"Impossible! Impossible!"

"But it's true. It slipped out of my hand. Look, I can feel it with my fingertip."

I try to get it out. No luck. I scrape off little shavings of soap with my fingernails. After five minutes of struggling, I'm in pain; my fingers are slightly stained with blood, and it stings. I'm almost in tears.

"Robert, you've got long fingers. Try."

He stops laughing and says, quite seriously:

"We'd need a pair of sugar tongs."

Neither of us is laughing now. He tries. No luck. I get dressed, thoroughly distressed.

"Where are you going?"

"To my sister's. She has a pair of tongs."

"Go see a quack."

"No."

Out in the street, the soap doesn't bother me when I walk. Perhaps it's melted. Then, suddenly, I feel it: it's come out, and it's in my knickers. I walk carefully, keeping my legs pressed together, towards the nearest café. I'd die of shame if it fell onto the pavement, all slimy and bloody. In the washroom, I breathe a sigh of relief.

I took the soap back to Robert. It belonged to him, after all. A little smaller than before, of course.

20 May. – At La Coupole last night. A way of cheating on Robert without quite going the whole way. I'm sure he cheats on me now and then. He's always looking at other women in the street, even when he's with me. "Just comparing them with you," he says.

22 May. – There are days when I'm fed up with being submissive, fed up with my breasts, with my fur. I envy men. Their simplicity, their self-assurance. We're such poor, pitiful creatures. If they understood that, they'd forgive us our coquetry, our artifices, our lies.

We have only one weapon: our weakness; only one attraction: our charm—that is, our bodies and the way we carry ourselves. They don't have to train their bodies; we love them just as they are. I've seen very beautiful girls fall for ugly men with badly made bodies, but rarely have

I seen very handsome men fall for ugly women with badly made bodies. But if only they knew how tedious this business, these gymnastics, can sometimes be. They're comfortable in their simple, straight-cut clothes, in trousers that conceal their legs—which are generally so ugly—in shirts and ties that hide their thin necks, and in their plain hats. We, on the other hand, are obliged to parade through the streets like offerings. Our legs are scrutinised, our breasts weighed up, our waists measured. A thousand eyes undress us; out on the boulevard, I feel like prey. All my clothes and jewellery, all the strange, sumptuous trappings of a woman, both protect me and leave me vulnerable.

The more chic a woman is, the more she seems untouchable, fragile in her inaccessibility. I pity those elegant women smothered in jewellery and coats like a donkey laden with relics. How ridiculous they must look when they undress under the disappointed gaze of a lover, watching gold and fabric fall away one by one to reveal a bony frame or a slab of lard dressed up as a woman! What a let-down for the poor bloke who realises too late that he hasn't got a woman at all, but some kind of vehicle covered in cloth and glitter. Tulle can't keep a lover for more than a fortnight. I'm convinced it's because every time she makes love, she takes off her false chignon before the operation. I certainly shan't warn her, because she's stupid and vain. Men love a body and a face. When they see a woman passing, they say, "She's beautiful!" We, when we see a man, are more attracted by his bearing, his manner. We say, "He's a fine-looking man."

24 May. – A dream last night. A train was disappearing into the night, and at the back, attached to the last carriage, a huge red light was glowing. I could see nothing but that red light. I couldn't hear the wheels. I was terribly hot. I tell Robert about my dream. He's read a few books on "psychoanalysis".

"That, my girl, means you're troubled in the arse department, and that you prefer doing it doggy-style to…"

"Idiot!"

"Maybe, but it was Freud, Doctor Freud himself, who said so. For a man to have that dream is more serious, you see?"

"Yes."

"I'm warning you, if you dream that your brother, your wine merchant or your tripe seller is chasing you with a big knife and plunging

it into your body without you feeling any pain, and so on, it means you unconsciously desire your brother, your tripe seller. Have you never dreamt anything like that?"

"I don't know. Anyway, one thing I do know, and I can swear to it, is that I don't desire my brother or my shoemaker."

"Now, little girl…"

26 may. – I have to admit, doggy-style is something else. He's on top of me like an animal. Every now and then he gets into position. He kneads my breasts in his hands. They hang down like beautiful white balloons. He squeezes them, caresses them, sometimes roughly, sometimes gently, tenderly. They grow firm, their tips stiffen. He hurts me, and it feels good. I arch my back, raise myself up, almost on my knees, as if in prayer. And there he is, behind me, inside me, thrusting into me, filling me. I pray, and my God or my Devil is there behind me. I crawl along on my knees, trying to get away, but I'm dragging that blissful weight with me too. He holds me back, sets me free, holds me back, sets me free, holds me back even more tightly. My hair falls like rain across my face. I collapse on my stomach. He's still there. I'm nailed to the bed, crucified in my joy. Doggy-style! Doggy-style!

28 May. – I get dressed. Longish skirt, white silk blouse, blue summer jacket. Bare legs, woven raffia sandals. Out I go, feeling happy. I love everybody. If a good-looking boy comes up to me, I'll go off with him. To hell with Robert!

A boy did come up to me. Handsome, too. Good thing I was feeling bold, because he was pretty shy himself. But he got the hint eventually and loosened up.

29 May. – I left him this morning. I swore I'd come back. He'll have a long wait. He got on my nerves for several reasons.

Too tender: Always the same words. Fifteen hours of listening to "Darling, my darling, you're so beautiful! Oh, your eyes, darling, my darling…" Enough to drive anyone mad!

Clumsy: I'm used to Robert's sure touch, his movements both abrupt and gentle, his firm, sweeping caresses, so I was disappointed! Beware of men who are too handsome! They're often clumsy in bed, as though they're afraid of disturbing their own beauty. Then they think

their good looks are enough to delight us. They let themselves be admired, strike charming poses, lie down:

They wait to be caressed. A man of average looks—or even an ugly one—is different. He takes part, he cooperates. He wants to make himself desirable. He wants to turn a woman on. And because he makes the effort, he succeeds, and everyone's happy.

31 May. – Robert and I are pretty good at the "sixty-nine". Robert calls it that, and I could scream! But he grumbles that I don't do my fair share, or complains that I bite him. I neglect my part of the bargain. I'm too busy coming to think about anything else, and once I've come, as his cock gets harder and bigger, I'm afraid he'll suddenly shoot a load of glue into my mouth.

4 June. – Going down on each other isn't easy. Robert taught me how. Before that, I used to bite him, and I was too shy to do anything else.

7 *June.* – Robert: "What puts whores one up on you respectable women is their technique. Unbelievable!"

Their technique! I'm offended. He treats me like some beginner. What secrets do whores have, anyway? I'm sure their famous technique is just a lot of unnecessary fuss. After all, sex is simple enough, and when you've been at it for five years, as I have, you probably know all the basics.

Men adore whores! Or else they run them down. So, you'd be a fool to take them at their word. It's all a ploy. "Me, I can't stand whores. I only go for respectable women." They make you feel so safe and secure that before you know it, you're in bed with them. Or else they go on and on about how wonderful whores are. What technique they have! Another ploy. You want to prove you can do it just as well... And where does it end? In bed! They get what they want without even breaking a sweat, the crafty bastards.

12 June. – I prefer winter to summer. Dresses, coats, hats, stockings, Mary Janes: I feel protected, mysterious, sexy. I put on perfume. Its scent trails behind me in the cold air like a scarf. If a man passes me without noticing me, the scent catches him. He turns, but all he sees is my back. I walk away in little steps, indifferent.

In summer, white skin is obscene. If your whole body isn't tanned, it looks awful. The sweat from my armpits leaves two grey circles under my arms. My hands are clammy. My make-up melts.

In bed, the heat is unbearable. Bellies go squelch, squelch against each other; foreheads and cheeks are wet. Lovers sweat like galley slaves.

"Robert, how can a woman tell if a man loves her?"

"When she farts in bed and the bloke doesn't fuck off."

13 June. – How does it happen? I don't know. But all of a sudden, for an hour, five minutes, even a whole day, I stop loving Robert. He bores me. I find him ugly, stupid. He talks too much; everything he says gets on my nerves, I dislike his gestures, even his voice and his clothes. He's hairy, thin, and smells bad. Then, just as suddenly as I began to hate him, I fall in love with him again. I want him even thinner and hairier, and I ask him to talk to me. And I love him with a love intensified by all my remorse and by the forgiveness he offers me, for he has carried on loving me all along.

Does he really love me, though?

We went to the Bal Nègre last night. A filthy café with a back room. An orchestra of Black musicians perched on a raised platform. Yellow walls decorated with plaster mouldings depicting couples in 1900s costume. The Black man playing the clarinet is handsome and has inexhaustible breath. Lots of Black people and lots of maids. A few smart couples who come here to slum it or to experience something exotic. One rumba follows another. The maids practically wrap themselves around their Black partners, who seem delighted. Their arses wiggle, undulate, roll; their bellies seek out the cock that, I imagine, won't be denied them for long. "They've got very expressive arses," Robert says, "but faces you wouldn't want to wake up next to." I dance with Robert, who complains that my arse is too slow and that I'm not insistent enough with my lower belly.

"You fancy dancing with a Black man?" he asks me.

"Doesn't appeal to me."

"Oh, I'd like to see you dance with a Black man."

"Why?"

"No reason. I'll explain. Next time, I'll pretend I'm going to the bog. A Black man will ask you to dance. That one, for instance. I'm

sure of it." He points out a Black man in his thirties, distinguished-looking, with a sad air about him, who has looked at me five or six times.

Just as Robert predicted, the man asks me to dance. We dance. I don't dislike him, but his skin really is very black, and his hair is tightly curled, like short wool stuck to his scalp.

The poor fellow is just as silly as a white man. If he'd been naïve and shy, and had spoken to me in a friendly, easygoing way, I'd have liked him. But, unfortunately for him, he puts on a white man's act. Robert sits watching me with an ironic smile, never taking his eyes off me. When the rumba ends, I go back to him. He puts his arm around my shoulders.

"So, why did you want me to dance with a Black man?"

"He thought he'd scored, didn't he? Look at him, sulking!"

"So that's why you wanted me to…?"

"Yes."

I shrug. Robert can be downright cruel.

17 June. – Men talk among themselves. They discuss politics, sport, mechanics. Mysterious, profound conversations from which we are excluded. They use complicated words and talk about other men: MPs, footballers, boxers. Nothing is more humiliating for a woman than being present at such discussions. We don't understand a thing; we sit there, silent and motionless. We daren't even cough. They talk and talk, get angry, laugh, drink, explain, contradict one another. We're forgotten. It's the name of some political party leader or footballer that fills their heads. And their conversation is pure: they give the impression of speaking in words that come straight from their minds, their intelligence. When they're with us, by contrast, their words are no longer clear and hard-edged but are always clouded by the presence of lies, by the desire they conceal or reveal. The language men use differs depending on whether they're talking among themselves or in the presence of women.

Oh, we have our own language, too. We talk about dresses, slips, stockings, hats. They—the men—have two advantages over us:

– They're not interested.

– They despise us. "Women's talk!" they say. Yet we can't despise them when they talk about the next war, or even about sport.

It's lucky they have a cock and like to use it. Without that, we'd be fit for nothing but slavery. We have them by the cock.

"Intellectual" women make me sad. They've lost the charm of women, and they'll never have the strength and self-assurance of men! Poor girls! Deep down, they're unhappy; but they're so puffed up with pretension and pent-up pride that it's impossible either to forgive them or to pity them. All their books will never teach them how to possess a man. And for a woman, that's the only thing that matters. Besides, unless they're degenerates, men can't stand intellectual women. They're afraid of them as if they were monsters.

18 June. – Cheating on Robert, incidentally, gives me pleasure. I love him more after I've cheated on him. When he gets the chance, he sleeps with other girls; I know that. But he doesn't know that, when I feel like it, I sleep with a man I fancy. For me, it's a way of proving my independence from Robert.

If I've slept with a man and, leaving his place, go to visit Robert, I feel strong. The misdeed and the lie protect me. That lie stands between Robert and me; it prevents me from being entirely his.

22 June. – At the dressmaker's today, I take off my clothes.

"What's that there? Have you had a fall?" the dressmaker asks me. I look at my shoulder. I'd forgotten about that bite and the love bite Robert gave me. I answer, muddle my words. The dressmaker has understood and says nothing. She's an old maid, and I notice that she avoids touching me as she helps me into my dress. There's a sort of revulsion in her hands and on her face.

When we make love, Robert bites me. Deep bites. And yet I feel nothing when he does it. I'm too carried away by pleasure. I even like it. I don't bite him; I lick his face and gently scratch his back. But making love never renders him insensible to pain. If I dig my nails in, he cries out as if he were being slaughtered. I laugh at him. The slightest drop of blood, the tiniest scratch, a little pimple, a cramp, and he's in a foul mood. "You women feel pain more readily than men, but

that's because you're stupid. Stupid in the literal sense. Because you're like animals."

25 June. – The day after making love, my head feels heavy, my limbs weary, my mouth sad. I'm half-blind, half-deaf, as though submerged in water. Sleep weighs down my eyelids. I collapse into every chair, every armchair. I'm thirsty; the days after making love are long. Robert says, "I'm drained." Today, I'm drained.

27 June. – It rained yesterday, and the weather is a little cool for the time of year. I'm wearing a very lightweight woollen jumper that shows off my breasts beautifully, and a navy-blue canvas jacket. Robert asked me to go out with him wearing just the jumper. I didn't want to, because my nipples stick out and I look very provocative. Robert insisted. I obeyed, but I walked along the street with my shoulders hunched.

Annoyed, Robert said to me, "All right, I get the message. You can put your jacket on."

He wants me to look provocative. He likes me to turn the heads of the men I pass in the street, provided I'm with him.

In the morning, by contrast, when I wash and dress, when I do my hair and put on my make-up before going out, he watches me—or rather, spies on me, his nose buried in the bedclothes, apparently half-asleep but in reality wide awake. In the end, he can't stand it any longer. "Why do you put on your make-up so carefully? Haven't you finished combing your hair yet? Why are you putting on your bra?"

I don't answer. When I'm ready, I kiss him on the forehead. He grumbles, his hair sticking up in all directions, his eyes bleary. "Give me your lips."

"No, you'd rub off my lipstick and smudge it all over my face."

"Fine, fine, off you go!"

He hides his head under the sheets. I kiss the sheet and leave.

28 June. – Twenty-three today. I'm still a young girl, when I could be married and the mother of two or three children. Will I ever marry, and when? Marriage frightens me. Spending every day of my life with the same man—how much patience will I need! He'll grow old, and so will I. We'll be ugly and withered. He'll develop his little habits, his tics, his smells. And there'll be white hair, silences, days and meals

when we'll have nothing to say to each other. And the kids, who'll be lame, blind, perverted, liars, idiots, lazy, little thugs. And one pregnancy after another, my body deformed, my tits ruined, my legs covered in varicose veins, my skin flabby, the pain of childbirth; then the kids bawling in the night, shitting and pissing everywhere, on my dresses, in their knickers. And perhaps there won't be enough money, the husband earning a derisory salary; hungry kids, old dresses patched up, out-of-fashion hats, vulgar stockings for me. What madness! Unless I marry a rich man. The trouble is that rich men are usually idiots and bores.

You dream of a very handsome husband, a luxurious flat, adorable children. What you get is a stupid, insignificant husband, a flat on the eighth floor, degenerate brats. I'll stay single for as long as I can. I'll get married at around thirty-five. In any case, by thirty-five, life won't have many pleasures left to offer me. It'll be the beginning of old age, the first white hairs; I'll have only the remnants of my beauty left. I'll be tired. No more dances where I danced all night, no more making love three or four times a week, no more walks of six or nine miles.

30 June. – What will my life be like when I can no longer make love? Whenever I think about it, a wave of anguish washes over me. I, who feel fully alive, fully happy, only when I'm in bed with a man on top of me. What will become of me? Will I turn into a dirty old woman who seduces fifteen-year-old virgins, or a miserable old grouch full of good advice, moralising and sermons?

Old age is a Chinese torture!

Men pay little attention to it. They generally grow old with dignity. They replace the pleasures of the cock with politics, billiards and business trips. But what about us? What will we have left when we're past fifty or sixty? Religion, kneeling in some cold church, where I'll spend all day churning out prayers, begging God's forgiveness for having made love when I was young and beautiful.

2 July. – I reread the preceding pages. I realise that I am not keeping a proper diary. I record chiefly my reflections, without explaining how they relate to the events of the day. A proper diary is this: reflecting on the basis of one's actions. But I am not very methodical. With me, reflection does not automatically come before or after an

action. It comes whenever it pleases, sometimes not at all. An important act, one that might help me understand either my own character or that of others, escapes me. Some trivial gesture seems important. I have curious eyes, which alight everywhere, but very often convey nothing to the soul, other than a vague pleasure or sadness. Eight days later, I write down an idea but have forgotten where it came from, how I arrived at it. Men, in my opinion, are more serious in this respect. If they sometimes fail to question themselves before acting, at least they reflect afterwards, whether the action has turned out well or badly. Hence one of their advantages: they have a technique, a tactic, whereas we have nothing but a few tricks. In love, for example, their tactics are crude, of course, but we have been falling for them for centuries: "You are beautiful, the first woman ever to inspire such a feeling in me; your modesty, your grace, your reserve, and so on." They have said it a hundred times, and they say it again. The formula never fails. We know – we swear to ourselves – that we do not believe them, but we listen; the sound is pleasant, and the day comes when we are convinced that they are sincere, when in fact they are tired, feeling ridiculous, and it would take very little to unmask them. We fall into the trap just when they are thinking of giving up the game. They then realise that we have taken the bait. They conscientiously carry on, and suddenly our defeat is complete: we cross the threshold of the hotel or apartment.

Tactics do not differ in substance, but in form. Many men, impatient and eager, lose heart if they do not "get" the woman that very day. They flare up just as quickly as they cool down. Once they have possessed the girl, they never see her again. Woe betide the girl if they pursue their efforts more persistently than usual, if victory comes only after three or four outings, after a week or two. Either they take revenge on the girl who has finally given herself to them, despise her, decide that she has made an awful fuss before coming round to it, and dump her, calling her a prude; or else, exhausted, once they have gained their objective, they display the most insolent indifference, allow themselves to be loved without lifting a finger, comfortably installed in their victory and too lazy to concern themselves with anything else.

Broadly speaking:

The quick ones are groppers.

The slow ones are fondlers.

They are all equally dangerous; the slow ones are even more disquieting. You never know exactly where they are leading you: To friendship? To marriage? To bed? To avoid disappointment, the best thing is to expect bed.

5 July. – There is a look that passes between a woman who has been possessed and the man who possessed her. There is also a look exchanged between a man who has slept with a woman and that woman herself. The look that says: I–have–been–possessed; the look that says: I–have–had–her. When Pierre and Julien are there – along with Robert – I am always afraid that Robert will understand. It is more obvious in a man. We women conceal it better, especially in the presence of a third party. There is a man here; I have slept with him. I feel humiliated by the sense of pride that fills him, by his almost complete certainty that he can have me again whenever he pleases. Sometimes I refuse a man who has had me once because I can see that he is far too sure of his rights, even when I want him.

6 July. – This morning I was watching the women queuing outside the grocer's. Old or ageless, more withered than wrinkled, thin, with scrawny necks like those plucked-necked hens that stand dreaming stupidly on one leg in farmyards – or else fat, with a yellow fatness that fills in their wrinkles. They wore wedding rings – almost all of them – which revolved around their painfully thin fingers. They were ugly and sad. Accustomed to their ugliness and their sadness. They talked about rent, ration cards, the heat. One of them said: "They say they're giving out margarine instead of butter. My husband doesn't like that sort of thing..."

At once, all of them, in chorus, began talking about their husbands' tastes: "Oh, mine's fussy, he only likes food cooked in oil!"

"And mine takes his food to the factory every day. The trouble I have getting his lunch bag ready for him in the morning!"

"Mine doesn't like anything. It's never cooked enough or salted enough or hot enough or cold enough. And he says so in front of the children. And the children agree and start being fussy too. They're far too spoilt!"

"Don't talk to me about husbands!" said an old woman.

And they all laughed, loudly. They thought the joke was hilarious. And badly dressed and badly put together, poor clothes on poor bodies. Ill-shaped legs, big feet in frayed sandals, in strappy sandals from which thick, dirty toes poked out.

I imagine them naked, making love.

It made me feel sleepy. How could a man have been so perverted as to marry them, to father children on them! I wondered. It was nearly noon and the sun was blazing white-hot. Some of the women had a discreet stink about their crotches and armpits. The one in front of me, who was squawking very loudly, kept sending her hair into my nose, and her hair smelled sour, of baby piss, of curdled milk. And they stood waiting on their sweaty feet, with their sweaty bodies, stinking, poor, full of empty words and petty worries, covered in wedding rings, children, husbands, worn-out clothes and the July sunshine of Paris. And I was one of their kind. A little younger, a little prettier, but condemned, just as they were.

9 July – This afternoon, after sunbathing in the Tuileries Gardens, I felt a desire for peace and shade.

I had decided to go and rest in a cool corner of a church. I walked on. No church. The sun was so oppressive, the heat so muggy, that I went into a cinema. And then I realised that a fellow had followed me. He bought a ticket at the box office. He came and sat down beside me, having outwitted the usherette. I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye. He was rather short, but young and handsome. Black hair, shiny and neatly combed. A checked shirt revealing a chest that was slightly hairy, but tanned and muscular. They were showing *The Queen of Broadway*.[4] Rita Hayworth was beautiful and sang well. The fellow began nudging me with his foot, then his knee. He wasn't interested in the film. The auditorium was cool and I felt languid, utterly languid with desire. Rita Hayworth was singing; the

[4] *La Reine de Broadway* (as it's called in the original French text) is the French title of *Cover Girl* (1944), directed by Charles Vidor, and starring Rita Hayworth and Gene Kelly. Confusingly, there is an unrelated American B-picture called *The Queen of Broadway* (1942), directed by Sam Newfield, and starring Buster Crabbe and Rochelle Hudson.

fellow's hand slowly and cautiously descended from the armrest and, suddenly, came to rest on my knee. I kept my eyes stubbornly fixed on the screen. The hand lingered for a moment, then slid with a firm deliberateness towards my thighs. The hand was warm, wedged between my two thighs. The hand continued its journey; I squeezed my legs together. The hand grew impatient. It had a destination and could not understand why obstacles were being put in its way. At last, unable to bear it any longer, I relaxed my thighs, and the hand groped and felt its way about. It was in! I could no longer see the film. I couldn't hold out any longer; I was cooing with pleasure, silently. With his left hand, the fellow took my wrist and tried to guide my hand towards his fly. I resisted, but he didn't give up. So I turned towards him. "Can't you behave yourself?" I asked. The fellow, panic-stricken, withdrew both hands. I could tell he was looking for a handkerchief, now thoroughly chastened. No more attempts. But as the film was nearing its end, he took out his wallet, opened it, placed a white card on my knees, then left silently, in the darkness. I thought he was ashamed and didn't want me to see his face when we came out.

I left in my turn. The white card was a visiting card. A name in Gothic lettering: Guy Bouju, student, Cité Universitaire.

12 July. – Today I've been laid low by a spell of gloom. I'm weary, I'm hot. I can't bear to look in the mirror; I find myself so ugly.

I stayed in bed until eleven. At nine I opened my eyes. The room seemed so dreary, my clothes lay in such a pathetic jumble on the chair and the table, the noises from the street were so commonplace, so much like every other day, that I closed my eyes again. Oh! It isn't sadness, no, it's more like a heaviness. My life weighs on me just as it did when I was seventeen, when I didn't know it. But at seventeen, on top of that, it frightened me. Today I am no longer afraid of it. We know each other better. I shall not be moved from my conviction:

There is only one thing that teaches a woman how to live:

Love. I have made love to about thirty men. With each man my experience grew. Men are the sun. We are the shadow. Without them, we do not exist. A woman without a man by her side is an emptiness,

a zero. Nobody sees her. Men can afford the luxury of living alone if they choose. We cannot. A virgin over eighteen is a useless creature, a chicken, she is nothing. She serves no purpose. A woman is made for love. One who has never served that purpose, or no longer does, is dead. For virgins, the evil is a minor one; a little imagination is all they need. Life no longer frightens me. Men have taught it to me, and go on teaching it. My pillow is a confessional, a tribunal. There I question them, hear their confessions. They give themselves away, fall apart, betray themselves. I listen and I do not forget. I have forgotten nothing of all they have told me, all thirty or forty of the men who have penetrated me.

I know: They betrayed themselves, consciously, cynically, confident in their strength. They think us so stupid, so flighty, that they are convinced we shall never learn our lesson. And it's true: everything I have learnt is of no use to me when I am face to face with them. I have no illusions left about them, about their fidelity, their generosity, their honour. And so what? Does that stop me desiring them, seeking them out? I love them even in their brutality, their boorishness, their clumsy lying. My illusions have changed colour. They are grey or black. They still possess us. I have given up believing myself clever. I play my part, they play theirs. We pretend to be innocent. We women fight with our eyes closed; they fight with their eyes open. Every blow of theirs finds its mark. Ours are lost in empty space. They say they are playing a game; we protest that we are sincere. In the end they too protest their sincerity, as a matter of policy. The fight is unequal. We have lent them our weapons.

And I chatter, and chatter. Men, women...

A million poets, philosophers and priests, for a million years, have been talking about men and women. And yet, if I read all that printed matter, I feel like laughing and calling them idiots. They have all forgotten one thing: the stick. For a million years, men have been playing battledore and shuttlecock with us. They toss us into the air, take aim, and contrive to make us fall back onto the stick, impaled, trapped, right on target. That's life. A game of battledore and shuttlecock. There's no point in stiffening up; the more you resist, the more you suffer. The poets, philosophers and priests are the men's representatives, sent to sugar the pill for us. They sing, they debate, they

preach, and we forget what we are for. How bitter the awakening! Yet our naïveté is always so great that we go back to reading poets and scribblers, and accuse some man of having deceived or betrayed us.

I do not hate them. That's how they are. God gave them everything. He is a man too, as are Jesus, the apostles and the Pope. To be a saint, there is no need to be a virgin. For a female saint, beginning with the Virgin Mary, it is almost essential. The chances are much better; virginity is a good qualification. To be a saint, you have to be a little stupid. Since love teaches men less than it teaches women, it is only natural that virginity should be demanded of candidates for sainthood.

When I see a priest or a nun, I feel uneasy, as I do in the presence of a madman or an animal's stare. Is it possible? I wonder. Does he have a stick beneath his cassock, does she have breasts beneath her clean apron? What do they see, what do they think, what do they desire? I am afraid. Is the world about to turn upside down? What if I were a nun tomorrow, and Robert a priest? What if we talked about God, Heaven, Good and Evil instead of pawing each other and making love without fear or reproach?

One day, on a train, I was alone in a compartment with a priest. The carriage was almost empty. He was young, very dark, with a swarthy Spanish complexion, enormous black eyes. The priest of one's dreams. It's impossible for a fellow like that not to have a bit of fire in him, I thought. So I showed him my legs, took off my jacket and tugged at my pullover to make my breasts thrust forward. I smoked, I put on make-up. I hitched my skirts up even higher. He, with his nose buried in his catechism, was a stone. He looked at me once, slowly, very attentively. I held his gaze, provocatively; the train, as I've already said, was almost empty. He plunged back into his catechism. I could have beaten him or raped him. I changed compartments. He didn't even raise his head when I left, when I flung my suitcases against his knees, when I trod on his feet. A madman!

But I feel heavy today. I'm fed up, as Robert would say.

"Fed up with what?"

"With everything."

"But what does that mean, 'I'm fed up'?"

"Shit, shit and more shit. It means everything is shit. Houses, men, women, work, books. It rains shit, it snows shit. You know, it's like saying there's damp in a house. That's what being fed up means. I'm in good health, sound of mind, but there's damp everywhere, from cellar to attic. Days like this, when I find myself uninhabitable."

There's Robert's explanation.

And today I find myself uninhabitable. I'd like to leave myself, steal someone else's skin. Have someone else's voice, hair, worries and pleasures. And I'd soon be fed up with that. Like a prisoner changing cells! If I make love today, I won't come, or else habit will get the better of me. My body will remember pleasure, demand it despite myself. If I want it. Of course, I rarely refuse. I resist until the moment when I think: Oh, what's the point of being so silly! And then I give in.

Why this feeling of being fed up that has crushed me today? Perhaps because I looked at my clothes too long this morning. They seemed so sad and abandoned. I didn't want to get up. The mask was there, on the chair; putting it on, starting all over again: bra, girdle, skirt and all the rest. Life! Naked, on an island, I wouldn't have been fed up.

14 July. – "The day when women get 'banged' by a soldier, for the Fatherland! Long live France!" said Robert. There were dances in the streets that evening.

Young girls dressed in Alsatian, Breton and Provençal costumes! They danced and danced. Everyone was joyful. The accordions stretched themselves to breaking point, the musicians enjoying themselves just as much as the dancers. 14 July! Thousands of young men must have looked at their sticks that morning and murmured to them, stroking them with their hands: "Now then, my little fellow, don't miss this opportunity. The Fatherland is offering you its females today, in this patriotic spirit! No distractions!"

Robert "banged" me. I was sad. I could hear every bed in Paris creaking in time with ours. I came without conviction.

17 July. – I'm unhappy, Robert.

"Are you in pain? Are you ill?"

"It's a pain I can't quite locate anywhere."

Robert laughed. Then, in grandiloquent tones:

"Trample your pain underfoot! What does this pain of yours mean? And what do you mean, you're unhappy? Why pain, why unhappy?"

"You understand nothing."

"You're making yourself out to be important. You're all alike."

"I've had enough, Robert, of your 'You're all alike, you're all alike!'"

He wasn't put out in the least.

"I stand by it: you're all alike! When you're tired, because of your monthly troubles, or sad because Pierre or Paul hasn't slept with you, you suffer: 'I'm unhappy. My pain!' Give me a break, will you?"

"And you, are you never unhappy?"

"No!"

"Why not? Have you got a secret?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"I think I resemble you at those moments. That's enough to cure me."

19 July. – I am very worried. My period should have come three days ago. Robert, whom I saw this afternoon, didn't look particularly pleased by the news.

And he was asking me for explanations, putting all sorts of extraordinary questions to me.

"Do you get stomach pains when your period is about to start?"

"Yes."

"And you aren't in pain?"

"No."

"Are you sure you aren't in pain?"

"I'm telling you, aren't I?"

And however much I tried to convince myself, probing my belly or puffing it out until I gave myself cramps, no, I wasn't in pain.

"How does it happen? Just like that, suddenly?"

"Yes."

We were sitting outside a café. Every now and then he would ask me:

"Hasn't it started yet, by any chance?"

"No, you idiot."

I didn't know whether to laugh or get annoyed. I left Robert at five o'clock.

"If it starts, write to me straight away."

What would I do if I were pregnant? I'd get rid of the child, of course. But what if it refused to go away? No question of forcing Robert to marry me. Neither of us wants that. Bring up the child? The very thought makes me shudder. My youth would be over. My love affairs, my beauty.

A child? Why have children? So that the spectacle of a being opening up to life, of one who is "growing", should make us more acutely aware of our own decline. How cruel! "It's the law," my grandmother used to say. What law? The law of life. I accept neither this philosophy nor this resignation. Old age is an abject, hideous thing. The young! The young! Here they come! Here they are, stealing our beauty, our health, our joy, our innocence. There they are, falling in love and strolling about in light-coloured suits and flimsy dresses. I don't want one of these young people, when I myself am old, to be my child.

Is that selfishness? I don't know. It's anger, despair. There will be one fewer young person to watch me grow old. We are so arrogant, so proud of our youth. We catch buses on the run, climb the Underground stairs without getting out of breath, run almost naked along the beaches. Every gesture we make, every word we utter, proclaims to the world that life belongs to us because we are young. The old keep silent, watching us with their poor, worn-out eyes. They smile horribly, like the dead. I wish they were jealous, that they hated us. At least that would prove they were alive. But no, nothing. They endure, they forgive, they love. Like the dead.

20 July. – I had taken some Crinex and some Florida Drops. A kind man, that chemist. Another old fellow, too. And during the night "they" arrived. I could have danced for joy, had the sight of all that blood not frightened me. Despite all my precautions, the bed was a pool of blood. You would have thought four murders had been committed there. And it kept bleeding, pouring out, pouring out. A torrent, a flood. I threw one blood-soaked cloth after another into the washbasin. After an hour, I began to be frightened. I had never

bled so much. And suddenly, the word came to me: I'm haemorrhaging. And I tried to staunch the flow, wild with anxiety, while the word rang in my ears: Haemorrhage! Haemorrhage! You're going to die! I was sweating with fear. It was so absurd, all that blood flowing away. Why was it pouring out? I had no wounds, no illness. Why?

I thought of stupid things: drinking it as it flowed out, sealing the opening hermetically, standing on my head to stop it coming out. Of course, I did none of these things. I sobbed. I think the blood flowed even faster. I forced back my tears and sobs. I pictured myself dead in the morning, lying on my blood-red bed. They would force the door and find me. The sheets would already be dry and rust-coloured. They would pick me up, turn me over to see whether I had a wound. My back would be smeared with dried blood, flaking off my skin like old paint. I tried everything: walking, standing still, lying down motionless, fidgeting about, pressing my stomach. It kept flowing, steadily and copiously. My head hurt. "You're getting weaker, you're going to die." At last, at six o'clock, the haemorrhage subsided. The cloths I had been applying to my stomach no longer turned red like a newspaper catching fire. I began to pray.

I am sitting up in bed, like a convalescent. I feel weak. I shan't get up. Lucienne came to see me. She will bring me provisions, fruit, cakes. I swear that from now on I shall force Robert, or whoever it may be, to wear rubbers during the dangerous periods. I've had enough of these anxieties, these waiting periods and these floods of blood.

I am not sending Robert a note to reassure him. It's only fair that he should suffer a little too. He's surely worried. Good. He's wondering whether he's going to be a "daddy". Men! For them, nothing but pleasure. For us, fear, suffering, children, hospitals and maternity wards, our bellies slit open, our breasts turned into udders. For them, pleasure, a game of cards and the vanity with which they say: "He's my son, she's my daughter!"

24 July. – I'm leaving for the Côte d'Azur tomorrow. I'll spend a month in Le Lavandou, a little beach resort, apparently delightful, twenty kilometres from Hyères.

25 July. – Hurrah for holidays! Lucienne came with me. We are free, alone and unknown. Robert has gone to spend a month in the Alps, near Grenoble, where his parents live. I prefer the seaside. This

separation will do us good. We shall love each other all the more when we return. We have decided not to write to each other, so that our separation will be complete.

Within a week I'll be nicely tanned. I've bought some perfumed suntan oil, which I rub all over myself before stretching out in the sun. Soon I'm glistening, streaming with a mixture of sweat and oil. My legs and shoulders shine in the sunlight. I couldn't be happier.

"If you cheat on me, be careful who you pick up," Robert told me. "I don't want to come away with some nasty disease."

"And you?"

"Me, I'm cautious if there's any danger: rubbers, ointments! Besides, I shan't cheat on you. There are no women in this backwater. Peasants, campers, nothing worth picking up here. Will you cheat on me?"

"No."

"You know, I give you permission to enjoy yourself."

"I don't need your permission."

"All the more reason."

Despite all his apparent light-heartedness and carefree manner, this question is tormenting him: Will I cheat on him? And with whom?

28 July. – I haven't much time for writing. Getting up every morning at nine or ten. Breakfast, shopping for provisions, various errands. Noon: a quick dip before lunch. Lunch. A siesta or reading under the parasol. Swimming. Swimming. Swimming in the water and sunshine. Walks. Aperitifs. Dinner. In the evening, dancing or a stroll.

The evenings are wonderful. It's silly not to have another word to describe what they are like, these evenings. And I say: Wonderful. And I'm not ashamed to sit on an overturned boat, on the little stone causeway that keeps the sand from invading the road. I'm not ashamed to sit there, gazing at the sea, the moon, the star-filled sky, the moonlight reflected on the waves or, when the sea is absolutely still, the immense pools of moonlit steel that glimmer softly. When I return to Paris and talk about the sea, the night, the moon, the beach, the sky "studded with stars", the black boats that seem to be sleeping, I'll sound as though I'm describing a postcard. But it isn't a postcard.

The sea moves; the tar on the boats smells lovely; couples pass by, kissing and making love, I'm sure, just as this landscape demands that they should. Behind me I can hear the orchestras at the "Paradise" and the "Bar du Soleil" playing slow numbers, blues and tangos. I am alone. At this precise moment, I need nobody. I tell myself that I am perfectly happy. Everything belongs to me, and I have nothing. I close my eyes and think: Paris, winter, the cold, people are ugly, hurried, badly dressed. I can taste the dust in my throat. And I open my eyes: the sea is there, the warm night, I hear the orchestras again and the whispered voices of passing couples. The miracle has happened. I am happy.

If Robert were here, he would mercilessly mock my "emotional states". He's like Attila. Wherever he goes, poetry refuses to grow. As soon as he senses that sentimentality is approaching, he starts talking in his harsh, cruel, vigorous language. He points out some detail, some trivial thing that destroys the harmony. He pokes about, prods, sniffs, and invariably, of course, discovers something ridiculous, filthy or commonplace. When he didn't have a room of his own and we were obliged to make love in hotels that rented rooms by the hour, his first move was to turn back the bedclothes and inspect the sheets. He would bend over, looking for bloodstains or semen, a hair, a button; if he found anything at all, his delight was complete. Then he would open the drawers and the wardrobe.

How can I love him? Does he even care about my love?

31 July. – I shall think neither of Robert nor of Paris. Let these few days I'm spending by the sea be free of both past and future. All of life should be arranged like this: in sealed compartments. The happy periods just as much as the unhappy ones.

11 o'clock. What I wrote this morning is foolish. Foolish because I have a memory. I carry Paris, Robert, my friends, my ideas, my childhood around with me. There has never been a desert island. Not even for Robinson Crusoe. To say that I won't think about Robert means that I won't write about it or say that I'm thinking of him. Under the circumstances, I might as well stop lying to myself and go on writing that I often think about him.

4 August. – I haven't had a love affair yet. Hardly even a flirtation. (I detest that filthy word. To flirt! To play with flowers? It's all too

convenient to cover up one's little indiscretions with a pretty word. (Here, Robert's influence. He has left a deeper mark on me than I realise. His observations, his words, his ideas come to my lips and into my mind without my noticing, without my even being aware of it.)) A handsome fellow with crew-cut hair (or almost), magnificently built, deeply tanned. He dances well, with a somewhat stiff, formal bearing, a vague expression in his eyes, his head held high and proudly. I danced with him all evening at the cabaret of the "Bar du Soleil". He offered afterwards to accompany me back to my hotel. I accepted. The village is small. The hotel is two hundred metres away. We walked slowly. He talked – inevitably – about the sea beneath the moon, the softness of the night, and so on. He was no good at it. Neither his voice nor his physique was suited to such talk. The sporty type, not given to questions. But the poor fellow evidently felt obliged to wax poetic. It bored him, and he made fun of the moon and the night. I felt sorry for him, while thinking him stupid, but I nodded, played along, added my own embellishments, brought in more moonlight and night. He thought things were going splendidly, but when he suggested that we lie down in a boat, on a bed of fishing nets, I put on an act of outraged virtue, all "Who do you take me for?" The few metres separating us from my hotel must have seemed a long way to him. He was silent, nudging pebbles with the toe of his shoe. I shook his hand, stretching out my arm towards him from a distance. He didn't press the matter.

The following day, he was hunting other prey. What had he been saying about the moon? The bed of nets had seemed soft enough, but sleep with a fellow who is convinced he has "got you" through poetry? A thousand times no!

6 August. – I had brought a great many books with me, but I read very little. Literature bores me more and more. Perhaps because it is written exclusively by men, and because they talk about only one thing: women.

I read *Génitrix* and *Le Baiser au lépreux*, by F. Mauriac. These books gave me the impression of watching an old gentleman indulging in the pleasures of solitary gratification.

I read Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* and *Les Caves du Vatican*. Dreary beyond belief. Everything about them is false and cramped, reeking a

mile off of literary pretension, of expensive ink on fine, parchment-like paper, limp and lifeless.

I'll buy some detective novels. I'll ask Robert what he thinks of Gide and Mauriac.

7 August. – I sleep quite naked, on the floor, on two thick woollen blankets. Some nights I am seized by an overwhelming urge to make love. Leaping about and writhing do nothing to calm me. Last night, at about one o'clock, I could stand it no longer. I put on my bathrobe, ran down to the beach and went for a swim, stark naked. How many opportunities men let slip through their fingers! If only an acceptable male had happened to be there...

10 August. – I leave tomorrow for the Île du Levant. Apparently, it's an island of nudists. I can hardly bring myself to believe it.

12 August. – And it's true: everyone is naked. The men stroll about solemnly, carrying their eggs and their sticks between their legs. The women lie stretched out in the sun, seemingly inviting inspection. I am naked. So is Lucienne. Lucienne is less beautiful than I am. Her breasts hang lower, her shoulders are less rounded. Nevertheless, she is highly desirable. We are lying on one of the island's tiny beaches. The men's sticks lie dormant against their thighs. That piece of brown or red flesh dangling from a thicket of hair is horrible. The men contemplate it, indifferent, apparently satisfied with its mere presence. Some of the nudists are very old. I had never seen old sticks before. Nothing could be more hideous. They look as though they had been roasted in a fire; the old women are just as appalling to behold. Their breasts, their buttocks, their skin above all—that tanned skin of old age—their backs, their knees, their wretched bodies seem to have emerged from a nightmare. So far, I have seen only four handsome young men, with their sticks, their buttocks and everything else in fine condition, and three pretty girls. I haven't seen a single erect stick. As for myself (and Lucienne is the same), the sight of all these completely naked bodies causes me not the slightest stir. My curiosity is too great to leave any room for desire.

18 August. – Back to Le Lavandou. No adventures on the island. Fauns are in short supply there.

19 August. – Despite our agreement, I had written to Robert. His reply arrived today. He is in the Alpes-Maritimes, in a little village called Auron.

He tells me he climbs trees like Tarzan, rolls down grassy slopes like a barrel, hates climbing and would rather take enormous detours than tackle even a moderately steep incline. As I had asked him to, he also gives me his opinion of my reading: "– Mauriac and Gide are two eunuchs, two little priests who have never had their fill of fucking. Mauriac is a sly, perverted fellow who will regret all his life that he wasn't wearing a cassock, so that he might have known the pleasure of a woman's hand rummaging underneath it. Gide is a little queer. He invents all sorts of stories to conceal a complete lack of balls and character. I recommend La Fontaine's fables and Perrault's fairy tales. Marvellous!"

20 August. – In five days, I shall be in Paris. I mustn't think about it. If it were raining, if the sky weren't so mercilessly blue, leaving would be easier. Fortunately, Robert will be back. I shall have love. In Paris, people have nothing but that: LOVE. Young or old, handsome or ugly, sick or healthy, they all make love. From nine o'clock onwards, four million Parisians go to bed, and half of them climb on top of the other half. And the next day, the clothes, the work, the bus, the sticks tucked away again, the furs washed with good or bad soap, a few little brats conceived, a few cases of syphilis contracted, countless dark-ringed eyes, swollen lips and aching heads. And these beasts, sitting behind their desks, scurrying along the streets, dreaming on café terraces, crushed in the Metro, all of them ravenous for love, or happy in love, or sickened by love. Robert says: "When you can't understand something, try explaining it by the cock. It always works. The cock explains everything: wars, politics, literature, music, the existence of God, everything! The world revolves around a cock."

27 August. – I didn't want to write anything about the last few days I spent by the sea. All my pleasures, all my happiness had rung hollow.

Departure was looming. People would ask me: "Will you be coming to the Travestis?" "May I arrange to meet you next Saturday at La Cigale?" To every question I had to answer: "No." And I felt almost ashamed to be leaving, and almost jealous. For others, the holidays would go on; for others, Le Lavandou would still be there, with its

white houses, its palm trees, its beach. For me, Paris and the Metro, Paris and work. What an injustice! For some, the only law: Work or Death. For a fortunate few, an endless holiday. The dream: a lazy life, an interminable holiday in the sun.

29 August. – Saw Robert again. Love-making. I would have liked him to be more surprised to see how tanned I was. Not the slightest surprise. He is stronger, more muscular, his cheeks more ruddy. He laughs and speaks loudly; no doubt he has grown accustomed to talking in the open air, up in the mountains. Since we were both full of energy and high spirits, we made love six times.

30 August. – It's hot in Paris. In the public gardens, poor devils expose themselves to the blazing sun in the hope of getting a tan. They sweat in their clothes, their faces stream with perspiration, the sun dulls their senses. Never mind! Brown, brown. Ashamed of their white skin. And yet a very white woman's body is rather lovely. Provided it is very white and free of spots, scars and redness.

A very white man is rarely handsome, especially if he's hairy. I like men who are tanned and, when they take off their underpants, the whiteness of their bellies and buttocks.

Speaking of hair reminds me of the delicious sensation Robert's legs give me when we slip into bed. His hairy legs brush against my whole body. That's all it takes for my desire to swell. I'm sleeping with a gorilla. It's wonderful. I open my eyes and Robert's civilised head is right above mine. Still, a pretend gorilla has its attractions.

When I was little, I used to read illustrated boys' magazines: *Tarzan*, *Robinson*, *L'Intrépide*, *Hurrah*, and often, in their stories, a gorilla would attack a village and carry off the most beautiful woman. He would take her away, naked, through the branches. I used to think I would have loved to be that abducted woman, carried up into the trees in the gorilla's enormous arms. But then Tarzan or some idiotic explorer would arrive and kill the ape. The woman would miraculously fall onto a bed of leaves, and her rescuer would marry her. I cursed the explorer, and Tarzan a little less, because he resembled the gorilla. I went to the cinema to see every Tarzan film. And each time I came away disappointed. I didn't yet know why, but I found my hero strangely limp. Poor Johnny Weissmuller! How many little girls, in their dreams, prefer a monkey to you?

2 September. – Men are disgusting pigs! Lucienne tells me this appalling story about what happened the day before yesterday to the little daughter of her grocer.

The child (three and a half years old) was playing outside the door when a man came along, gave her some sweets, took her by the hand and led her into a cellar. He fondled her and, to finish off, shoved his stick into her mouth and began to come. The little girl returned home terrified, her mouth and face smeared with semen. She said that a gentleman had taken her into a cellar and put a large piece of meat into her mouth, threatening to beat her if she bit it. Her mother was beside herself with rage. The man was arrested yesterday. He is a postman, married, and the father of a twenty-year-old daughter.

As I am not sufficiently horrified, Lucienne (who is a social worker) goes on. Last week, a twelve-year-old girl was brought to her. Pregnant! Lucienne asks her:

"Do you know how that happens?"

"Yes," the child replies.

"And do you know who did it to you?"

"No."

"Which boy was it? Did you go out with a lot of boys?"

"No."

"Which boys, then?"

"None."

"Then?"

"I don't know. It was either Daddy or my brother. They're the only ones who did that to me."

Naturally, I told Robert both these stories, whereupon, by way of revenge, he came out with five or six tales of babies raped by their mothers, society ladies in love with their greyhounds, and so on.

I stood my ground. Men are filthier than we are.

7 September. – Love-making. After he has come, Robert really does collapse on top of me. He weighs on me like a dead man. I feel his cock growing soft. And I am still hungry. The cock slips away, like a Gervais ice-cream lolly being slowly, voluptuously withdrawn from someone's mouth. I savour my ice lolly. I have a veritable mouth down

below. And my real mouth opens; I moisten my lips, bite Robert's neck, cling to him inside me as best I can, wherever I can. I let out a cry. Robert suddenly pulls away. He is already on his feet. Water is running into the washbasin.

I can understand how a woman of lukewarm temperament might grow tired of love-making and even regard it as a repugnant chore. The washbasin, the bidet, the softened cock, the cheesy smells, the bloodshot eyes, the faces contorted with desire and then slack with exhaustion—all this, I admit, can be discouraging.

And then there's the question of Robert slipping a filthy, damp towel beneath my bottom to protect his clean sheets—or a newspaper, if he hasn't got a towel?

13 September. – What a business keeping a diary is! If only I recorded the little events of my days (the people I meet, the books I read, the films I see), perhaps I might enjoy reading it again. But I write about little else (if anything) but what concerns my love for Robert.

I shall read these pages again when I am sixty. I shall be a pious old woman, dressed in black, and ugly. I shall burn this notebook and dare to say that Satan dictated it to me, that I was nothing but an innocent, pure young girl led astray by the Devil. And Satan was so clever that he foresaw my reaction as an old woman, and that even now he is ordering me to write down that I am writing at his dictation, so that when I am old I shall no more believe him than I do now.

What a man, that Satan!

17 September. – Life goes by. Eating, sleeping, working, making love. The table for eating, the desk for working, the cinema, the bed for sleeping, the bed for making love. All lives are much the same.

THE END