PIERRE LOUŸS

BYBLIS
LEDA
A NEW PLEASURE

Done into English
By
M. S. Buck.

NEW YORK
Privately Printed for Subscribers
1920

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BYBLIS

Changed into a Fountain

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AND Amaryllis, between the three young women and the three philosophers, related this fabulous allegory, as though to little children:

"Travelers whom I have known and who have been to Caria, ascending the Menander much farther than the shepherds go, have seen the God of the drowsy river among the rushes on the verge of the shadowy waters. He had a long, green beard and his face was wrinkled like the rocks of the grizzled

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banks from which hang weeping herbs. His ancient eye-lids seemed dead upon eyes forever blind. It is probable that, today, those who would seek him would find him no longer living.

"Now, it was he who was the father of Byblis, through his union with the nymph Cyanis; and I am going to tell you the history of the unfortunate Byblis."

I

In the original grotto from which the river mysteriously flowed, the nymph Cyanis brought forth two chil-

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dren at one birth; one was a son whom she named Caunos; the other a daughter who was Byblis.

They both grew up on the banks of the Menander, and sometimes Cyanis pointed out to them, under the light sheen of the surface, the divine appearance of their father whose soul stirred the fugitive waters.

Of the world, they knew only the forest where they were born. They had never seen the sun except through the web of the branches. Byblis never left her brother and she put her arm about his neck when they walked together.

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She wore a little tunic which her mother had woven for her in the depths of the water and which was blue and gray like the first light of dawn. Caunos bore about his loins a girdle of rushes from which hung a yellow fabric.

When the day was light, so that they could walk in the wood, they wandered together very far, playing with the fallen fruits or searching for the largest flowers and with the sweetest perfume. And those found by one were always for the other and they never disputed, so that their mother

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praised them before the other nymphs, her friends.

Now, when twelve years had passed away since the day of their birth, their mother became uneasy, and sometimes followed them.

The two children no longer played and, after spending a whole day in the forest, brought back nothing in their hands, neither birds nor flowers nor fruits nor coronals. They walked so closely together that their hair mingled. Byblis' hands wandered

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over her brother's arms. Sometimes she would kiss his cheek; then they would both be silent.

When the heat was too great, they slipped among the low branches and there, lying upon their breasts on the fragrant moss, they would talk and admire each other and remain inseparable.

Then Cyanis called her son aside and said to him:

"Why art thou sad?"

Caunos responded:

"I am not sad. Formerly, I laughed and played. Now all is changed. I no longer care for games,

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mother, and if I do not laugh it is because I am happy."

Cyanis demanded:

"Why art thou happy?"

And Caunos replied:

"I see Byblis."

Cyanis demanded still:

"Why dost thou no longer look at the forest?"

"Because the hair of Byblis is softer than the grasses and richer with perfume; because the eyes of Byblis . . ."

But Cyanis stopped him.

"Child! Be silent!"

And, hoping to cure him of his forbidden passion, she took him at once

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to the dwelling of a nymph of the mountain who had seven daughters of a beauty more marvelous than words can tell.

And, together, they said to him:

"Choose. She who pleases thee, Caunos, shall be thy wife."

But Caunos regarded the seven girls with as indifferent an eye as though he saw seven rocks; for the image of Byblis alone filled his little soul and he had no place in him for a strange tenderness.

For a month, Cyanis conducted her son thus, from mountain to mountain

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and from plain to plain, but without once succeeding in turning him from his desire.

At last, divining that she would never be able to overcome this passionate obstinacy, she began to reproach her son and to accuse him of infamy. But the child did not understand at all of what his mother reproached him. Why, among all women, should he be denied just the one he loved? Why should the tendernesses which would be permitted in the importunate arms of another, become criminal in the adored arms of Byblis? For what mysterious reasons should a sen-

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timent which he knew tender and good, capable of all sacrifices, be judged worthy only of all punishments? Zeus, he thought, had certainly espoused his sister, and the Dione Aphrodite had dared, with her brother Hephaestos, to deceive her brother Ares. He did not yet understand that the gods had given themselves, alone, an intelligent morality and that they troubled the virtue of men with incomprehensible laws.

And Cyanis said to her son:

"I will renounce thee as my child."

She beckoned to a centauress who

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was passing, going toward the sea, and obliged Caunos to mount. The beast hurried away.

For some time, Cyanis followed them with her eyes.

Caunos, frightened, held fast to the shoulders, sometimes buried under the masses of hair. The centauress advanced in long, powerful leaps, in a straight line, diminishing in the green distance. Soon she passed behind a clump of trees, then reappeared, but smaller, like a dot which hardly seemed to move. Cyanis could no longer distinguish her.

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With slow steps, the mother of Byblis returned to the forest.

She was sad, but proud also, at having saved, by the violent separation, the destinies of her two children; and she thanked the gods for having given her strength to accomplish the rending duty.

"Now," she thought, "Byblis, left alone, will forget her sacrificed brother. Tomorrow, she will become enamored of the first who seeks to charm her and, it may be, a line half divine will issue from the bed of a regular marriage. Blessed are the immortal gods!"

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But when she returned to the grotto, the little Byblis was no longer there.

II

When Byblis found herself alone upon the little bed of green leaves where she had slept, side by side with her brother, through all the nights, she sought in vain for sleep; on this night not a dream would come to her.

She arose; the night was sweet. A soft respiration slowly raised and lowered the profound masses of the forest. She seated herself among the rocks and gazed at the gliding water.

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"Caunos," she thought, "Caunos. Why has he not returned? What attracts and detains him? Why has he left me, my father?"

In saying these last words, she leaned over the spring. . . .

"My father!" she repeated. "My father! Where is Caunos? Tell me . . ."

A murmur of the waters responded:

"Far . . ."

Byblis, frightened, repeated quickly:

"And when will he return? When will he return here?"

"Never . . ." replied the spring.

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"Dead! He is dead!"

"No . . ."

"Where will I find him?"

". . ."

The spring said no more. The light whispering of the reeds again became a monotone. Not one divine appearance moved in the pure water.

Byblis raised herself and ran. She knew the foot-path by which Caunos had departed with her mother. It was a narrow passage which wound among the trees and buried itself in the forest. She had never followed it for it crossed a low ground which was in-

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fested with serpents and evil beasts. This time, her desire was much stronger than her fear and she hurried on, trembling, as fast as her little, naked feet could carry her.

The night was not dark; but the shadows from the moon were black and, among the great trees, Byblis had to feel her way.

She reached a place where the path divided. How should she know which way to choose? She searched for a long time, on her knees, for a track which would guide her. The ground was dry; she could see nothing. But

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when she raised her head she saw, hidden among the leaves of an oak, a hamadryad with green breasts who watched her, smiling.

"Oh!" cried Byblis. "Which way did he go? If thou didst see him, tell me . . ."

The hamadryad extended one of her long branchy arms toward the right and Byblis thanked her with a grateful look.

She walked for a long time, that night. The path continued always, barely marked under the fallen leaves; it advanced without ceasing to wind ac-

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cording to the ground and the trees, rising, descending, in the shadows, interminably.

At last, overcome by fatigue, Byblis fell upon the moss and slept.

Awakening the next day, under a sun already high, she felt a strange softness along her extended hand. She opened her eyes; a golden hind was licking it, slowly. But at Byblis' first movement, the delicate animal leapt erect on its tiny hooves, raised its two ears and fastened upon her two beautiful, moist eyes, dark and gleaming like water among the rocks.

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"Hind," said Byblis, "whose art thou? If thou belongest to the goddess Artemis, guide me because I know her. At the full moon I give her libations of goat's milk and she recognizes me, hind, she loves me well. If thou art of her followers, deliver me from the anguish I suffer and be sure thou wilt not displease the good Huntress of the Night."

The hind seemed to understand; she moved forward, at a pace measured to that of the child who followed.

Together they crossed, thus, a great part of the forest and also two streamlets which the hind leapt at a bound

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but which Byblis could pass only by entering the water which rose to her knees. Byblis was very confident. She was sure, now, of being on the right road; without doubt, this hind has been sent by the goddess herself in gratitude for her devotion; and the divine animal would conduct her through the woods toward the well-beloved brother whom she would never leave again. Each step brought nearer the moment when she would see Caunos again. She already felt, against her breast, the affectionate embrace of the fugitive. A little of his breath seemed to have passed in the

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air, enchanting the breeze . . .

Suddenly, the hind paused. She thrust her long head between two young trees where, at the same time, appeared the horned profile of a stag; and, as though she had attained the end she sought, lay down, her hooves under her belly, and rested her chin upon the grass.

"Caunos!"

Byblis appealed.

"Caunos, where art thou?"

But, for response, only the stag made a few steps toward her, shaking his terrible horns which were twisted like ten brown serpents. And Byblis

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understood then that the hind had been, like herself, in search of her lover, and that it is perhaps hopeless to depend on the good offices of those already quite absorbed by an intimate passion.

She retraced her steps; but she was lost. She took a new path which descended abruptly toward an invisible road. Her poor little feet, weary and bruised from the stones, torn by roots, slipped over the brown carpet of pine needles. At a turn of the irregular road, which followed the course of a

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stream, she paused before a divine couple.

They were two nymphs of different substances; one, of those who presided over the forests and the other over the water of springs. The oread had brought to the naiad fresh offerings received from the men, and they both were bathing in the stream, enlaced and undulating.

"Naiad," said Byblis, "hast thou seen the son of Cyanis?"

"Yes. His shadow passed over me. It was yesterday, at sunset."

"From whence did he come?"

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"I do not know."

"Where did he go?"

"I did not follow him."

Byblis sighed.

"And thou," she said to the other nymph, "hast thou seen the son of Cyanis?"

"Yes. Far from here, on the mountain."

"From whence did he come?"

"I did not know."

"Where did he go?"

"I have forgotten."

Then she resumed, raising herself in the midst of the rapid waters:

"Stay with us, young girl, stay.

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Why dost thou dream still of one who is here no longer? We have stored up for thee an infinity of present joys. There is no happiness in the future worth the labor of pursuing it."

But Byblis did not at all believe these words of the nymph. Although she could not express the ideas of her little soul, she could conceive no other joy than through her sufferings as she pursued her search for happiness. During the first day of her fruitless journey, she had depended on the aid and zeal of those unknown. Since she had seen them heedless of assisting her destiny, she resolved to depend

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on no one except herself; and, leaving the winding path, she penetrated at hazard into the labyrinth of the wood.

Meanwhile, the two immortals had repeated their prudent words:

"Stay with us, young girl, stay. Why dost thou still dream of one who is here no longer? There is no happiness in the future worth the labor of pursuing it."

And, for a long time after, the child, climbing the mysterious mountain, heard, in the distance, two clear voices calling together:

"Byblis!"

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III

For a night and a day, Byblis traveled over the mountain. She inquired, anxiously, of all the divinities of the woods, those of the trees, those of the glades and those of the shadowy caverns. With interminable confidences, she told of her sadness; she supplicated, she trembled, she wrung her little hands. But no one had seen Caunos.

She penetrated so far on her ascent that the sacred name of her mother was not known where she passed and the indifferent nymphs did not under-

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stand what she was trying to say.

Then she wished to return; but she had lost herself. On all sides, she was surrounded by the confused colonnade of enormous pines. There was no horizon. She ran aimlessly. She called in desperation.

Not even an echo answered.

Then, when her tired eyelids would no longer stay open and she had lain down to sleep upon the ground, a passing dream said, in a slow voice:

"Thou wilt never see him again, thy brother. Thou wilt never see him again."

She awakened with a start.

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Her hands stretched out, her mouth opened; but with such anguish that she had no strength to cry out.

The moon had risen, red like blood behind the tall, black lines of the pines. Byblis could hardly see it. It seemed to her that a damp veil rested upon her long eyes. An eternal silence slept in the woods.

And there was a great tear which filled the corner of her left eye.

Byblis had never wept. She believed that she was going to die, and sighed, as the divine relief mysteriously assisted her.

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The tear extended, trembled, enlarged; then suddenly rolled down her cheek.

Byblis remained motionless, her eyes fixed, before the moon.

And now a swollen tear filled the corner of her right eye. It enlarged like the first, glided upon the lashes, and fell.

Two other tears were born, two burning drops which left moist traces on her cheeks. They reached the corners of her mouth; a delicious bitterness enervated the weary child.

So, never more would her hand touch the hand of Caunos. Never

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more would she see the shadowy glow of his regard, his dear head and his young hair. Never again would they sleep, side by side, enlaced upon the same bed of leaves. The forests had forgotten his name.

An outburst of despair dropped her face into her hands; but such an abundance of tears wet her burning cheeks that it seemed to her as though a miraculous spring was carrying away all her sorrows like dead leaves upon the waters of a torrent.

The tears, born gently within her, mounted to her eyes, floated, overflowed, glided in a warm sheet over

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her cheeks, inundated her narrow breast, fell upon her closed legs. She no longer felt them round, one by one, between her long eyelids; they had become a continuous and gentle stream, an inexhaustible flow, the effusion of an enchanted water.

Meanwhile, awakened by the moonlight, the immortals of the forest hastened up from all sides. The bark of the trees became transparent, revealing the forms of the nymphs; and even the shivering naiads, quitting their waters and rocks, were seen in the woods.

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They thronged about Byblis, calling to her, frightened by the child's floods of tears which had traced in the earth a deep, sinuous line which slowly moved toward the plain.

But already Byblis heard nothing more, neither the voices nor the steps nor the night wind. Little by little, her attitude became eternal. Under the flood of tears, her skin had taken the smooth, white tint of marble bathed by the waters. The wind no longer stirred her hair along her arms. She had devolved into pure stone. A shadowy light still lingered for a mo-

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ment in her vision. Suddenly, this flickered out; but the fresh tears still ran from her eyes.

It is thus that Byblis was changed into a fountain.

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ONE could no longer see.

An unseen Artemis hunted beneath the inclining crescent moon behind the black branches flowered with limpid stars. The four Corinthians lay among the grasses, near the three young men; and one knew not whether the last would venture to speak after the others, so silent was the hour.

Stories should be told only in the light of day. Because, when the shadow has entered in some part, one

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can no longer listen to the voice of fable, for the fugitive spirit establishes itself and speaks enchantingly to itself.

Each of the outstretched women had, already, a secret companion, charmingly created to a real image of her childish desire. Nevertheless, they all opened their eyes in the darkness when grave Melandryon said these first words:

"I will tell you the story of the Swan and of the little nymph who lived on the banks of the river Eurotas. It is in praise of blissful darkness."

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He partly raised himself, one hand in the grasses, and began to speak thus:

I

In those days, there were no tombs along the paths nor temples upon the hills.

But few men existed; no one spoke. The earth abandoned itself to the joy of the gods, and assisted in the birth of monstrous divinities. Those were the times in which Echidna brought forth the Chimera and Pasiphæ the Minotaur. The little children turned

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pale in the woods, in fear of the flight of dragons.

Now, on the moist borders of the Eurotas, where the woods were so thick that no light could be seen, there lived an extraordinary young girl who was bluish like the night, mysterious as the slender moon and soft as the Milky-Way. It was for this that she had been named Leda.

She was really almost blue, for the blood of the iris ran in her veins and not, as in yours, the blood of roses. Her nails were bluer than her hands, her nipples bluer than her breasts, her elbows and her knees were wholly

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azure. Her lips shone with the color of her eyes which were blue like deep water. As for her loosened hair, it was sombre and blue as the nocturnal sky and quickened along her arms as though she were wingèd.

She loved only the water and the night.

Her pleasure was to walk on the spongy meadows along the shores, where she could feel the water without seeing it, and her naked feet quivered with delight at the hidden dampness.

For she never bathed in the river, for fear of the jealous naiads; and

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nowhere else had she ever wished to give herself entirely to the water. But how she loved to be wet! She would mingle with the rapid current the extreme ringlet of her hair and then draw it, with slow circlings, over her pale skin. Or she would take, in the hollow of her hand, a little of the river's coolness and make it run between her young breasts until it was lost in the fold of her rounded legs. Or else she would lay herself forward, flat upon the damp moss, to drink gently from the surface of the water, like a silent hind.

This was her life; this and the

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thought of the satyrs. These appeared sometimes, by accident, but fled away in fright, for they took her for Phoebe, severe to those who saw her naked. She would have liked to speak to them if they would have paused near her. The details of their appearance filled her with astonishment. One night, when she had gone some distance into the forest, because rain had fallen and the earth was flooded, she had passed near one of these demi-gods, asleep; but, becoming fearful herself, she had withdrawn quickly. Afterward, she thought of it, at intervals, uneasy over things

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which she could not understand.

She began to regard herself, also, and found herself mysterious. At this period she became very sentimental and wept in her hair.

When the nights were bright, she regarded herself in the water. Once she thought it would be better to gather and roll her hair to bare her neck, which she felt pleasant to her caressing hand. She chose a supple rush to gather the blue knot of her hair and made herself a flowing coronal with five large watery leaves and a languishing nenuphar.

At first, she took pleasure in walk-

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ing about thus. But no one saw it, for she was alone. Then she became unhappy and stopped playing with herself.

Now, her spirit did not know it, but already her body awaited the beating of the wings of the Swan.

II

One evening, when she was scarcely awake, reflecting on resuming her dreams because a wide stream of yellow day still glowed beyond the night of the forest, her attention was drawn by a noise in the reeds near her, and

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she saw the apparition of a Swan.

The beautiful bird was white as a woman, splendid and rosy as the day, and radiated like a cloud. He seemed the actual spirit of the noon-day sky, its form, its wingèd essence. This is why he was named Zeus.

Leda considered him as he spread his wings, walking a little. At a distance, he moved around the nymph, looking sideways at her. Then he drew closer to her and, raising himself on his wide, red feet, stretched the undulous grace of his neck as high as he could before the bluish young thighs and to the mysterious lips.

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Leda's astonished hands carefully touched the little head, enveloping it with caresses. The bird quivered in all his feathers. In his deep, soft wings, he clasped and bent her naked legs. Leda let herself fall upon the ground.

She put her two hands over her eyes. She had neither fear nor shame, but an inexplicable joy; and the beating of her heart raised her breasts.

She divined nothing of what was happening. She did not know what could happen. She understood nothing, not even why she was happy.

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She felt, along her arms, the supple neck of the Swan.

Why had he come? What had she done, that he should come? Why had he not taken flight like the other swans upon the river or the satyrs in the forests? From her first memory, she had always lived alone. Thus she had not many ideas for thought, and the happenings of this night were so disconcerting . . . this swan . . . this Swan . . . She had not even seen him, for she was asleep. And he had come.

She was no longer afraid to look at him and did not move for fear he

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would fly away. She felt, upon her cheeks, the coolness of his beating wings.

Soon, he seemed to draw back, and his caresses changed. Leda opened herself to him like a blue flower of the river. She felt between her cold knees the warmth of the bird's body. Suddenly she cried: Ah . . . Ah . . . and her arms trembled like pale branches. The beak had penetrated abruptly, and the head of the Swan moved in her, slowly, as though he were eating her entrails, deliciously.

She melted in a long sigh of abun-

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dant delight, let her burning head fall back with closed eyes, wrenching at the grass with her fingers and shivering in space her little, convulsed feet which spread out in the silence.

For a long time, she remained motionless. At her first movement, her hand met, beneath her, the ensanguined beak of the swan.

She sat up and saw the great white bird against the clear sheen of the river.

She wished to rise; the bird obstructed her.

She wished to take a little of the

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water in the hollow of her hand and cool her joyous pain; the bird stopped her with his wing.

She took him in her arms and covered with kisses the tufted plumes which bristled up under her mouth. Then she stretched out on the bank and slept profoundly.

The next morning, as the day began, a new sensation awoke her suddenly and it seemed to her that something detached itself from her body. And this was a great blue egg which had rolled before her, gleaming like a sapphire.

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She wished to take it and play with it, or perhaps to bake it in warm embers as she had seen the satyrs do, but the Swan seized it in his beak and placed it in a cluster of bending reeds.

He stretched out over it his spreading wings, regarding Leda fixedly and then, in a straight flight toward the sky, mounted so high, and slowly, that he disappeared in the brightening dawn with the last pale star.

III

Leda hoped that, with the next rising of the stars, the Swan would re-

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turn to her and she waited for him among the reeds of the river, near the egg born of their miraculous union. The Eurotas was peopled with swans, but this one was no longer there. She would have recognized him among a thousand; even with her eyes closed, she would have felt his approach. But he was not there now; of this she was very sure.

Then she took off her coronal of water leaves, let it fall in the current, and loosened her hair and wept.

When she wiped her eyes, after a long time, a satyr, whose steps she had not heard, stood there.

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For she was no longer like Phoebe. She had lost her virginity. The satyrs were no longer afraid of her.

She bounded to her feet and drew back, frightened.

The ægipan said, softly:

"Who art thou?"

"I am Leda," she replied.

He was silent for a moment, then resumed:

"Why art thou not like the other nymphs? Why art thou blue like the water and the night?"

"I do not know."

He regarded her with astonishment.

"What dost thou here, all alone?"

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"I am waiting for the Swan."

And she looked out over the river.

"What swan?" he asked her.

"The Swan. I did not call him, I did not see him, and yet he came. I am so astonished. I will tell thee."

She related to him what had passed and she parted the reeds to show him the blue egg of the morning.

The satyr understood. He began to laugh and gave coarse explanations which she stopped at each word, putting her hand over his mouth and crying:

"I do not want to know! I will not. O! O! thou hast taught me. O! is

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it possible! Now I can no longer love him, and I am unhappy enough to die!"

He seized her by the arms, passionately.

"Do not touch me!" she wept. "O! how happy I was this morning! I cannot understand how happy I was! Now, if he returns, I will no longer love him! Now thou hast told me. Ah, how wicked thou art!"

He enlaced her suddenly, caressing her hair.

"O! No! no! no! . . . no . . ." she cried, again. "O! not thee! O! not this! the Swan! if he should re-

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turn. . . . Alas! alas! all is ended, all is ended."

She remained with open eyes, without weeping, her mouth open, her hands trembling with fright.

"I wish I could die. I do not even know whether I am mortal. I wish I could die in the water, but I am afraid of the naiads and that they would not carry me away with them. Oh! what have I done!"

And she sobbed loudly upon her arms.

But a grave voice spoke before her and, as she opened her eyes, she saw

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the god of the river, crowned with green herbs, half out of the water, leaning upon an oar of bright wood.

He said:

"Thou art the Night. And thou hast loved the symbol of all that which is light and glory and thou hast united thyself to it.

"From the symbol is born the symbol, and from the symbol will be born Beauty. It is the blue egg which has come forth from thee. Since the beginning of the world, it was known that she would be called Helen; and even the last man will know that she has lived.

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"Thou hast been filled with love because thou hast known nothing.

"That is the glory of blissful darkness.

"But thou art a woman also, and in the evening of the same day man also has impregnated thee.

"Thou bearest in thee the obscure being who should be nothing but himself and whom his father has not foreseen and of whom his son would be ignorant. I shall take the germ in my waters. It will remain in nothingness.

"Thou hast been full of hatred because thou hast not understood every-

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thing. And I will make thee forget all. That is the glory of blissful darkness."

She did not understand all that he had said but she thanked him, weeping.

She entered into the bed of the river and purified herself there of the satyr, and when she returned again to the bank, she had lost all remembrance of her sorrow and of her joy.

. . . . . .

Melandryon ceased speaking. The women remained silent. However, Rhea finally demanded:

"And Castor and Polydeuces?

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Thou hast said nothing of them? They were the brothers of Helen."

"No. That is a wrong legend; they are not interesting. Helen alone was born from the Swan."

"How dost thou know?"

". . ."

"And why dost thou say that the Swan wounded her with his beak? That is not in the legend and it is not probable. . . . And why dost thou say that Leda was blue like water in the night? Thou hast a reason for saying that."

"Didst thou not hear the words of the River? Symbols are never to be

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explained. They are never to be penetrated. Have belief. Ah! Do not doubt. That which is figured as a symbol hides a truth, but it is not to be made manifest; otherwise, why should it be symbolized?

"Forms are not to be rended, for they hide only the Invisible. We know there are adorable nymphs enclosed in the trees, and that when the wood-cutter opens them, the hamadryads are already dead. We know that, behind us, there are dancing satyrs and divine nudities, but we should not turn: all would already have disappeared.

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"It is the undulous reflection of the springs which is the essence of the naiad. It is the buck standing in the midst of the goats which is the essence of the satyr. It is one or the other of you which is the essence of Aphrodite. But it is not to be spoken; it is not to be known; one should not try to understand it. Such is the condition of love and joy. It is the glory of blissful darkness."

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A NEW PLEASURE

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MR. GLADSTONE (Before a map):

What are these two mountains, near the sources of the Nile?

MR. STANLEY:

They are the mountains Gordon-Bennett-Mackay.

MR. GLADSTONE:

Who gave them those ridiculous names?

MR. STANLEY:

It is I, sir, who discovered them.

MR. GLADSTONE:

Oh! no. They were discovered twenty-three centuries ago by Herodotus.

(*Daily News.* 1896.)

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I

FOUR years ago, perhaps five, I was living for several days each week in a small, but quiet and well furnished ground floor, in a street which communicated at one end with the little Monceau Park. This detail was of no interest to me for the gate was always closed in the evening before midnight, so that I could not walk there precisely at the hour when I best liked the open air.

One night I found myself there, in

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silent conversation with two blue pottery cats crouched upon a white table, hesitating in choice between two ways of whiling away the solitude: writing a sonnet and smoking cigarettes, or smoking cigarettes and staring at the ceiling.

The important point is always to have a cigarette at hand; it surrounds objects with a delicate, celestial tint which blends lights and shadows, effaces angles and, by an ensorcelling perfume, casts over the restless spirit a variable balance from which it falls into dreams.

This evening, I had the intention

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to write and the desire to do nothing; in other words, the evening seemed likely to end, like all the others, before a virgin sheet of paper and an ash-tray full of cadavers, when I was drawn from my thoughts by a ring at the neglected bell.

I raised my head. I satisfied myself that, on Friday the ninth of June, I expected no one at this hour of the night, but, when a second ring followed closely on the first, I went to the door and drew the lock.

Opening the door, I saw a woman.

She was enveloped in a flowing cloak which was of woolen cloth like

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a traveler's cloak, but woven in figures like a ball wrap. This was closed about her neck with a gathering of chenille from which her head barely emerged, brown under her blond tinted hair. Her face was young, sensual, a little mocking; two eyes very dark, a mouth very red.

"Wilt thou let me in, please?" she asked, inclining her head upon a shoulder.

I drew back with the singular astonishment of a man who sees entering his house, at an hour when one scarcely receives even the closest friends, a woman of whom he could

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recall no memory and who, with her first words, addressed him with a familiar "thou."

"Dear friend," I said timidly, when I had followed her into my room, "Dear friend, do not blame me; I recognize thee perfectly but by some misfortune I cannot at the moment recall thy name. Is it Lucien? or Totote?"

She smiled indulgently and, without replying, took off her cloak. Her robe was of water-green silk, ornamented with great irises woven in the cloth itself, the stems ascending along the body to the low, square-cut opening which left exposed the tops of the

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breasts. On each arm she wore a little golden serpent with emerald eyes. A necklace of great pearls in two rows shone upon her dark skin, marking the base of the neck which was rounded and lithe.

"If thou dost recognize me," she said, "it is because thou hast seen me in some dream. I am Callisto, the daughter of Lamia. For eighteen hundred years my tomb remained in peace in the flowery woods of Daphne, near the hills which once were voluptuous Antioch. But now the tombs

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have traveled. They bore me away to Paris and my shadow followed the stone which contains my fragile ashes. For a long time I slept in the glacial caverns of the Louvre. I might have been there forever, if a noble pagan, a holy man, M. Louis Menard, the only one who, today, remembers the rights and divine ceremonies, had not pronounced before my tomb the traditional words which give to the wretched dead an ephemeral and nocturnal life. For seven hours each night I can walk in thy squalid city . . ."

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"Oh! Poor girl!" I interrupted. "How changed thou must find the world!"

"Yes and no. I find the houses dark, the costumes ugly and the sky dismal; (what singular idea brings you to live in such a climate!) I find life is more confused and the people look unhappier; but if I have been surprised, it has been to see again, on every side, all the things I have known. What! in eighteen centuries you have accomplished no more than this! Nothing new? Nothing better, truly? What I have seen in your streets, in your parks, in your houses, is that

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all, is that really all? . . . How miserable, my friend!"

The astonishment she caused, held me speechless. She smiled and explained:

"Thou seest how I am dressed?" she asked. "I am wearing the robe which was placed with me in the tomb. Behold it. In my time, people clothed themselves in wool, in flax, and in silk. Returning to the earth, I thought to find these old stuffs lost even to memory. I imagined (forgive me) that after so many years men would have discovered marvelous tissues like the sunlight or moonlight and more

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delightful to touch than the skin of a virgin or a fruit. But no; how do you clothe yourselves? in wool, in flax and in silk . . . Oh! I know: you have found cotton, fit to clothe negroes who were inconvenient as they were. This is, perhaps, extremely moral . . . Thou likest cotton? Thou art proud of its discovery? As for me, I could not bear to touch this stuff which clings and falls apart. Have you, indeed, a stuff to drape better than wool? no; finer than the woven flax? more luminous than silk? . . . But answer thyself."

She continued:

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"In my day, we shod ourselves with skins. . . . We had sandals, colored shoes, furred slippers, high boots . . . thine own shoes, fastened with a loop a little higher, are of Phrygian form. Look at mine: they are of olive morocco, gilded from little irons, like the binding of a book. Admire them. Thou wilt find none so lovely in the shops of thy friends' tradesmen."

She continued further:

"In my day, to make jewelry, two precious metals were used: gold and silver. Have you found a third? Necklaces were made, rings, bracelets, ear-rings, diadems and brooches. I

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have found all these, identically, along the streets of Paris. You know the pearl, the emerald, the diamond, the opal, the moonstone, the ruby, the sapphire and all the tinted silicas which come from Arabia and India, today, as formerly. Have you, by any chance, created one precious stone in eighteen centuries? But one, tell me of one, I pray thee! one stone which I have not known, one ring which I have not had on my fingers, one new jewel, even mounted in gold like mine, since thou hast no rarer metal to offer me, but bearing in its claws a new gem?"

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Her voice had become animated, little by little, to a tone of reproach and vexation. I made a quieting gesture.

"Callisto," I replied, "I think thou attachest an exaggerated importance to the ornaments which women wear and which have no other purpose than to occupy, by their difficult choice and fastidious form, a stagnant and idle life. It is evident today, after ten thousand years of fruitless efforts among all people, that a young girl will never know how to be more beautiful by the art of the dress-maker, the embroiderer and the goldsmith than at the instant when she shows her-

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self all naked, as the gods created her. I doubt not that the Greeks knew this simple costume. . . ."

"Better than thy compatriots."

"Do not be proud. You did not invent it. I know that, in our days, it is more disguised than in the time when thou wert born; but, at the worst, of what importance is the difference? One cannot dress women. That is axiomatic. We will not combat it. If the æsthetic truths could be demonstrated from theorems, M. Poincairé could already have proved mathematically that it is futile to exercise human imagination in an attempt to

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solve this problem; as certain an impossibility as the trisection of angles. For my part, I am not afflicted by the failure, since it is eternal, and I am contented to admire woman in her primitive purity (which, for her, never changes) with the antique emotion of those who once touched Helen."

She regarded me steadily and, inclining her head toward me, said slowly:

"Art thou sure, presumptuous one, that women have not changed?"

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II

In my agitation, I know not whether I saw what she did immediately after saying these words.

How she removed her rings, slipped off her bracelets, opened her necklace, let her vestments fall and, at the same time, her thick hair, I could not say. It was so rapid and dazzling that it remains in my memory like a dim wonder.

Until then, I had not entirely believed in the reality of the adventure. Apparitions long believed supernatural and therefore recognized as obe-

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dient to the laws of a profound but unknown nature, sometimes present themselves with aspects of a material form which is not questioned by any of our senses and which can mislead even a spirit which is incredulous or fortified against improbabilities.

I had been asking myself for an hour whether I was not being mystified by some extravagant reader; some stranger, I thought, immodest and deliberate enough to come at night to a bed-chamber where she had certainly not been invited, attempting, no doubt, to cover the banal design which moved her by a careful dissimulation under a

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costume from the theatre. I had responded in the mood to which she herself conducted, with the reserve of a complaisant interlocutor who, through deference or curiosity, would not rend too quickly the tissue of a careful and interesting comedy.

But, as soon as she was nude, I knew that she had come to me from the distant past . . .

I remember very well that, at the moment I realized this, I approached, if I did not achieve, all the exaltation with which a religious instinct invincibly inspires me. I held myself in my chair to keep from falling on my knees

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and I gazed, my head forward, with a feeling of sacrilege, as though so marvelous a being should not be beheld by the same eyes which had seen mortal women. I had never known such agitation.

Callisto was superb. Her body was slender and rounded, the torso high, the legs very long. Her fine joints were of a fragility which ravished me and even in the muscular thighs one divined the delicate bones. Depilated, but pure and without cosmetics, her skin shone as though fresh from the bath, browned in a light, uniform tint, almost black about the breasts,

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along the edges of the eye-lids and in the short line of sex. I know not how to describe her beauty which could never be developed in our climate or in our age, for it was not born of any one detail but only of harmony and perhaps of clarity. To affirm a difference between her and the women of my time, I was obliged to believe without any proof for my discernment, as a collector distinguishes the true from the false, sometimes without being able to demonstrate the exact point upon which he established his conviction.

As though placing herself at my dis-

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posal, she extended herself upon a couch.

"You could, at least, have brought women to perfection," she resumed, smiling; "and, as thou seest, the races have deteriorated. Why have your doctors, who despise ours, left your mistresses, today, less beautiful than my sisters? The earth where we had lived has not been engulfed. The Orontes descends always from the midst of the cedar mountains. Smyrna survives. Sparta is dead but Athens has been resurrected. Vain and feeble century, why hast thou replaced the Ionians with a mixture of

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Levantines and why hast thou not created selections of women as thou hast created families of roses? Thou canst not. Thine effort is that of a child. Ours was that of gods."

While she spoke (I was scarcely in a mood to dispute with her), a terror such as one feels on the borderland of sleep pressed my temples. I trembled lest she suddenly leave me, like a fluid being, an offspring of the light; and I asked if my eyes only had the illusion of her corporeal presence; if, with the tip of my finger, I could touch her delicate skin.

"Come," she said, laughing, "I am

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not a shadow. Give me thy hand."

Arching her loins upon the couch, she passed my arm about her body which pressed voluptuously upon my fingers.

Then, with a waywardness which would take no denial, she resumed her discourse.

"A thousand years before the time of my beauty, men united with women somewhat as goats united. Thou hast read Homer? Neither Argos nor Troy knew of other pleasures than those contained in the savage acts of animals. Even the kiss upon the mouth was unknown to Briseis. An-

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dromache never offered her breasts to other lips than those of her little child. About Helen's thighs no hand ever opened and lightly raised the shiverings born of the human caress."

She closed her eyes. . . .

"And then, suddenly, in a day, the peoples of the antique Orient where I was born received from the gods, like a fire eternally young, the sole gift which distinguished them from the other inhabitants of the world: they discovered voluptuousness.

"O days of strength! youth of the world! For the first time, the lips of a man and a woman, leaving fruits,

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found themselves savory. The great burning soul of Aphrodite inspired the bodies of lovers and, each day, a new pleasure—a *new* pleasure, thou understandest—descended from blue Olympia into the great, groaning beds. There was an intoxication unrestrained; from Babylon to Mount Erix, all the perfumes, all the silks, the flowers, the arts and the women, formed in the triumph which followed the discovery of joy. The young girls, at last liberated from hereditary barbarousness, conscious of their senses and of their desires, opened their nostrils to the rose and their

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charming bodies to the mouth. During the centuries, the treasure of sensuality was augmented. In my time, in Antioch and in Alexandria, the women enriched it still more. I myself, Callisto, the daughter of Lamia, it is I who discovered this . . ."

But I drew back . . .

She laughed.

"Ah! Thou art afraid! Well then, we will speak of thy time; let us see! During the nineteen hundred years of my slumber in the tomb, what unknown joy have you conquered? For an hour I have been asking thee for a new pearl. Now I ask thee for

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a love which I have not already tried. Without doubt, after so long a time, many new pleasures have been discovered. I await thine invitation to partake of them."

She was secure in her ironic position and I divined that, during her long nocturnal wanderings about the city, she had tried in vain to complete her education; also, that I could give nothing in this impossible search.

"Be patient," I said simply. "Thou seest, we have begun by forgetting everything. Later, we will reinvent. This is the history of modern civilization. It came to the world

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a few years after thy death, after unexampled calamities great enough to be irreparable. First came the birth and singular fortune of a religion which, in its origin, was assuredly commendable but which, distorted by Israelites too rude or too adroit, rendered barren the efforts of thy race and scattered salt upon the ruins of Athens. Following this came the invasion of Barbarians; when the deluge of Judea had rotted the wood of the vessel, the rats penetrated there and scattered it in pieces. This endured until the new day when the books saved from destruction and recovered

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at Constantinople arose in the Orient like a new dawn. An hundred years were spent reading them. Since they have been studied, three painful centuries have passed. But the time is for us, perhaps. We must be for the time, Callisto."

She smiled in derision.

"Hast thou found," she responded, "in the parchments of thy museums, the tradition of Rhodopis? Can your archæologists, who possess so thoroughly the policies of Pericles and the strategy of Alexander, reconstruct the science of Aspasia and of Thaïs? Do they know whether the tomb in which

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the delicate ashes of Phryne repose, has not enclosed forever the secret of a lost voluptuousness?

"This tradition I have still. Wouldst thou know it? I will yield it to thee . . ."

III

Whatever may be the curiosity of the young girls who read this fragment of memories, I will not pause to dwell on a description of that which followed; first, because I have already written, upon the documents of Callisto, an entire book which is called

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"Aphrodite"; and then, because a certain reserve restrains me, perhaps, from presenting, under a personal form, the details of a night of excesses.

Callisto arose toward noon. She caused me to observe pleasantly that the sun was already high and that, through need of a perfected lighting system, we had but glimpsed each other.

"You ruin the Night; you no longer know the Dawn," she said, sadly. "Formerly, the spectacle of the gleam of dawn was the recompense for long, exhausting vigils. Now you pass your

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lives in a monotonous light and you do not even know the Shadows."

I was uneasy.

"Noon! . . . But did I not hear thee speak of a life confined to nocturnal hours. How can I still hold thee here?"

"That is an affair between Persephone and myself," she replied, with a singular smile. "Let us talk. I have not finished abusing thine epoch."

I was a little tired, and still nervous.

"Enough," I said, "I pray thee. Let us talk of ourselves, wilt thou? Let us leave the world, better or worse

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. . . I am interested only in thee."

"Still, hear me. Thou hast not been convinced. I will continue until thou art. Truly, I remain desolated at my second journey upon earth. I should have remained in the tomb, with the dreams of the purer age in which I grew up amidst pleasures. I need to tell someone about the deceptions which end my promenade and what I wish to thy century for all the surprises which it has not offered me. Seest thou, the world is a young man who gives hopes but who is likely to misfire his life."

"I know not . . . It seems to me

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that we have thought well and created well since thy death. The age in which we live is not so contemptuous."

"But it is! Partly from its impotence but more from its conceit. No! you have not thought and you have not created! Your people dress like Phœnicians, reproducing the models invented by my race, but elsewhere than with us you find nothing, and you exist only in our shadow."

She made a gesture.

"Walk in the streets of Paris. Everywhere our eternal soul shines in the façades of the monuments, in the

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capitals of the columns and on the foreheads of the statues. After having built, during the barbarous and wretched middle-ages, those miserable buildings which are already (happily!) falling, you, the men of modern times, have returned to our ruins and, for four hundred years, have made mosaics of stone with the fragments of our temples. A column found in Sicily has engendered two thousand churches and as many railroad platforms. Even to new requirements you have not known how to give a new architecture. With the bronze of your cannons you have copied the Tra-

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jan column, and you have made concert halls Corinthian in style. After us, with our sculptors who wrought in marble and cast in bronze, you have found nothing, not a natural stone, not a chemical alloy, worthy of reproducing the human figure. And the only glory of your sculptors is not from that which they have done, but because one has found, in the ground, a torso of Apollonius, a wreck without head, without arms and without legs, a lamentable ruin, but a created work, that; a creative work. Scholars!"

She took two books from a case and threw them upon the carpet.

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"Your thought, like your art, is a parasite upon our cadavers. It is not Descartes, it was Parmenides who said that thought is identical with being. It is not Kant, it was still Parmenides who said that thought is identical with its object. In these two phrases, the modern schools are entirely encased; they cannot emerge. Wherever our science became general, that is to say, philosophical, there it has remained, to this day, upon our fundamental laws. The masters of Euclid fixed forever the unchangeable relation of lines. Archimedes supplied integral calculus long before your Leibniz who

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was equally indebted to us for his metaphysics. In place of meditating upon the fall of apples, Newton, whom you venerate, could have limited himself to reading a page from Aristotle where his theory of universal gravity was expounded two thousand years ago. Upon the constitution of matter, which is the problem of God, Democritus knew more than Lord Kelvin; his hypothesis alone remains admissible. Finally, at the moment when you are upon the point of conceiving a central and universal science, with a law sufficient to explain all phenomena—what is this science and what is this law? no

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more than that to which Heraclitus, two thousand four hundred years ago, gave this definitive expression:—fire transforms in movement; movement transforms in fire; and this is the world."

I was exhausted.

"O Callisto," I supplicated, "hear my wingéd words; thou art much too learned. I had often heard that the antique courtesans were women of rare intellectuality, but it was not this, certainly, which made them so beautiful. Today, if Madame de Pougy, in spite of her great literary talent, wished to entertain M. Boutroux with the subjects

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which preoccupy him, she would not succeed in interesting him as much as an Aspasia speaking to Xenophon. And yet I would prefer to have her tell me more willingly about a robe from Jacques Doucet than about a thermodynamic law, and it is a conversation which would be more becoming to her supple body. Moreover, the charm of a woman always increases at the moment when she remains silent; but this is a special truth which is obvious only to men."

She waited silently until I had finished; then, with a victorious obstinacy, she resumed:

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"How is it that, in two thousand years, you have discovered neither . . ."

"We discovered America," I interrupted, impatiently.

"That is not true!"

"Callisto, do not be absurd."

"I repeat, and I will maintain, that America was discovered by Aristotle and that this is not a paradoxical thesis but a fact historical and patent. Aristotle knew that the world is round and (as thou canst read in his books), he advised a search for the road to the Indes 'by the west, beyond the columns of Heracles.' It was this project

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which Columbus resumed. But one has always reckoned that the glory of a discovery remains with the brain which conceives it and not with the one which executes it. When Leverrier discovered Neptune . . ."

"Ah, well," I said, consumed with lassitude, "at least, thou wilt allow this: we discovered Neptune."

"And when was this! You discovered Neptune! Thou art astonishing! Since yesterday I have been supplicating thee to reveal a new pleasure to me, a conquest toward happiness, a victory over tears. And you have discovered Neptune! I return to life, after

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twenty centuries, concerned about everything, jealous of the marvels I supposed invented, beseeching, if I were not to weep through my life of eternal shadow, to be returned quickly to the world; and someone has discovered Neptune! A pleasure! a pleasure! a pleasure of the spirit or a pleasure of the senses; it does not matter which! Must I descend again to the Elysian fields without bearing with me the quiver of a new delight?"

She extended her hands. . . . Then, brusquely:

"Anyway, it was Pythagoras who discovered Neptune."

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I subsided.

"Absolutely," she declared, inexorably, "Pythagoras found that the solar system was composed of ten stars. I do not know upon what he founded this number; but his disciple, Philolaos, came to discern, later, without any lensed instrument, and many centuries before Copernicus, the double movement of the earth upon its axis and about the central fire; although no doubt it is impossible for thee to really understand how such a discovery could have been established with the sole assistance of reason, thou hast no right to assume that the hypothesis of Py-

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thagoras was advanced rashly and confirmed by accident. I have finished."

I contended no more.

"Wilt thou have a cigarette?" I asked.

"What?"

"I say: wilt thou have a cigarette? No doubt they also have come to us from Greece. Perhaps it was Aristotle who . . ."

"No. I had never seen them before. I admit that we were ignorant of this absurd habit of filling the mouth with the smoke of leaves. But I do not suppose thou wouldst pretend to offer me this as a pleasure."

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"Who knows. Hast thou tried?"

"Never! What, art thou also one of those who indulge in this ridiculous exercise?"

"Sixty times each day. It is, even, the sole regular occupation in which I willingly employ my life."

"And it pleases thee?"

"I really believe I could resign myself to not touching the hand of a woman for an entire week, sooner than separate from my cigarettes for the same length of time."

"Thou art exaggerating."

"Scarcely any."

She had become thoughtful.

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"Ah well, give me a cigarette."

"I would suggest it."

"Light it. What does one do? Breathe?"

"Young girls puff the smoke; but that is not the best way. It is better to really inhale. Draw in. Close the eyes. Again . . ."

After some minutes, Callisto's little roll of oriental leaves was in ashes. She dropped the half-consumed end where the fard of her lips had left a trace of rouge.

There was a silence.

She would not look at me. She had taken the square package in her hand

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which seemed agitated by a soft emotion, and, after she had examined it on all sides, I saw that she would not return it.

Slowly, with the care one bestows upon the most precious objects, she placed it near the ash-tray at the edge of a bright divan on which she stretched out her long, dark body.

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