

## THE PHOSPHORESCENT WALTZER

*(An extract from the memoirs of a beautiful  
but poor woman, concerning her marriage)*

### I

I pity people who don't know the Basque coast, and more particularly Saint-Jean-de-Luz Bay. An occasional sojourn in that magical land would compensate them for the troubles of life. It would permit them to wait without impatience for their passage to a better world—unless one passes into oblivion, which is still a subject of controversy.

Personally, after having rolled my lump around the world somewhat—I use the singular out of respect for the current expression<sup>1</sup>, but know that I'm twenty-two years old and that nature has endowed me sumptuously with that of which the Amazons lacked half—and after having admired many shores from the Far East to the Far West, I remain fanatical about that enchanting location, and I used to spend vacations there as often as my modest resources permitted.

I love the peaceful fluidity of the atmosphere in that region, the soft warmth of the sand, the discreet voice of the waves. I love the décor of the villas, the hotels along the beach, the elegant frame of Ciboure to the left and the cliffs of Saint-Barbe to the right. I love idling through the tortuous, scarcely-paved streets, in which every house religiously preserves the local character. I also love the bronzed, slimly-built people, and the proud upright posture of the women when they walk—which they have apparently inherited from their ancestors, who used to carry burdens on their heads. I also love the elegant company that animates the resort from July to the end of September, in competition with the vogue for Biarritz. Finally, I love the Pergola, the embryo of a vast casino interrupted by the war, where one can dance, drink, eat and tempt fortune gambling.

I am not one of those morose individuals who attribute the outgoing tide not to astral influences but to the disgust the sea experiences on seeing so many people assembled on its shore, dancing so comically, chattering so idly, guzzling so gluttonously and ruining themselves so stupidly. The waves, such people jest, are recoiling in horror. Good for the waves! They are, however, very indulgent, since they soon come back again...

And I love, I love that vain crowd and that joyous refuge!

Well, it was in the Pergola, enfevered that evening by a costumed ball, that I experienced the most disappointing emotion of my youth.

I'm an orphan; my father's career as a diplomat dragged me all over the world and brought me into contact with various civilizations, with all the instruction that results, for a child's intelligence, from the spectacle of mores in which, in some latitudes, it is immoral to show one's face, whereas in others, it is the face and upper body that one exposes proudly while hiding the rest. In spite of the domination that I had achieved over my nervous system by virtue of that nomadic existence and the philosophy with which I had become accustomed to accepting the surprises of life, yes, I experienced that evening my first true chagrin, and, as I am also impetuous by nature, my first authentic revolt.

What! That was the way that the friend whom my virginal heart already considered as the master of my destiny slipped away! No promises had been made, it is true, either by him or by me; no definitive word had been pronounced. He was still able to consider himself free, although I had pledged myself to

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<sup>1</sup> The French *roulé ma bosse*, which translates literally as “rolled my lump” is used metaphorically in a manner closely akin to the English expression “like a rolling stone,” but the latter will not sustain the *double entendre* that permits the parenthetical observation.

him a long time ago. But is it not gazes, attentions, anxieties and the very sound of the voice that obligate you, as much as promises and oaths? How could I suppose that Marcel would greet with such indifference the propositions I had just made to him? What a disillusionment!

I thought that he might respond to the confidence with the amusing flippancy with which he is able to demolish people who do not please him; I even thought that he might take advantage of it finally to declare the affection that his entire being had betrayed since the beginning of our friendship. Far from it; his eyes remained calmly attached to the movements of the dancers; he continued, with a hand lightly applied on the back of my chair, to beat the measure of the fast-paced shimmy to which a few couples were swinging their hips beneath the enchantment of the multicolored chandeliers.

“Did you understand what I said, Marcel?” I said, twisting my fan.

“Perfectly, my dear Made.”

“And is that all that you have to say in reply?”

“My God, what do you want me to say?”

“I hoped at least for some advice, dictated by the interest that you have taken in me for two years.”

“Oh, advice is dangerous, when it’s a matter of something as serious as marriage.”

“And you don’t like danger...” I said, ironically, although my voice was tearful.

“I fear it, like any human being.”

“Even when it might be a matter of saving my future? Oh, Marcel, I thought you were nobler!”

My reproach provoked a reaction in him that I was no longer expecting. He turned his head away, so that I would not be able to glimpse his tenderness—but I had divined it. What secret, incomprehensible force, then, opposed his heart to its determination?

“Let’s speak clearly,” he said, very softly, in order to attenuate in advance the pain that he was about to cause me. “You’re twenty-two years old; you’re pretty, intelligent, cultivated and more fully-informed about amorous matters than all these young women surrounding us, who nevertheless hide behind their precious candor an already-experienced knowledge. Unlike them, and fortunately for you, you’ve been able to remain sheltered from the demon; you refrain from listening, like some of these we can see at this moment, to the whispers of dancing-partners and responding to them with a smile that speaks volumes. Yes, for you, flirtation is a petty vice; you want to remain irreproachable by the only man that you will love.

“But who might that man be? For, along with all the real qualities with which I’ve just credited you, Made, I must admit that you have one serious defect: you are, essentially, a creature of luxury. Your habits, the result of your education, of the comfortable situation of your lamented father, necessitate that you wear lovely dresses; that your feet should be clad in good quality stockings and shoes; that an automobile should be waiting for you during all your visits; that your boudoir should be furnished with antiques and carpeted in silk; and you don’t hesitate when it’s a matter of a few large-denomination bills for a fashionable fur.

“Yes, for you, all that ostentation and all those refinements are not special: they’re necessary and compulsory. But you have no fortune, my dear Made! I can’t see you, from now on, shaping the mediocrity of a man who only has intelligence enough to earn a living in this society enslaved by shopkeepers and boxers. You, the wife of an advocate, a physician, an artist or a scientist? You, obliged to renounce the pomp that is dear to you, to manage a household, to haggle with suppliers, skimp on nourishment, help out the one and only maid and change the children’s nappies, if there are any? Get away!”

“Oh!” I protested, wounded by the fact that he doubted my courage. “With all my heart, for the man I love...”

“Yes,” he agreed, “with all your heart...but you’d suffer from it, Made, and a true friend couldn’t demand it of you. It would be to immolate you—and at length, your love would lose its wings. You ought not to suffer, Made, and you shouldn’t! I’d be the first to be inconsolable. So I say to you: listen with more favor to this offer, unusual in our era even for an elite creature like you. Although its advantages are indisputable, I’d like to point them out to you.

“Let’s first examine the young man together. We have him in sight now. There he is, offering his hand to Mademoiselle de Laricarière, who is starting to dance a waltz with him. He dances badly; he dances impetuously; but he’s handsome. With his straight nose, his rounded oval face, his wide eyes, yes, he’s as handsome as an antique—classically handsome, with all the beauty of which Phidias left immortal memories. His dentition is possessed of the most Oriental purity. His harmonious muscles, his supple articulations, his powerful torso and his arched lower back make him one of the most veritably enviable specimens of our epoch.

“Furthermore, his elegance, his good manners, his courtesy and his simplicity recommend him even more to mothers in search of a son-in-law for their daughter. I’m sure that Mademoiselle de Laricarière would take him on. See how she’s smiling at him already, how her cheek is inclining toward him, how flexible her waist is becoming—too flexible, even—in order to abandon itself to her partner’s pressure...but she’s wasting her time. He only has eyes for you. It’s you he loves, you he wants to make his wife.

“And he’s madly rich, Made! His father, Monsieur Danator, has made an enormous fortune in Argentina. I wonder, in that regard, how a man like that, so impassioned by medicine, physics, chemistry and transcendental science could have had enough practical sense to build an extraordinarily profitable business. I’m also suspicious of his past, for those who, starting from nothing, rapidly acquire a fortune are usually adventurers of whom it’s necessary to be suspicious. They leave cadavers in their wake; their purse-strings, before tying up their profits, have strangled more than a few innocents...but no, Monsieur Danator *père* isn’t an adventurer. All his transactions have been above board. He can even be considered an honest man.

“He’s taken an interest in a thousand successful enterprises, by virtue of his intelligence. His recent discovery of naphtha mines in the Urals, on land that he bought for less than six francs a hectare in our money, no longer permit his wealth to be calculated. One can only be astonished that a man so strangely devoid of grace has been able to produce such a magnificent child. His wife must be very beautiful, and very close to nature. The poor woman died in an accident, it appears. She was electrocuted after being moved by curiosity to touch a powerful electrical machine used by her husband in his experiments...

“Why, I only have to look at the Villa of the Immaculate Conception that he’s built out there beyond Ciboure, to regret that his son isn’t a daughter and that I lack the gifts that favor you. I wouldn’t hesitate for a moment! I’d sell my heart and all the rest to know...yes, to know...”

“To know what?”

My friend Marcel Germaud did not reply. He made an evasive gesture, and I was all the more reluctant to press him to complete his train of thought because I was atrociously wounded by his advice. Moreover, our attention was captured at that moment to Monsieur Danator *père*. He was sitting at a table alone, a short distance away from us, on the edge of the dance-floor—the place that he normally adopted in order not to lose sight of his son. He chaperoned his offspring like a doting mother, which inevitably made him the butt of the bathers’ jokes.

Monsieur Danator was too far away from us to have overheard our conversation, but one might have thought that he had divined that he was its object, for he was looking at us with an astonished expression. Once again, I had a disagreeable impression of the individual in question, whose clean-shaven face had a complicated bone-structure, in which the brows and jaws formed protrusions outlining the skeleton beneath the taut skin, while the ears, projecting and pointed, were animated by incessant movements, like those of wolves. But the eyes astonished me even more; pierced, as if by a drill, between reddened eyelids, they advertised an extraordinary cerebral feverishness. And he was bald to boot—the full extent of the fellow’s cranium was bald. Even though he never took off the Basque beret with which he covered it, one could see that the polish of his scalp extended all the way to the occiput.

No, that caricature would not become my father-in-law! Me, apply to him the polite appellations that daughters-in-law employ in familial extravagance...!

Seeing that he was observed, Monsieur Danator looked away, and Marcel, pointing at the young man who was escorting his partner to her seat now that the dance was over, continued: “Setting aside the singularities of the papa—and it’s not with him, after all, that you’ll be exchanging affection—the son

presents himself as the most enviable of husbands. I'll add that, without having been able to appreciate the extent of his education, I don't believe he's an imbecile. He often indulges in witty repartee..."

"Oh! In poor taste, and, quite often, with a vulgarity of language..."

"I agree, Made. It's necessary to excuse him, however, because he's a fervent imitator of his father, and Monsieur Danator has a predilection for lewd jokes...and then, it's becoming respectable. That doesn't prevent him from having a well-nourished memory; from valiantly playing the part of Theramenes;<sup>2</sup> from singing operettas pleasantly; from having a weakness for crustaceans, which is a symptom of Epicureanism; and even from risking a few light-hearted swerves in the direction of Parnassus. A poet: what more do you want in order to accept a share in his Pactolus?"

"It's just that it would be necessary for me to sleep in his Pactolus."

"So what?"

"And call him Adam."

"That's not so ridiculous."

"Adam, not ridiculous? Can you see me, in society, being announced as Madam Adam Danator?"

"In society, people would be looking at your pearls, not listening to the syllables of your name."

"And to kiss him, saying 'I love you, Adam' But I'd burst out laughing simply at the thought of being Eve!"

"Eve would have châteaux and would be grateful to her primal man."

"Come on!" I said, bitterly. "I can see that you're treating the matter far more lightly than I am."

Was I mistaken? My reply seemed to sadden him. But one never knew, with him. To penetrate his thoughts required a divination that is not my strong suit. When he emerged from his biological studies, where renown reckoned him to be a first-rate scientist, he armored himself with a paradoxical, mocking wit, and seemed not to believe in anything. I'd only ever been able to catch glimpses of the secrets of his soul, so fugitive and so misleading...

I thought, therefore, that it would be futile to confess to him what still put me off Adam Danator. It was the confused but oft-repeated impression that the handsome young man in question lacked personality; that he was like a reflection of someone else; that his ideas were never fitted exactly to the frame of a conversation; that his repartee, although casual, lacked individuality, as if he were reciting his sallies rather than forging them with his own mind. In truth, it would have been quite difficult for me to explain all that to Marcel, and even now that I hold the key to my stupefying conjugal adventure, I have difficulty identifying the exact significance of that psychological eccentricity.

My suitor had rejoined his father and was sitting down before a lemon squash ordered in advance. I saw Monsieur Danator take a small flask out of his pocket and pour a few drops from it into his son's drink. They didn't say a word. The two men, eloquent enough in society, always maintained the most absolute silence when they were reduced to their own company. Adam swallowed the contents of the glass in a single draught, grimacing slightly.

"It appears to me that his good health nevertheless requires a little care," I observed to Marcel.

He responded with the same enigmatic gesture that he had made before. Then he moved his chair to give passage to the young man, who was coming to ask me to dance.

"It's another waltz. Papa has ordered waltzes, Mademoiselle Ribaire..."

I accepted, and we ventured forth to the strains of an old tune delivered as if under protest by the orchestra, which still contrived to give it a tango rhythm. He took me by the waist in the most decent fashion and we set about whirling. He moved with an extraordinary fidelity to the beat; his step never went a centimeter beyond what was required; but what was lacking between us was the accord, the harmony, that results from a kind of unconscious inspiration and inebriates a couple with the rhythm. In fact, I only had to let myself be transported. If, by virtue of an embarrassment resulting from an encounter with other dancers, my feet got out of position, he took no notice and persisted in drawing me onwards, which reestablished the momentum. In the same way, he paid little heed to his neighbors; he jostled them and went on regardless, like a mechanical toy whose spring was unwinding.

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<sup>2</sup> An Athenian rebel against tyranny, controversial among historians but inevitably admired by French Romantics.

What did I experience in dancing with him?

First of all, it's necessary to understand what a young woman can feel in contact with her dancing-partner. Certainly, it's a question of species. For some, I'm sure, dancing is merely an exercise, a kind of sport, much like running, swimming or cycling. For others, it's physical means of contenting sentimentality. For others still, to whom it would never occur that pleasure might be supplemented to duty, it's a pre-conjugal chore. But for me, whose dark hair and a slight down on the lips betray the exigencies of nature, I must confess that the grip of a dancing-partner, whoever he might be, has never failed to cause me a certain indefinable disturbance. So, for the sake of decency, scorn for bodily weakness and the desire to preserve myself for the ideal of a chosen companion, I had resolved never dance again. If I was breaking the rule at that moment, it was only because of the irritation resulting from my conversation with Marcel.

Oh, that accursed temperament! I would have like so much to provoke Marcel's jealousy without any injury to my virginal resolutions! Well, even so, I had the disappointment of weakening again in the grip of that young man. It was, however, rude—his grip, that is. To adapt me to his gyratory movement, he went so far as to make me suffer; while he retained an even respiration, I ran out of breath, suffocating; no fluidity can be exchanged with a dancer who directs his gaze blissfully toward the variegated canvas of the dance-floor, whirling without any apparent care except avoiding false steps, and not even replying to my plea to moderate his pace...and yet, in his arms, I became once again the perturbed woman that I only wanted to be with Marcel...

Oh, that accursed temperament!

At the same time as the orchestra, my waltzer stopped dead, as if at the flick of a switch, without a gasp, without a drop of sweat, cool and calm, as radiant as he had been before the gymnastics.

We went back to the table where Marcel was waiting for me. Adam hesitated for a moment, wondering whether he ought to go back to his father or stay. But Monsieur Danator came in his turn to sit down with us, bringing two bottles of extra-dry that he had just ordered.

In that seaside resort, as in all seaside resorts, and, in a more general sense, in all collectivities, where everyone's slightest gestures are observed and interpreted in the most unfavorable fashion, the ostentatious movement of the Danators to join us would have been considered to be the consequence of an invitation that I had carefully refrained from offering. What! Those gentlemen, always so reserved, so haughty, who only appeared on the beach and in the Pergola as if they were slumming, and departed again almost immediately in their limousine for the inaccessible retreat in Ciboure, were lingering at the nocturnal festival and swilling champagne in the company of that little adventuress Ribaire and her boyfriend Marcel Germaud! Could one imagine such a solicitation? Which of the two, then—the father or the son—was chasing after that slut without a sou? For no one knew as yet about the marriage proposal that had been made to me, and could only think in terms of gallantry.

All gazes were, therefore, directed at me, and the most fiery, the most hateful, was bulging from the orbits of Mademoiselle de Laricarière. For want of being able to flirt with Adam, she was leaning, while laughing in bursts, toward her temporary squire, Guy Frappart, a middle-aged man, monocled, with dyed hair, the owner of a large canning factory, and a cynical poisoner. He detested me because he had paid insolent court to me for indecent motives, which had earned him a sharp rejection. He had also attempted in vain to get into Monsieur Danator's good books in order to interest him in a few business proposals, with the result that the pleasure he was taking in his neighbor's jokes was simultaneously responsive to my intransigence and his lack of success with the billionaire.

Once the venom had been spat out, however, we were forgotten; the fête went on, the orchestra launched enthusiastically into a foxtrot and Monsieur Danator, uncorking the extra-dry, sent a jet of foam on to the floor, like one of Molière's physicians. He grimaced his joy at having so fortunately missed his aim. After which, having filled our glasses, he occupied himself with supplying his son with another orangeade, into which he immediately poured a few drops from his flask—a touching solicitude, but one that diminished my suitor.

"Don't be astonished," said Monsieur Danator, as if in reply to my interior observation. "I need to pay as much attention to him as a new-born baby. That's because he is, like all poets, always in quest of a

caesura or a rhyme, so he forgets the contingencies. But you should see his verses! They're incomparable, exquisite in their imagery and musicality! I don't think Hugo could do any better. Oh, there will be, for his wife, a fine mission with regard to my little Pindar...to assist him to create! Drink, Adam!"

He held out the glass, but—a further surprise—the polite Adam brought a cooked crab out of the pocket of his smoking jacket, cracked its shell, and started sucking at it avidly.

"Adam!" protested his father, impetuously.

But the other continued devouring his prey regardless, with a savage appetite and an animal joy, showing off his shiny teeth. Then, Monsieur Danator gave him a stare charged with such menace that Adam recovered his sense of propriety and immediately abandoned his crab, dropping it into his trouser pocket. All of that happened very rapidly, in less time than it takes to write, but I took note of it because all such details would ultimately become valuable to me in understanding the whims of the man who wanted to be my husband.

Furthermore, Adam apologized immediately.

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle, for having allowed myself to be carried away by my seafood delicacy. Papa is very strict with me, but you will be more indulgent than him, on learning that I adore crustaceans, and that not a day goes by without me saying to Heaven, in my prayers: 'Thank you for the crayfish!' It even happens that I am greedy enough to extract them from dinner plates and regale myself with them outside meal times. That annoys my father, because I no longer have an appetite when I sit down at table—but if you knew how tastily crabs are prepared at the villa! Our below stairs got the recipe from a great popular writer, who got it himself from Alexandre Dumas *père*—and you can't be unaware that the latter was a fine cook, and gladly tickled the stove in between two pages of a novel or two scenes of a play. It was a salutary relaxation for him; he returned all the more willingly to his literary creations when he had created a culinary recipe. Thus, great minds constrain their genius to occupations that seem inferior, but which are really not, for there is poetry in a dish that is able to excite the gustatory papillae..."

"Enough, my little Epicurean!" Monsieur Danator interjected. "Drink your orangeade!" He handed the beverage to his son, who drank it meekly. Then, turning to me, the scientist said: "When you give us the pleasure of coming to lunch at Immaculate Conception, you'll see that my Eliacin doesn't make reckless promises.<sup>3</sup> I flatter myself on having a table where one is able to pig out." He clicked his tongue.

I detested his vulgarity. In general, the argot and puns of which Monsieur Danator frequently and triumphantly made use, were odious to me.

Perhaps he understood that, for, putting on his utmost grace, he said: "I invite you too, Monsieur Germaud. You shall taste our crustaceans. I've obtained from the State the privilege of importing the sea into my home, in order to cultivate marine invertebrates while carrying out interesting experiments upon them. But aren't you in the same boat as myself, in a small way?"

"A small way?" I protested. "But Monsieur Germaud is one of our greatest scientists! He's an assistant at the Museum. His work, which will soon earn him a promotion to the teaching staff, is widely cited. You must certainly know about his celebrated experiments in biogenesis."

"Biogenesis?"

"Yes, biogenesis...all those troubling incursions into the realm of life. It's impossible that you're unaware of the discoveries of Dr. Stéphane Leduc of Nantes, and several other scientists, who cause plants to grow, and it seems, even rudimentary animals, simply by introducing chemical compounds into pure water."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Racine's Biblical tragedy *Athalie* (1691) Eliacin is the name under which Joas, the endangered sole survivor of the royal family supposedly eliminated by the eponymous villain, is hidden by the high priest Joad. Athalie takes him in, but he subsequently becomes the leader of a rebellion against her, intent on restoring the Jewish faith for which she has substituted the worship of Baal.

<sup>4</sup> Stéphane Leduc (1853-1939), a professor in the *École de Médecine* at Nantes, published *Les Bases physique de la vie et de la biogénèse* in 1906. He made a sustained attempt to understand the physical and chemical origin of life, concocting ingenious chemical cocktails that produced systems imitative of the elementary properties of life, but never succeeded in producing actual living organisms.

“I have indeed heard vague rumor of them, but do explain...”

He was encouraging me to talk about a subject about which I was passionate. Marcel, who had deployed his powerful intelligence in that regard, had nourished my appetite for it on many an occasion. Thus, forgetting that I was addressing a man who must secretly be laughing at the poverty of my knowledge, I let myself go.

“They are, in fact, very disturbing, these experiments that lead one to think that the scepter of creation might one day pass from the hand of the good God to you or me...”

“Let’s say to me,” sniggered Monsieur Danator, “because you...”

“I have no pretensions,” I conceded, “inasmuch as I have Faith—Faith, it is true, is not eroded by these facts, given that divine power floats high above the miserable interpretations of this world, but paleontology confirms that the first creatures appeared in the waters of the sea, in an epoch when our globe had a much higher temperature than it does today, when physical phenomena were predominant. Under the influence of those phenomena of heat and electricity, solutions of colloids and crystalloids formed, which, separated by membranes through which exchanges were effectuated and subject to osmotic influence, constituted living beings. Such is the work of nature. But the genius of humans can repeat these processes in the laboratory, Benedikt, in Vienna; Raphael Dubois, in Lyon; Jules Félix, in Brussels, and others, notably Le Foll,<sup>5</sup> by putting certain salts in water, have obtained these so-called osmotic crossovers, which are, in sum, organic beings similar in all respects to plants or to animals, disposed like the tissues of our bodies. But the palm still goes to Professor Leduc, who specified the dynamics of life, and for whom it’s child’s play to reproduce the phenomena and structure of living tissue.”

I had finished reeling off my little scientific speech, and I was rather proud of it, but Monsieur Danator asked: “Are the plants and animals that all these worthy people have produced capable of reproducing themselves?”

“Reproducing themselves?”

“Yes—by coupling with one another?”

The question was too inappropriate for me to respond to it. I understood his meaning well enough: he was asking me whether the osmotic growths were capable of renewing life in the natural fashion that drives creatures to combine their seeds under the force of amour. But how could I appear to understand such an indecent question? I lowered my eyes modestly.

“I see, then, that nothing has been accomplished,” sniggered Monsieur Danator. “Well, you can tell this Leduc of Nantes, if you ever run into him, that one doesn’t call oneself a Duc when one is only good for scrubbing the laboratory sink...and this Benedikt of Vienna that it’s a blessing that I don’t have his backside within range of my foot...and this Dubois of Lyon that he’ll never be the wood with which a scientist lights his fire, and this Félix of Brussels that Virgil, if he were alive today, would never have written *Félix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas!*<sup>6</sup>...and this Le Foll...oh, yes, mad is he who has who is proud of that...and to the others, all the others, you can say *crap!* because, you see, even if their artificial growths scar their wounds, they haven’t realized the function that completes the synthesis of life—which is to say, sequential reproduction!”

He gulped a mouthful of champagne, belched copiously and concluded: “From M’sieu le Duc de Nantes with the coat-of-arms bearing academic palms of a field of gules<sup>7</sup> to Le Foll bearing a fool’s

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<sup>5</sup> Moriz Benedikt (1835-1920) was an Austrian neurologist whose *Krystallisation und Morphogenesis* (1904) and *Biomekanik und Biogenesis* (1912) are relevant to the present discussion. Raphael Dubois (1849-1929) was a pharmacologist interested in phosphorescence and bioluminescence, who attempted to bring the phenomena of radioactivity and biology under the same theoretical umbrella with the aid of the notion of “bioproteon.” Dr. Jules Félix (1872-1920) published *La Vie des minéraux: la plasmogénèse et le biomécanisme universel* in 1910. Le Foll is a surprisingly common surname, but the other reference is probably to the medical researcher who signed his works G. Le Foll.

<sup>6</sup> “Fortunate is he who is able to know the causes of things.” (verse 490 of Book II of the *Georgics*)

<sup>7</sup> Gueule [gules] refers here to the heraldic color red, but when the word is repeated later in the sentence its primary significance is to a more literal meaning [mouth], further illustrating Danator’s fondness for puns.

bauble over a green-clad merchant's mouth, they're all peasants of science. You tell them that, Germaud! And you'll get to eat oysters *à la Danator*, and lick your chops over them."

He formed a kind of cup with his hands. "You line a dish the size of a field with a layer of butter, a layer of oysters, a layer of grated cheese and a layer of breadcrumbs; then more butter, oysters, grated cheese and breadcrumbs, and so on, *ad libitum*. You bake it in the oven for twenty minutes, after sprinkling more breadcrumbs on it...and then, my children, it flows like the milk of Paradise between your jaws. Get away, like the meconium of the infant Jesus! All washed down with a top-notch Johannisberg. People quit my table shouting 'Long live Papa Danator!'"

Thanks to the influence of the extra-dry—I was on my third glass—I wasn't shocked by the fellow's insensate language and convulsive gestures. My resentment against Marcel had also melted into a mild optimism. I could have thanked him for understanding my need for luxury and encouraging me to satisfy it.

Around us, the party was becoming hectic; people were throwing confetti and streamers; and that folly, the lights, the variegated colors and the hectic orchestra making my heart spin as much as the suggestive liquor. I was invaded by well-being; I now gazed without displeasure at the young man with the gilded eyes, the rosy cheeks and the musculature of a young god.

*Why, I wondered, should I not vibrate with him the same rhapsodies as with Marcel? He's a poet, and doesn't love grow better in a poet's flower-bed than a scientist's crucible? Provided that the poet plays his lute in the shade of a solid cash-box, upon which his Egeria has only to draw to satisfy all her whims...*

I'm ashamed to describe my weakness, when a few moments earlier I had felt so strong in my pride, but let no one forget, in my defense, that it was difficult for me to resist the champagne, the ambience and, to top it off, an inexplicably persuasive action coming from Monsieur Danator. Thus, invisibly and silently, certain powers of nature take possession of you.

He had incontestably exercised some influence upon me, for he transmitted, without saying a word and without his gaze, his desire that I should dance with his son again. I was on my feet before the latter had even asked me.

"Go, my children," he said, coupling us together. "Life favors you; take advantage of it. Dance, in a spiral orbit, obedient to the ineluctable laws of nature. Later...if my ideas about osmosis are correct...later, we'll see."

Joke or prophecy, I didn't care; I welcomed Adam's arm. This time, the orchestra launched into a foxtrot, but Adam forced me to waltz. You can imagine the ravages we produced, the shoves we imparted and received among the dancers who were following a different set of steps.

"Stop! Stop!" I cried. "Can't you tell that this isn't a waltz?" But my protest went over his lowered head, failing to disenchant his ineradicable smile.

I renounce any attempt to describe the amazement of the couples with which we collided, the indignation of a party of customers whose table we sent flying in passing, and the piercing mockery of my rival, Mademoiselle de Laricarière, on the arm of her frisky quinquagenarian. Fortunately, a void formed around us, and as the hour was epileptic and we were in tune with it, the crowd finished up cheering us frantically. I went back to my seat with my hair undone and my tulle dress in bits, a whole section of the skirt having been ripped off in the confusion.

"Well, I can't compliment you for your enthusiasm! Look what you've done to me, Monsieur Adam! I'm practically undressed.

"Do you think Eve wasn't, when Father Adam waltzed with her in Paradise?" Monsieur Danator joked.

That excursion had dissipated my favorable dispositions. I huddled up in my ridicule. I demanded my cloak in order to hide my rags; Monsieur Danator hastened to fetch it himself. In his absence, Marcel asked his son several questions, to which the latter made no reply.

I attributed Adam's silence to the fact that he couldn't hear, because of the din that was being produced around us; doubtless, too, he was unused to such distractions, for he gazed with bewilderment at the party animals throwing celluloid projectiles; he was listening as if in a dream to the racket of the

orchestra, the interpellations, the songs and the screams mingled with the stridency of the toy instruments—trumpets, whistles and little bells—that had been distributed in order to add to the infernal cacophony.

Soon, Monsieur Danator came back, holding my cape and struggling to free himself from a network of streamers that had been thrown at him on the way. Furiously, he brushed off his pursuers with his beret, removed from his scalp for the first time, which permitted me to see its astonishing devastation.

He covered me up with nurse-like precaution. Then he drew me into the quietest corner of the establishment and made a loudspeaker with his hands in order to transmit his confidence to me.

“Don’t hold it against my specimen. He only knows how to dance the waltz. I’ll buy you another dress, prettier than that one, and you’ll come out of the misadventure, in the end, with a profit. But if he’s only a one-note dancer, know that Adam has many qualities and charms that make him an elite child. He’s delightful, the boy, as you’ve been able to convince yourself. So, I’ll take advantage of it to remind you, one last time, my child, of the proposition that I made to you. I say ‘one last time’ because, for you as well as for us, the uncertainty can’t go on any longer. We’re becoming the laughing-stock of the resort...

“Adam adores you, you know; he wants to make you the happiness of his life; he’ll be very unhappy if you reject him. I could have chosen other parties for him; there has been no lack of opportunities. His fortune, his virtues, his personal grace and beauty make him the cynosure of all the eyes of virgins in ferment and their ascendants desperate to add a male to their wealth.

“Yes, I only had to lift my finger—but it’s you he wants, and I love him too much not to bow to his desire. I have, on the other hand, pointed out the incalculable benefits that you would get out of it: you don’t find a father-in-law like me lurking underneath a bidet. So make up your mind, my child; I need an answer this evening, and I’ll have one—yes, and I want it to be affirmative.”

In any other circumstances, that ultimatum, and the terms in which it was expressed, would have deterred me even from responding, but I was still laboring under the emotion of Marcel’s advice, and, on the other hand, as I’ve said, my interlocutor was giving off some kind of mysterious and intense persuasive power that put me at his mercy.

I therefore replied: “I can’t decide so quickly, Monsieur Danator, as you ought to understand. Your offer flatters me, certainly, and I admit that your son seems to me to be an enviable companion. As for you, I’m thoroughly persuaded that there aren’t many fathers like you”—I put a certain irony into the last remark, which Monsieur Danator understood perfectly, for his face twitched—“but to promise myself to someone for life requires that I get to know them a little better...”

“Adam has no need to be known, since I’ve made him and I guarantee him!” claimed Monsieur Danator. And he added, incisively: “Look, I’ll give you all night to think about it. Tomorrow morning, Adam and I will come to the beach. He’ll take his bath with those paupers. I detest that promiscuity, on principle, but I want you to be able to see how anatomically perfect he is in his bathing suit, and what an exceptional swimmer he is...yes, it’s quite different from dancing when he’s in his element...”

“This is what I propose: we’ll avoid meeting up in the baths. After his aquatic exercises, if it’s yes, come over to me and say: ‘Bravo for the man of the sea!’ If it’s no, don’t come over, and I’ll redirect my attention to some other creatress.”

Mademoiselle de Laricarière went past at that moment, and the attention that Monsieur Danator directed at her told me as clearly as could be that she was the “other creatress” he had in mind. I vibrated with jealousy.

“Is that agreed?” the strange man insisted.

“It’s agreed.”

We went back to our table, and I observed that Adam and Marcel had remained mute during our absence, but that the latter was observing the former with prodigious interest. For love of me? I no longer hoped so—but an incident followed that further complicated the pattern of the evening’s events.

Let’s see whether I can remember the position and attitude that each of us had when, by virtue of a practical joke in the worst possible taste, the electric lights suddenly went out and absolute darkness reigned, unleashing the enthusiasm of the clientele.

This is how it was: I had Monsieur Danator facing me, Marcel to my left and young Adam to my right, with his legs crossed. Well, at the moment when, after some hesitation, my retina adapted to the obscurity, I distinctly saw, in the darkness, in the place occupied by Adam, five phosphorescent gleams. One of them, the largest, was at the level of his eyes; two others were in the same plane as his hands; two more, which were no more than stripes, were palpitating perpendicularly near the floor.

That incomprehensible illumination only lasted for a few seconds. I divined a jostling beside me, as if someone had violently shoved someone else out of the way, and the phosphorescent patches, after several oscillations, vanished.

People around us having lit matches, I was able to recognize then that Monsieur Danator and Adam had exchanged places, and that the father was snatching away a handkerchief that he had thrown over the face of his offspring. Furthermore, the electricity was immediately switched on again, and I welcomed with genuine relief the enormous laughter of Monsieur Danator, manifestly emitted to enable me to share the joy of the farce of the phosphorescence.

*Another joke, I thought, an amusing trick of physics. Monsieur Danator has found a means to make his son glow in the dark. The luminous patches were his face, his hands and the gaps in his perforated socks, uncovering the skin where the stripes were. But how curious these people are, and how they're aggravating my hesitation, as if on a whim.*

"We're going," said Monsieur Danator. "Come on, Adam, kiss your fiancée's hand."

"Not his fiancée yet..." I protested.

"Yes, yes! Tomorrow, the matter will be resolved. There are attractions that one can't overcome. My son is better than an attraction; he's all the attractions of nature, a synthesis of attractions, if I might put it that way. So, tomorrow, it will be yes, and in three weeks—the time required to publish the banns—you'll be the beautiful young Madame Danator, the promise of my posterity."

On that affirmation, he withdrew, pushing my near future in front of him. I followed them momentarily with my eyes and then lost them behind a curtain of spectators. But I had scarcely turned away when a great hubbub rose up from the direction in which they had gone.

It was evidently a dispute; people were climbing on to their chairs to get a better view, and I heard a shrill voice rising above the tumult, protesting and shouting threats.

"What's going on?" I asked the manager of the establishment, who was coming back from the quarrel, now concluded.

"It's his son, Mademoiselle."

"His son?"

"Yes, the Danator boy, the puppy! Pure vandalism, Mademoiselle! Can you imagine that as he passed the buffet, the fool took it into his head to steal a lobster cooked for supper."

"Steal?"

"As I say! He stuffed it under his overcoat and scurried off as if it were nothing. No way, José! I'd seen him, and I was able to catch up with my dish. The very idea! Because they've got money they think anything's permissible. That one would dip his fingers in the sauce, for sure."

"But in the end, you were compensated?"

"Yes—the father threw me a thousand francs and didn't want the change. I can't deny that that's overpayment—but it's the way of doing things that's disgusting."

I turned to Marcel. "What do you think of that?"

"Very, very interesting." And without any further explanation, he said: "Would you like some supper, Made, or would you prefer it if I dropped you off at home?"

"I'd gladly walk a few steps in your company, Marcel, inasmuch as I need to talk to you."

"At your orders, Made."

We went out, glad to be finally getting away from those pleasures, which were offending our delicacy, each as much as the other. Immediately, we were gripped by the poetry of the splendid night. In the tranquil atmosphere, the moon, in all her coquetry, was pouring a pale golden fluid over the vellum strewn with a dust of stars. O mysterious space, O slow clarity, how you evoke the near-nothing that we are in the infinity of worlds!

And yet, I brought the universe back to our two beings drawing away from the Pergola: the millions of lights no longer counted by comparison with the two of us, mere ephemeral vibrations of eternal life!

“Ah, here’s something that will compensate us for those lunatics!” said Marcel, consoling himself.

Leaning on the parapet of the sea-front, he steeped himself intensely in the marvelous sight of the bay, somnolent beneath the homage of the heavens. To the left, in the direction of Ciboure, the lights of the Réserve, the Pergola’s rival establishment, were going out, with the result that a great calm reigned there, and I wondered what fate awaited me in that corner of earth sunk in the darkness, if I agreed to enter the Danators’ villa as a bride. Ahead, on the sparkling immensity, the barrier of rocks and cement edified by human hands to oppose the wrath of the waves was clearly perceptible; it assured us of the tranquility of the vast waves, permitting them to come and expire quietly fifty paces away from us. What a formidable and tender harmony, that muting of the waves!

“Which way?” Marcel asked.

I pointed toward the cliffs of Sainte-Barbe, our usual stroll. For the first time in the two seasons since a genuine sympathy had developed between us, he took me by the arm. I felt the gentleness of his grip divinely. Nothing other than the exquisite night authorized his familiarity, however; on the contrary, he was risking it at the moment when our destinies, hitherto encouraged to combine by a mutual attraction, were perhaps about to be separated forever...except that I had need of his protection; that I was a poor wreck, floating at the whim of two contrary sentiments, the tutelary flow toward Marcel, and the ebb, swollen by uncertainties, toward the Danators...

Where would I run aground?

“Let’s take advantage of the night,” I said to my companion, “to explain ourselves frankly. It’s easier to dare to speak from the heart at night. A little while ago, you gave me some advice that, I confess, I wasn’t expecting. In essence, you told me this: ‘Be venal, marry Adam Danator.’ Is that possible, Marcel; and if I decide to do it, ought I to believe that I won’t leave any regret behind?”

“In whom?”

“Come on, Marcel! I’ve asked you to be honest. All of your conduct toward me until now led me to believe that you wanted me for a wife; I sensed in myself treasures of abnegation and tenderness that would have rendered me worthy of it. You couldn’t possibly have been unaware of that...and now you’ve suddenly changed your tune and are pushing me toward that strange man...yes, strange, in spite of all the perfections you’re obstinate in recognizing in him. So, I confess that that has taken me by surprise...and that it saddens me...”

I divined, by the fashion in which his arm started to tremble against me, that he was experiencing an emotion similar to mine. And yet, he declared: “I’ve told you exactly what I think, my dear Made. A woman could never be happy with me, you see. I’m too much a slave of my work to distract myself with anyone whatsoever. Science, work...I can’t accept other yokes. And look—I’m giving you proof of it by renouncing you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing...I’m explaining myself badly. Know, nevertheless, that I retain an affection for you so faithful that I wouldn’t want to lose sight of you during the preliminaries of your marriage and the beginning of your union. Yes, permit me to assist, like a caring big brother, in everything that will interest you for some time to come. That authorization will make it easier for me to do something, in case...”

Again, he appeared to be afraid of having said too much. But my disappointment and irritation prevented me from commenting on his hesitation. All I could see was the wound in my amour, envenomed by self-regard.

“That’s all right,” I said, bitterly. “It’s settled now. The situation’s clear; I prefer that. It will permit me honestly to link hands with the young man. As for your offer of involving yourself in my marriage, to play, before the courtesan that I shall be, the role of guardian of the seraglio, permit me to be astonished, and to decline. I’m big enough, thank God, to defend myself, if ever some annoyance crops up...which is improbable.”

“Presumptuous girl!” he said, but more in pity than by way of criticism. “Well, I’ll occupy myself with your honor in spite of you.”

“We’ll see about that!” I retorted. And I left him at the foot of the cliff that we had just reached. I thought I heard a plaint calling me back, but I didn’t look round and went back to my hotel on my own.