resentment against myself. I feel bitter at having let myself go to seed because of your memory, and then because of sheer melancholy. I am now no bigger than the carapace of Tithonus* the grasshopper!'

Marin Marais laughed. He told her he had never found her very large and that he still remembered how, in days gone by, when he put his hands round her thigh, the fingers met in a circle.

'You are overflowing with wit,' she said. 'And to think that I would have liked to be your wife!'

Mademoiselle de Sainte Colombe suddenly threw off her bed covers. Monsieur Marin recoiled with such haste that he unhooked the baldaquin curtains which fell in a heap. She had lifted up her shift to get out of bed, and he beheld the total nudity of her thighs and her private parts. She put her bare feet on the tiled floor with a sharp little cry, held out the material of her shift, showed it to him, thrust it into his hands, saying:

'The love you felt for me was no bigger than this hem of my shift.'

*A seventeenth-century classical reference. Tithonus was a handsome Trojan beloved by Aurora, who at his request granted him immortality. But he had forgotten to ask her for eternal youth and as he grew old he begged Aurora to free him from the world. She could not do this, so she relieved his suffering by changing him into a grasshopper.

'You're lying.'

They were silent. She placed her emaciated hand on the beribboned wrist of Marin Marais and said:

'Play, if you please.'

She was trying to climb back into her bed but it was too high. He helped her, pushing up her skinny buttocks. She was as light as a down pillow. He took the viol from Toinette who had just come back. Toinette put the bed curtains back in their loop and left them alone together. He began to perform *La Rêveuse* but she stopped him, telling him to play more slowly. He started again. She watched him playing, her eyes brilliant with fever. She did not close them. She was taking in the movements of his body as he played.

XXV

She was panting for breath. She brought her eyes close to the window pane. Through the bubbles of air that were caught in it, she watched Marin Marais helping her sister into the carriage. Then he himself put his gold-swagged red heel on the step, disappeared inside, shut the gilded door. Night was falling. Barefoot, she went to get a candle then rummaged in her wardrobe, went down on all fours, dragged out an old pale leather boot more or less scorched by fire or at least shrivelled. Grasping the edge of the door and pulling on the stuff of her dresses, she hauled herself upright and went back to the bed with the candle and the boot. She put them on her bedside table. She was panting as if she had lost the better part of all the breath in her body. She kept muttering:

'He did not want to be a bootmaker.'

She kept repeating this phrase. She rested her back against the mattress and the wooden frame of her bed. She drew out from the boot's eyeholes a long leather lace which she placed beside the candle. With infinite care she made a slip knot. She stood up and dragged towards her the stool Marin Marais had taken to sit on. She dragged it underneath the ceiling beam nearest the window, clambered with the help of her bed curtains on to the stool, managed to wind the leather noose five or six times round a big nail in the beam then put her head inside the slip knot and drew it tight. She had difficulty in kicking the stool away. She was kicking it and dancing on it a long time before she got it to fall. When her feet swung in empty air, she gave a shout, a sudden sharp shock ran through her knees.

XXVI

All the world's mornings are gone without recall. The years had passed by. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, on rising, would stroke his hand over Monsieur Baugin's picture and put on his shirt. He would go and dust his hut. He was an old man now. He also took care of the flowers and shrubs that his elder daughter had planted before she hanged herself. Then he would go to light the fire and heat the milk. He took down a crude earthenware dish in which he mashed his gruel.

Monsieur Marais had not seen Monsieur de Sainte Colombe again since the day when he had been surprised by the latter after he had sneezed underneath his cabin, when he was soaked to the skin. Monsieur Marais had kept in mind that Monsieur de Sainte Colombe knew melodies which were unfamiliar

to him but were considered to be the most beautiful in all the world. Sometimes he would wake in the middle of the night, recalling the names that Madeleine had whispered to him under the oath of secrecy: *Tears, Hells*, the *Shade of Aeneas*, the *Barque of Charon*, and he still regretted having lived without hearing them even once. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe would never publish what he had composed nor what his own masters had taught him. Monsieur Marais felt sad at the thought that these works were going to be lost for ever when Monsieur de Sainte Colombe died. He knew not what kind of life he would have nor what future years might bring. He wanted to become acquainted with these works before it was too late.

He would leave Versailles. Whether it was raining or snowing, he would pay nightly visits to the Bièvre. As had always been his wont, he would tie his horse to the wash place, on the road to Jouy, so that it would not be heard neighing, then would follow the damp path, go round the end of the wall on the river, creep under the wet hut.

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe never played those airs or at least never any that Monsieur Marais did not already know by heart. In fact, Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was playing less often. There were long silences during which he sometimes started to talk to himself. For three years, almost every night, Monsieur

Marais made his way to the hut, wondering: 'Is he going to play those melodies tonight? Is it the right time for them?'

XXVII

Finally, in the year 1689, on the night of the twenty-third day, when the cold was intense, the earth gripped in frozen sleet, the wind stinging eyes and ears, Monsieur Marais galloped to the wash place. The moon was shining. There were no clouds. 'Oh!' Monsieur Marais said to himself, 'this night is pure, the air raw, the heavens more than ever coldly eternal, the moon full and round. I can hear my horse's hooves clattering on the ground. Perhaps it will be this evening.'

He crouched there in the freezing cold, hugging his black cloak around him. The cold was so sharp, he had put a sheepskin jerkin on underneath it. All the same, his backside was numb with cold. His member was shrunk and frozen.

He listened in secret. His ear hurt, laid against the icy planks. Sainte Colombe was just playing around, idly plucking the strings of his viol. He gave them a few melancholy strokes with his bow. From time to time, as was often his custom, he talked. There was no method in what he did. His playing sounded negligent, senile, desolate. Monsieur Marais put his ear to a crack between the boards to try to catch the sense of what Monsieur de Sainte Colombe kept muttering to himself now and then. He could only catch words with no significance like 'crushed peaches' or 'boat'. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe played the Dubois Chaconne, which he used to perform in concerts with his daughters. Monsieur Marais recognized the principal theme. The piece closed in a majestic fashion. Then he heard a deep sigh after which Monsieur de Sainte Colombe started murmuring and lamenting:

'Ah! I am playing only for shadows that have become too old! That never come back now! Ah! if only there were someone besides myself in this world, some living soul who could appreciate my music! We would talk! I would pass it on to him and I could die.'

Then Monsieur Marais, shivering with cold underneath the hut, heaved a sigh himself. Giving another sigh, he went and scratched at the door of the cabin.

'Who is it sighing in the silence of the night?'

'A man who is fleeing the life of palaces and who is seeking music.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe understood who it was and was glad. He leaned forward and pushed the door open a crack with his bow. A little candlelight glimmered through the opening, but it was feebler than the radiance of the full moon. Marin Marais crouched at the the open door. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe bent forward and addressed the face:

'What are you seeking, Monsieur, in music?'

'I am seeking regrets and tears.'

Then he shoved the door of his hut full open, and stood up, trembling. He bowed ceremoniously as Monsieur Marais entered. At first they could not say anything. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe sat on his stool and said to Monsieur Marais:

'Sit down!'

Monsieur Marais, still shrouded in his sheepskin, sat down. The two of them just sat there, awkward, embarrassed.

'Monsieur, may I ask you for a last lesson?' Monsieur Marais asked, suddenly rousing himself.

'Monsieur, may I attempt a *first* lesson with you?' Monsieur de Sainte Colombe replied in a low voice.

Monsieur Marais bowed his head. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe coughed and said he wanted to

speak. He started talking jerkily.

'This is difficult, Monsieur. Music exists simply in order to speak of what words cannot express. In that sense it is not altogether human. So you have discovered that it is not for the king?'

'I have discovered that it is for God.'

'And you are mistaken, because it is God speaking.'

'For the ear?'

'That of which I cannot speak is not for the ear, Monsieur.'

'For gold, then?'

'No, gold is something that cannot be heard.'

'Fame?'

'No. Fame is nothing but names naming names.'

'Silence?'

'It is only the opposite of speech.'

'Rival musicians?'

'No!'

'Love?'

'No.'

'Regret for love?'

'No.'

'Abandonment?'

'No and no.'

'Is it for a wafer offered to the invisible?'

'No again. What is a wafer? It can be seen. It has a taste. It can be consumed. It is nothing.'

'Then I do not know, Monsieur. I think one should put out a glass of wine for the dead . . .'

'You are getting warmer.'

'A little drinking fountain for those abandoned by language. For the shadows of children. For the hammer blows of shoemakers. For whatever it is that precedes childhood. When one was without breath. When one was without light.'

After a few moments, on the face of the musician, a face so old and rigid, a smile appeared. He took Marin Marais' plump hand in his fleshless hand.

'Monsieur, just now you heard me sighing. I shall die soon and my art with me. Only my hens and geese will miss me. I am going to entrust you with one or two arias capable of awakening the dead. Come!'

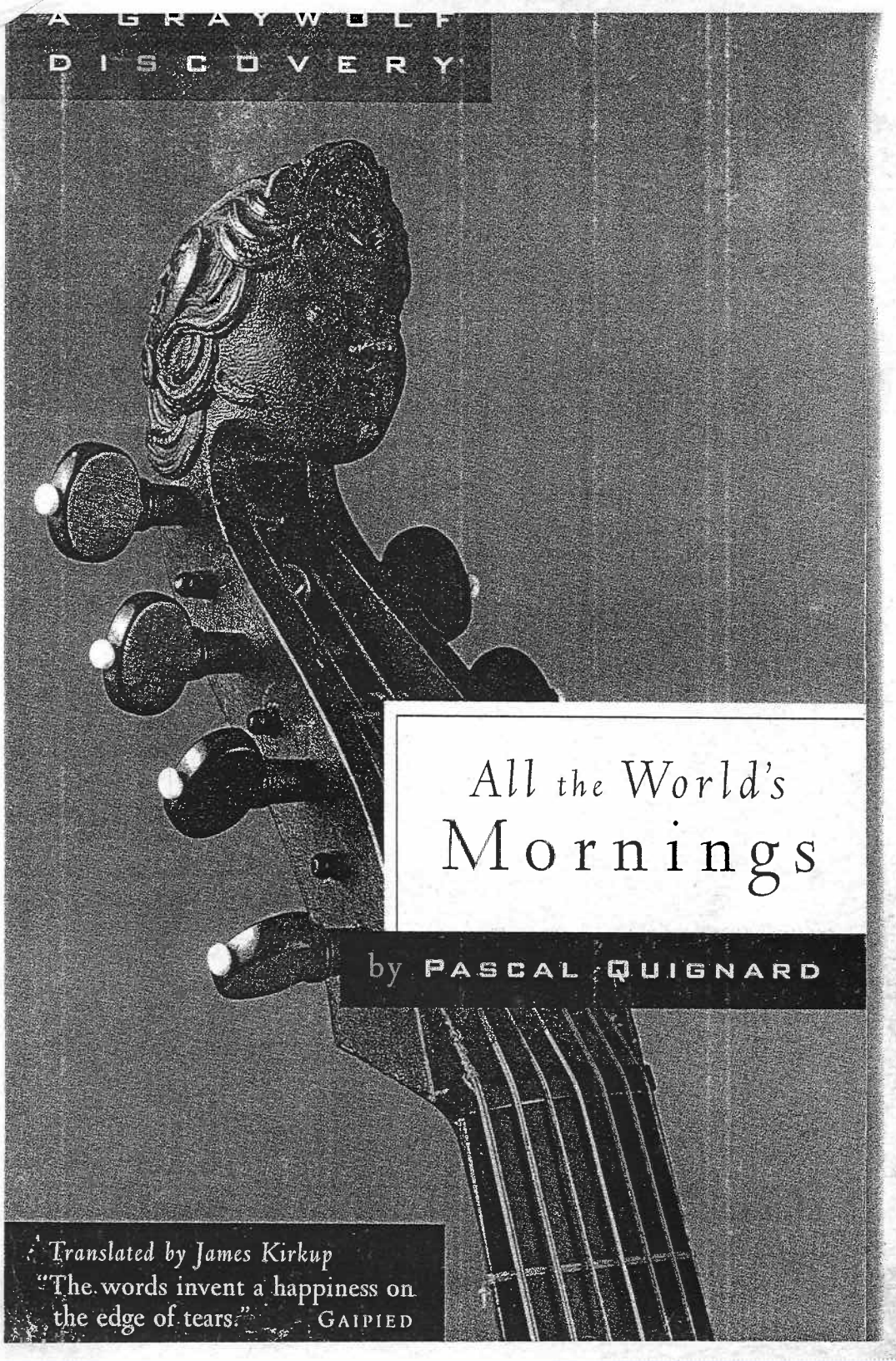
He tried to get up, but interrupted the movement to say:

'First of all we must go and find my dead daughter Madeleine's viol. I am going to let you hear *Tears* and the *Barque of Charon.* I am going to let you hear the whole of *Le Tombeau des regrets.* So far among my students I have found no ear worthy of listening to them. Come with me.'

Marin Marais took his arm. They went down the steps of the hut and walked towards the house. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe entrusted Monsieur Marais with Madeleine's viol. It was covered with dust.

They wiped it with their sleeves. Then Monsieur de Sainte Colombe filled a pewter plate with a few rolled wafers. They returned to the hut with the flask of wine, the viol, the glasses and the plate. While Monsieur Marais was taking off his black cloak and his sheepskin and casting them on the floor, Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was clearing a space in the centre of the hut, near the skylight through which they could see the full moon in all its whiteness, and set up the writing desk there. Passing his fingers over his lips, he wetted them and wiped up two drops of red wine that had dropped from the straw-plaited flask next to the plate. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe opened the morocco-bound music book while Monsieur Marais was pouring a little red wine into his glass. Monsieur Marais set the candle beside the manuscript music book. They looked at the score, closed the book, sat down, tuned their viols. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe gave the beat and they set their fingers on the strings. Thus it was that they played *Tears*. As the song of the two viols rose in the air, they looked at one another. They were weeping. The light coming into the hut through the skylight in the roof had become yellow. While their tears rolled slowly down their noses, their cheeks, their lips, they at the same time kept smiling at one another. It was dawn before Monsieur Marais returned to Versailles.

A GRAYWOLF DISCOVERY



All the World's Mornings

by PASCAL QUIGNARD

Translated by James Kirkup

"The words invent a happiness on the edge of tears." — GAIPIED

I

In the spring of 1650, Madame de Sainte Colombe died. She left two daughters aged two and six years. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was inconsolable at the death of his wife. He loved her. It was upon this occasion that he composed *Le Tombeau des regrets*, as a memorial to his grief.

He lived with his two daughters in a house which had a garden giving on to the Bièvre. The garden was long and narrow and completely enclosed right down to the river. There were willows along the bank and a boat in which Sainte Colombe would go and sit of an evening when the weather was kind. Though he was not rich he could not complain of being poor. He owned land in the region of Berry which brought in a little revenue and a harvest of wine which he bartered

for cloth and sometimes for game. He himself was no good at hunting and disliked scouring the forests overhanging the valley. The fees his pupils paid him made up the rest of his financial resources. He was a teacher of the viol which at that time was enjoying a certain vogue in London and Paris. He was a noted master of the instrument.

In his service he had two menservants and a cook, Guignotte, who looked after the little girls. A man who belonged to a group frequenting the Jansenist educationalists of Port-Royal, a Monsieur de Bures, taught the children their letters and numbers, the holy scriptures and some rudiments of Latin that enabled them to find their way in that language. Monsieur de Bures lodged in the cul-de-sac of the rue Saint-Dominque-d'Enfer. It was Madame de Pont-Carré who had recommended Monsieur de Bures to Sainte Colombe.

From their earliest childhood, he had familiarized his daughters with the notes and clefs of music. They were good singers and had a true gift for music. The three of them, when Toinette was five and Madeleine nine, would perform little vocal trios incorporating a certain number of technical difficulties, and Sainte Colombe was pleased by the elegance with which his daughters resolved them. At that age, the little girls took after Sainte Colombe more than they did their

mother; nevertheless he still cherished the latter's memory. Three years after her death, her image was still before him. After five years, her voice was still whispering in his ears. He was for the most part a taciturn man, and never went to either Paris or Jouy. Two years after the death of Madame de Sainte Colombe, he sold his horse. He was unable to overcome his regret at not having been present when his wife had delivered up her soul. At that moment he had been at the bedside of the late Monsieur Vauquelin who had expressed a wish to die with a little music and a glass of Puisey. That friend had expired after dinner. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, in the carriage of Monsieur de Savreux, had reached home after midnight. His wife had already been dressed in her grave clothes, and was surrounded by lighted tapers and weeping servants. He uttered not one word and would receive no one. The road leading from Paris had not been paved, and it took a good two hours to reach the city. Sainte Colombe henceforward kept to his house and dedicated his life to music. Year after year he laboured at the viol and became an acknowledged master. In the two years following his wife's passing he worked up to fifteen hours a day. He had had a hut constructed in the branches of a great mulberry tree dating from the days of Monsieur de

Sully.* Only four steps led up to it. In this retreat he could work without disturbing the little girls at their lessons or their play; or after Guignotte the cook had put them to bed. He believed the music would have disturbed the conversations of the two little girls who would chatter away in the darkness before falling asleep.

He found a new way to hold the viola da gamba between his knees without allowing it to rest against his calf. He added a bass string to the instrument to lend it the possibility of deeper tones and to produce a more melancholy effect. He perfected the bowing technique by lightening the weight of his hand and exerting pressure only on the horsehair using just his index and middle fingers, something he brought off with astonishing virtuosity. One of his pupils, Côme le Blanc the Elder, declared that he contrived to imitate all the inflexions of the human voice: from the sigh of a young lady to the sob of an old man, from the war cry of Henri de Navarre to the soft breathing of a child trying to draw something, from the distracted groan

* A reference to Maximilien de Béthune, Baron de Rosny, Duc-pair de Sully (1559–1641), a Protestant who became the finance minister of France under Henri IV in 1598. He made economies in the budget and encouraged agriculture, in particular the silkworm industry and the planting of mulberry trees.

sometimes produced by sexual pleasure to the almost voiceless gravity, deprived of nearly all force and harmony, of a man lost in prayer.

II

The road leading to Sainte Colombe's house became muddy as soon as the summer was over. Sainte Colombe held Paris in detestation, hating the click-clack of wooden-soled shoes and the clinking of spurs on the pavements, the screeching of carriage axles and the iron-bound cart wheels. He had some peculiar ways. He would squash stag beetles and cockchafers underneath the candlesticks: that made a curious sound, the mandibles or elytra gradually cracking beneath the metal base's sustained pressure. The little girls liked to watch him do this, and take pleasure in it. They even brought him ladybirds.

The man was not as aloof as he has been described; he was awkward in the expression of his emotions; he was unable to make those caressing gestures children

crave; he was incapable of a sustained conversation with anyone except Messieurs Baugin and Lancelot. Sainte Colombe had been the schoolmate of Claude Lancelot* and he would sometimes meet him on Madame de Pont-Carré's at-home days. Physically, Sainte Colombe was tall, knotty, very thin, sallow as a quince, brusque. He kept his back ramrod straight in a quite astonishing manner, his gaze fixed, his lips compressed. He was ill at ease in company, but he was capable of outbursts of gaiety.

He liked playing cards with his daughters while drinking wine. Every evening he would smoke a long clay pipe from the Ardennes. He made no effort to follow the fashions of the day. He wore his dark hair pulled straight back in wartime style, and when he went out he would put on a ruff. In his youth, he had been presented to the late king and from that day on, he knew not why, he had never again set foot in the Louvre nor in the old castle of Saint-Germain.** He no longer dressed in anything but black.

He could be just as violent and quick to anger as he could be tender. Whenever he heard sounds of crying

* One of the Gentlemen of Port-Royal (1615–95) who founded its educational system.

** François I's castle at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

during the night, he would make his way upstairs with a lighted candle and, kneeling between his little girls' beds, start singing:

Sola vivebat in antris Magdalena
*Lugens et suspirans die ac nocte . . .**

or else:

Il est mort pauvre et moi je vis comme il est mort
Et l'or
Dort
*Dans le palais de marbre où le roi joue encore.***

Sometimes the little ones would ask, especially Toinette:

'Who was our mamma?'

Then he would be wrapped in gloom and not another word could they get out of him. One day, he told them:

'You must be good little girls. You must always work hard. I am pleased with both of you, especially

* Madeleine lived all alone in a cave
Grieving and sighing day and night . . .

** He died a pauper and I am living as he died
And the gold
Slumbers
In the marbled palace where the king is still playing.

Madeleine, who is not so naughty. I keep grieving over your mother. Each one of the memories I cherish of my wife is a fragment of the happiness I shall never find again.'

On another occasion he apologized to them for not being much of a talker; he told them that their mother, for her part, was always full of talk and laughter; that as far as he was concerned he felt no great fondness for words and that he took no pleasure in the company of others, nor in books and sermons. Even the poems of Vauquelin des Yveteaux* and of his former friends never entirely satisfied him. He had once been friendly with Monsieur de La Petitière, who had been in the Cardinal's** bodyguard but who had since retired from the world and become shoemaker to the Gentlemen of Port-Royal, in the place of Monseiur Marais the Elder. The same thing went for painting, apart from Monsieur Baugin.† Monsieur de Sainte

* French writer, 1567–1649.

** i.e. Cardinal Richelieu.

† Lubin Baugin (1612–1663): he is represented in the Louvre by four still lifes, of which the most beautiful is 'Le dessert de gaufrettes', the painting mentioned here. It is painted on wood, not on canvas. The best information about this little-known painter is in Charles Sterling's *La Nature Morte de l'antiquité au XXme siècle* (Editions Macula 1985), which also contains a reproduction of another of his works, 'Les Cinq Sens'.

Colombe never praised the painting then being done by Monsieur de Champaigne. He found it not so much profound as pitiful, not so much sober as poverty-stricken.

It was the same with architecture, or sculpture, or the arts of mechanical engineering – or religion, were it not for Madame de Pont-Carré. It is true that Madame de Pont-Carré played the lute and the theorbo very well and had not dedicated this gift of hers entirely to God. From time to time she would send him her carriage when she could no longer bear to be deprived of music, have him brought to her house and would accompany him on the theorbo until the notes swam before her eyes. She possessed an old black viol that dated from the time of François I and which Sainte Colombe handled as if it were some ancient Egyptian idol.

He was subject to inexplicable rages that filled his children's hearts with terror because during these fits of fury he would smash the furniture, shouting and panting as if he were suffocating. He was very strict with them, for he was afraid that they might not receive a proper education from a single man. He was severe with them, and never failed to punish them. He did not know how to reprimand them verbally, and could not lift his hand to them or wield the whip; so he would shut them up in the stillroom or the cellar,

where he would forget them. Guignotte the cook would come and let them out.

Madeleine never complained. Every time her father was angry, she became like a vessel capsizing and suddenly sinking: she would stop eating and take refuge in silence. Toinette would fight back, accusing her father, shouting at him. As she grew up, she gradually began to resemble in character Madame de Sainte Colombe. Her sister, petrified with fear, would say not a word and refused to take even one spoonful of soup.

In any case, they saw little of him. They lived in the company of Guignotte, Monsieur Pardoux and Monsieur de Bures. Or they would go the chapel to dust the statues, sweep away the spiders' webs and arrange the flowers. Guignotte, who was a native of Languedoc and whose habit it was to let her hair hang freely down her back, had made them fishing rods by breaking branches from the trees. All three of them, with a line, a hook and a curlpaper tied on to show when they had a bite, would tuck up their skirts as soon as the fine weather arrived and plodge barefoot in the mud. From the Bièvre they hooked their evening fry-up which they cooked in the pan with a little flour and vinegar drawn from the wine of Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's vineyard, which was pretty mediocre.

All this time the musician would sit for hours on his stool, on a bit of old Genoa velvet that his buttocks had worn bare, alone in his hut. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe called it his '*vorde*'. *Vorde* is an old word describing the wet verge of a river underneath willows. Up there in his mulberry tree, in front of the willows, his head high, lips compressed, chest bent over the instrument, his left hand straying over the frets as he perfected his technique with the exercises, it would sometimes happen that melodies or complaints were born under his touch. When such airs came back to him or when his mind became obsessed by them to the extent of plaguing him in his lonely bed, he would open his red manuscript music book and hastily jot them down so as not to be bothered by them any longer.

III

When his elder daughter had grown to the height necessary for apprenticeship to the viol, he taught her the positions, the chords, the arpeggios, the embellishments. The younger girl threw tantrums and fairly stormed with rage that she had been refused the honour her father had granted her sister. Neither being deprived of food nor confined to the cellar could break Toinette's will and calm the tempests that agitated her.

One morning before dawn, Monsieur de Sainte Colombe got up, followed the course of the Bièvre to the Seine, whose bank took him to the pont de la Dauphine, and consulted all day long with Monsieur Pardoux, who was his viol maker. He made sketches with him. He made calculations with him, and did not

go home until it was dusk. When Easter came and the chapel bell was tolling, Toinette discovered in the garden a strange object enveloped like a spectre in a grey serge covering. She lifted the material and found a viol, reduced to half size. It reproduced with admirable precision a viol exactly like her father's or her sister's, but smaller, like a foal among horses. Toinette was beside herself with joy.

She was pale, as pale as milk, and she wept against her father's knees, she was so happy. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's character and his not being much endowed with the gift of speech made him extremely reserved and his face remained without expression and severe, whatever he was feeling. It was only in his musical compositions that one discovered the complexity and delicacy of the world that was concealed behind that visage and behind his rare, rigid gestures. He sat drinking wine and stroking Toinette's hair, for she had buried her head in his doublet while her back was shaken with sobs.

Very soon the viol trio concerts of the Sainte Colombes became celebrated. The young noblemen or the sons of the bourgeoisie to whom Monsieur de Sainte Colombe taught his method of playing the viol pleaded to be allowed to attend them. Musicians who belonged to the guild or who held Monsieur de Sainte Colombe in esteem also were present. The master

musician went so far as to organize every fortnight a concert beginning at vespers and lasting four hours. With every recital, Monsieur de Sainte Colombe endeavoured to let new works be heard. Nevertheless the father and his daughters took particular pleasure in playing very skillful improvisations for three viols on some theme that those present at the assembly would suggest to them.

IV

Monsieur Caignet and Monsieur Chambionnières were among those attending these musical evenings, and they praised them highly. Gentlemen of the court had taken a fancy to these concerts, and often up to fifteen carriages as well as their horses could be seen drawn up on the muddy road, blocking the way for travellers and merchants making their way to Jouy or to Trappes. The king, after having their praises dinned into his ears, finally expressed a desire to hear this musician and his daughters. He despatched Monsieur Caignet – who was Louis XIV's appointed viol player and who was a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber. It was Toinette who ran to open the courtyard gate and led Monsieur Caignet into the garden. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, white with fury at being disturbed in

his sanctuary, came down the four steps of his hut and bowed stiffly.

Monsieur Caignet put his hat on again and declared:

'Monsieur, you are dwelling among ruins and in silence. You are to be envied for such an unadorned retreat. You are to be envied for these leafy forests that look down upon you.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe did not open his lips. He gazed fixedly at his visitor.

'Monsieur,' went on Monsieur Caignet, 'because you are a master of the art of the viol, I have received the command to invite you to perform at court. His Majesty has expressed a desire to hear you play, and, should your playing meet with his approval, he would welcome you among the musicians of his Privy Chamber. In such an event, I should have the honour of playing at your side.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe replied that he was a man no longer young, and a widower; that he was responsible for the upbringing of two daughters, which obliged him to live a more retired way of life than most men; and that he felt nothing but disgust for worldly things.

'Monsieur,' he continued, 'I have bounded my life by these planks of grey wood set in a mulberry tree; by the sounds of a viol's seven strings; by my two daughters' needs. My friends are my memories. My

court are those willows there, the running water, the chub, the gudgeon and the elder blossoms. You may inform his Majesty that his palace is no place for a wild man of the woods who was presented to the late king his father these thirty-five years ago.'

'Monsieur,' replied Monsieur Caignet, 'you do not realize the significance of my request. I belong to the king's Privy Chamber. The desire his Majesty has expressed is a royal command.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's face flushed darkly. His eyes glinted angrily. He went up to his visitor and touched his arm.

'I am such a man of the wilds, Monsieur, that I feel I belong to no one but myself. You may inform his Majesty that he has been too generous in allowing his glance to fall upon me.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was shoving Monsieur Caignet towards the house as he was speaking. They took their leave of one another with formal bows. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe returned to his hut while Toinette made her way to the hen house, which stood at the corner formed by the garden wall and the Bièvre.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Caignet came back with his feathered hat and his sword, drew close to the hut, scattered with booted foot a turkey and her little yellow chicks that were pecking around, slid himself

silently under the floor of the hut, sat on the grass beneath, in the shade among the mulberry roots and listened. Then he departed without anyone having noticed him and went back to the Louvre. He spoke to the king, reporting the reasons the musician had put forward and conveyed to him the marvellous and complex impression that had been made upon him by the music he had listened to in that secret hiding place.

V

The king expressed his displeasure at not possessing Monsieur de Sainte Colombe. The courtiers continued to praise his virtuoso improvisations. The vexation at not being obeyed increased the king's impatience to have the musician play before him. He again delegated Monsieur Caignet to visit him, this time accompanied by the abbé Mathieu.

The carriage that took them there was accompanied by two officers on horseback. The abbé Mathieu was wearing a black silk habit, a trim goffered lace collar and a large diamond cross on his chest.

Madeleine invited them into the living room. The abbé Mathieu, standing in front of the fireplace, placed his ring-laden hands on his red-lacquered cane with the silver pommel. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe,

in front of the tall window that opened on the garden, laid his unadorned hands on the back of a high, narrow chair. The abbé Mathieu began with these words:

'The musicians and poets of Antiquity worshipped fame, and they wept when emperors or princes banished them from their presence. You, Monsieur, are burying your name among turkeys, hens and small fry. You are concealing a talent that comes to you from Our Lord above in dusty, arrogant destitution. Your reputation is known to the king and his court, so it is now time for you to cast aside and burn your coarse garments, to accept his generous proposals and to have yourself made a full-bottomed wig. Your ruff is long since out of fashion . . .'

'. . . it is I who am out of fashion, Messieurs,' Sainte Colombe broke in, all of a sudden vexed that his personal appearance should be criticized. 'You will thank his Majesty for nothing,' he shouted. 'I prefer the radiance of the setting sun upon my hands to all the gold he might offer me. I prefer my plain clothes to your cumbersome bags of hair. I prefer my hens to the violins of the king and my pigs to *you*.'

'Monsieur!'

But Monsieur de Sainte Colombe had seized the chair and was swinging it over his head. He went on shouting:

'Leave this house and never speak to me again! Or I shall smash this chair over your head.'

Toinette and Madeleine were terrified by the sight of their father brandishing the chair at arm's length over his head and were afraid he would never regain control of himself. The abbé Mathieu did not appear afraid and struck his cane on the tiled floor saying:

'You will shrivel up and die like a fieldmouse shut away in your wooden hut, unknown to all.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe whirled the chair round his head and smashed it against the fireplace, howling at the top of his voice:

'Your palace is smaller than any hut, and your public is less than nobody.'

The abbé Mathieu moved towards him stroking his diamond cross and said:

'You will rot in your own mud, here in the horror of the suburbs, drowned in your own stream.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was white as a sheet, shaking all over and seemed about to seize another chair. Monsieur Caignet went up to him, as did Toinette. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was making harsh panting sounds trying to get his breath back, standing with his hands gripping the back of the chair. Toinette pried open his fingers and they all sat down. While Monsieur Caignet was putting on his gloves and his hat and the abbé was continuing to deplore his

obstinacy, Sainte Colombe said in a low voice, with a chilling calm:

'You are drowning men. So you hold out a helping hand. Not satisfied at being out of your depth, you want to drag others down with you to drown them too.'

He delivered these words slowly, in a rasping voice. The king liked this reply when the abbé and his Privy Chamber viol player reported it to him. He ordered that the musician should be left in peace, at the same time advising his courtiers to refrain from attending his musical evenings because the man was some kind of rebel and because he had been in league with those Gentlemen of Port-Royal, before the king had had them disbanded.

VI

For many years they lived in peace, living only for their music. Toinette gave up her half-size viol and the time came when, once a month, she had to stuff rags between her thighs. Now they gave only one concert every season, to which Monsieur de Sainte Colombe invited such fellow musicians as he approved of, and never the courtiers from Versailles nor even the rich merchants who were gaining influence with the king. He inscribed fewer and fewer new compositions in his manuscript notebook bound in red morocco leather, nor would he allow them to be published or subjected to the judgment of the common people. He said that they were momentary, improvised jottings that had only their spur-of-the-moment nature as an excuse for existing, and not finished works. Madeleine

grew into a beautiful woman, of a slender loveliness, and filled with a curiosity whose promptings she was unaware of but which aroused agonized feelings in her heart. Toinette made joyful progress in musical invention and virtuosity.

On days when his humour or the weather allowed it, the master would go to his boat, and, anchored to the bank, would daydream in it on the rippling stream. His boat was old and let in water: it had been built when the official in charge of waterways had reorganized the canal system, and it was painted white, although the years had flaked away most of the colour. The boat had the appearance of a huge viol laid open by Monsieur Pardoux, his viol-maker. He loved the gentle rocking motion imparted by the water, the foliage of the willow boughs falling over his face and the silence and stillness of the distant anglers. He would think of his dead wife, of the spirit with which she used to imbue everything she did, or the advice she would offer him whenever he asked for it, of her hips and her deep belly that had given him two daughters now grown into womanhood. He would listen to the chub and the gudgeon disporting themselves and breaking the stillness with the flip of a tail or with their little white mouths opening on the surface of the water to gobble air. In summer, when it was hot, he would divest himself of his shirt and his

breeches and let himself down gently into the cool stream, right up to his neck: then, plugging his fingers into his ears, would plunge his face under water.

One day, when he was gazing deep into the water, he dozed off and dreamed he was entering those dark depths and dwelling there. He had renounced all those things he loved on earth – his instruments, flowers, pastries, rolls of music, stag beetles, faces, pewter plates, wines. On emerging from his slumber, he remembered *Le Tombeau des regrets* which he had composed when his wife had departed from him that night to enter the kingdom of the dead, and he felt thirsty. He stood up, climbed back up the bank by clinging to the hanging branches, and went to get a bottle of wine in its woven straw jacket. He poured out on the hard-trodden earth of the cellar floor the topping of olive oil that preserved the wine from contact with the air. In the darkness of the cellar he poured a glass and tasted it. He returned to the hut in the garden where he practised the viol, less (to tell the truth) out of concern that he might disturb his daughters than out of the desire he had to be out of everyone's earshot so that he might try out hand positions and all the possible movements of his bow without a soul on earth being able to pass judgment on what he was wanting to do. He placed the straw-plaited carafe of wine on the pale blue cloth covering

the table where he would set his music stand, together with the wineglass which he filled again, and a pewter dish containing a few sweet rolled wafers: then he played *Le Tombeau des regrets*.

He did not need to follow his manuscript book. His left hand found its own way upon the frets of his instrument and he started to weep. While the melody raised its plangent voice, a very pale woman appeared near the door, smiling at him and laying a finger on her curving lips as a sign that she would not speak and that he should not be distracted from what he was playing. She silently moved round Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's desk. She sat on the music chest which was in the corner near the table with the flask of wine and listened to what he was playing.

It was his wife and his tears went on flowing. When he raised his eyes, after having finished the interpretation of the piece, she was no longer there. He set aside his viola da gamba, and, as he stretched out his hand towards the pewter plate set beside the flask of wine, he saw that the filled glass was now half empty, and was astonished to find lying beside it on the blue cloth a half-eaten wafer.

VII

This visit was not the last. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, at first thinking he might be going mad, came to believe that if this was madness, it was bringing him happiness; if it was truth, then it was a miracle. The love his wife felt for him was even greater than his own since she came to him and he was powerless to do the same for her. He took a pencil and wrote asking a friend belonging to the painters' guild, Monsieur Baugin, to make a painting representing the writing table beside which his wife had appeared. But he spoke of this visitation to no one. Even Madeleine, even Toinette knew nothing of it. He simply devoted himself to his viol and sometimes transcribed into his morocco notebook, in which Toinette had drawn with a ruler the manuscript lines, the themes which his

conversations or his daydreaming had inspired in him. In his bedroom, whose door he kept locked because the desire aroused by the memory of his wife sometimes compelled him to drop his breeches and pleasure himself with his hand, he would lay side by side on the table beside the window, on the wall facing the great four-poster he had shared twelve years with his wife, the music book bound in red morocco and the little painting he had commissioned from his friend, placed in a black frame. He felt happy when he looked at it. He was less disposed to fits of wrath and his two daughters noticed this but did not dare mention it to him. In his heart of hearts, he had the feeling that something had been accomplished. He had quietened down.

VIII

One day, a big lad of seventeen summers, his face as red as the comb of an old cock, came knocking at their door and asked Madeleine if he might request the privilege of becoming Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's pupil for composition and the viol. Madeleine found him very handsome and brought him into the living room. The young man, his wig in hand, laid a letter in a green-sealed envelope upon the table. Toinette came back with Sainte Colombe who took a seat in silence at the other end of the table, did not open the letter and gave a sign that he was prepared to listen. While the youth was talking, Madeleine set on the big table, covered with a blue cloth, a straw-jacketed flask of wine and an earthenware dish of cakes.

He was called Monsieur Marin Marais. He was full-

featured. He was born on the 31st of May 1656, and at the age of six had on account of his fine voice been recruited for the king's choir in the chantry of the church at the gates of the Château du Louvre. For nine years he had worn the surplice, the red robe, the square black cap, had slept in the dormitory of the cloister and learned his letters, learned to read music, to practise the viol in whatever spare time was allowed him – for the children were forever running to sing at matins, to the king's private services, to every grand mass, to vespers.

Then, when his voice had broken, he had been turned out on the street, as was stipulated in the chantry contract. He still felt ashamed. He did not know what to do with himself; hair had grown on his legs and his cheeks; his voice boomed and squeaked. He was now recalling that day of his humiliation whose date remained branded on his mind: the 22nd of September 1672. For the last time, under the church porch, he had used all his strength to push the great gilded door open with his shoulder. He had crossed the garden round the cloister of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.* He had seen big plums lying there in the grass.

*The great church at the east end of the Louvre, just off the rue de Rivoli. Its bell is the one that was rung on St Bartholomew's Day during the massacre of thousands of Huguenots (24 August, 1572).

He started to run down the street, past le For-L'Evèque, down the sharp slope leading to the shore and stopped. The Seine was covered by an immense, rich late-summer radiance, mingled with red mist. He was sobbing as he followed the bank on the way back to his father's house. He kept kicking stones or bumping into pigs or geese or the children playing in the grass and on the cracked mud of the shore. Naked men and women in shifts were washing themselves in the river, with water up to their knees.

That water running between the banks was a bleeding wound. The wound he had been given in his throat seemed to him as irreparable as the beauty of the river. That bridge, those towers, the old city, his childhood and the Louvre, the pleasures of voices in the chapel, the games in the cloister's little garden, his white surplice, his past, the violet plums all faded for ever, carried away by the crimson waters. His dormitory mate, Delalande, had still kept his voice and had remained there. Marin's heart filled with nostalgic memories. He felt all alone, like some bleating beast, his young sex, thick and hairy, hanging heavy between his thighs.

Wig in hand, he suddenly felt ashamed of having told all this to Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, who remained sitting ramrod straight, his expression impenetrable. Madeleine pushed forward the plate of

cakes with a smile intended to encourage him to go on speaking. Toinette sat on the chest, behind her father, her knees drawn up to her chin. The youth went on . . .

When he arrived at the shoemaker's after having greeted his father, he was unable to restrain his sobbing any longer and had dashed upstairs to shut himself in the room where the straw mattresses were laid out in the evening, above the shop where his father worked. His father, with an anvil or an iron last on his thigh, never stopped hammering or trimming the leather of a shoe or a boot. These hammer blows made the boy's heart jump and filled him with disgust. He detested the stink of urine in which the skins were macerating and the insipid smell of the bucket of water under the workbench in which his father steeped the heel stiffeners. The twitterings of the canaries in their cage, the stool with its squeaky strips of woven leather, his father's shouts – he found it all unendurable. He hated the dull or dirty songs his father sang under his breath, detested his endless talk, even his good nature, even his laughter and jokes whenever a client entered the shop. The one thing that had found favour in the eyes of the adolescent on his return had been the dim radiance from the candelabra hanging low down over the workbench and casting a shaft of light over the calloused hands as

they seized the hammer or held the awl. It tinted a fainter yellow tone the brown, red, grey, green leathers that were laid away on shelves or that hung from the ceiling beams on little coloured cords. That was when he had decided he was going to leave his family for ever, that he would become a musician, that he would be revenged upon the voice that had betrayed him, that he would find fame as a viol player.

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe shrugged his shoulders.

Monsieur Marais, fiddling with the wig in his hands, explained that on leaving Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois he had gone to study with Monsieur Caignet who had kept him for almost a year and then had sent him to Monsieur Maugars, the son of Monsieur de Richelieu's appointed viol player. When he received him, Monsieur Maugars asked him if he had heard tell of the fame of Monsieur de Sainte Colombe and his seventh string: he had created a wooden instrument that could encompass all the registers of the human voice: that of the child, that of the woman, that of a man, broken, grave. For six months Monsieur Maugars had put him to work then had enjoined him to go and seek out Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, who dwelt over the river, handing him this letter of recommendation from him. The young lad then pushed his letter of recommendation in the direction of Monsieur de

Sainte Colombe. The latter broke the seal, opened the letter but, without having read it, wished to speak and stood up. Thus it was that an adolescent who no longer dared open his mouth encountered a taciturn man. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was unable to speak his mind, laid the letter on the table, went to Madeleine and muttered that he would have to hear the lad play. She left the room. Clothed all in black, a white ruff round his neck, Monsieur de Sainte Colombe moved towards the fireplace, beside which he sat down in a big armchair.

For the first lesson, Madeleine lent her own viol. Marin Marais was even more confused and red-faced than when he entered the house. The girls sat closer to him, curious to see how the former choirboy from Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois played. He soon became accustomed to the size of the instrument, tuned it, played a suite by Monsieur Maugars with great ease and virtuosity.

He looked at his audience. The girls looked down. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe said:

'I do not think I am going to let you become one of my pupils.'

This was followed by a long silence during which the youth's lips kept trembling. He suddenly cried in a hoarse voice:

'You might at least tell me why!'

'You are just making music, Monsieur. You are not a musician.'

The boy's face froze, his eyes filled with tears. In his distress, he stammered:

'At least allow me to . . .'

Sainte Colombe stood up, turned the great wooden armchair to face the hearth. Toinette said:

'Wait a moment, father. Monsieur Marais can perhaps play from memory an air of his own composition.'

Monsieur Marais bent his head in assent. He made hurried preparations. At once he bent over the viol to tune it more carefully than before and played the *Badinage in B.*

'It's good, father. It's very good!' said Toinette who applauded when he had finished playing.

'What do you think?' Madeleine asked, turning apprehensively towards her father.

Sainte Colombe had remained standing. He suddenly turned away from them and made as if to leave the room. Just as he was about to cross the threshold, he turned his head, looked at the boy who had remained seated, his face red, terrorized, and said:

'Come back in one month. I shall let you know then if you are of sufficient worth for me to number you among my pupils.'

IX

The playful little air the boy had played for him often came back to Sainte Colombe in memory and he was moved by it. It was a worldly, simple tune but one not lacking in tender feelings. Finally he forgot it. He worked even harder in his hut.

On the fourth occasion when he sensed the body of his dead wife at his side, he asked, turning his eyes away from her face:

'Madame, can you speak, even in death?'

'Yes.'

He trembled as he recognized the sound of her voice. A low voice, or at least a contralto. He felt an urge to weep but could not do so, he was at one and the same time so taken aback at hearing the dream speak. With shaking shoulders, after a moment he

plucked up courage to ask her:

'Why do you come here only from time to time? Why do you not come all the time?'

'I do not know,' the shade replied, blushing. 'I came because what you were playing touched me. I came because you had the kindness to offer me wine and a few cakes to nibble with it.'

'Madame!' he cried.

He stood up suddenly, violently, so violently that he knocked over his stool. He laid the viol to one side because it was encumbering his body and laid it on its side against the planks of the wall, on his left. He opened his arms as if he was already expecting to embrace her. She cried:

'No!'

She moved away from him. He hung his head. She told him:

'My limbs, my breasts have grown cold.'

She had difficult in getting her breath. She gave the impression of someone making too great an effort. She touched her thighs and her breasts as she spoke these words. He lowered his head again and she returned and sat on the stool. When she was breathing a little more easily, she said softly:

'I'd like you to give me a glass of your wine, your red wine, to moisten my lips with.'

He hurried away, to the stillroom, went down into

the cellar. When he came back, Madame de Sainte Colombe was no longer there.

X

When he arrived for his second lesson, it was Madeleine, very slender, pink-cheeked, who opened the courtyard gate for him.

'I've just been having a bath,' she said. 'I must put up my hair.'

Her nape was pink, with little black curls shining in the light. As she lifted her arms, her breasts grew full and firm. They walked towards Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's hut. It was a fine spring day. There were primroses and butterflies. Marin Marais was carrying his viol over his shoulder. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe invited him to enter the hut in the mulberry tree and accepted him as his pupil, saying:

'You know the correct position of the body. Your playing does not lack feeling. Your bow is light and

sprightly. Your left hand jumps like a squirrel and trips like a mouse over the strings. Your ornaments are ingenious and sometimes charming. But I did not hear any music.'

Young Marin Marais had conflicting feelings as he listened to his master's summing-up: he was glad to have been accepted and he was boiling with rage at the reservations Monsieur de Sainte Colombe expressed one after the other without displaying more emotion than if he had been discussing cuttings and seedlings with his gardener. The master went on:

'You could be a help in the dancing of people who dance. You could accompany actors who sing on the stage. You will earn a living. You will live surrounded by music but you will not be a musician.

'Have you a feeling heart? Have you a thinking brain? Have you any idea what is the purpose of sounds when it is not a question of dancing or pleasing the king's ears?

'And yet your broken voice moved me. I am keeping you because of that pain, not because of your art.'

When young Marais came down the steps from the hut, he glimpsed, in the shade cast by the foliage, a young girl, slender, naked, who hid herself behind a tree, and he hastily turned his head away as if he had not seen her.

XI

The months passed by. One day when it was very cold and the countryside was covered with snow, they could not work very long before being numb with cold. Their fingers were frozen stiff and they left the hut, went back to the house and warmed themselves at the fire, on which they heated some wine, adding spices and cinnamon, and drank it.

'This wine warms my lungs and my belly,' said Marin Marais.

'Do you know the painter Baugin?' Sainte Colombe asked him.

'No, Monsieur, nor any other painter either.'

'I once commissioned a painting from him. It shows a corner of my writing table in my music room. Let's go and take a look at it.'

'Immediately?'

'Yes.'

Marin Marais was looking at Madeleine de Sainte Colombe: she was standing in profile next to the window, in front of the panes covered with frost that deformed the outlines of the mulberry and the willows. She was listening attentively. She cast him a strange look.

'Let us go and see my friend,' said Sainte Colombe.

'Yes,' said Marin Marais.

The latter, his eyes on Madeleine, opened his doublet, adjusting and relacing the collar of buff leather.

'It's in Paris,' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe.

'Yes,' replied Marin Marais.

They wrapped up warmly. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe shrouded his face in a woollen scarf; Madeleine handed them their hats, cloaks, gloves. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe took down from their hook beside the hearth his cross-belt and sword. It was the only time Monsieur Marais saw Monsieur de Sainte Colombe wearing a sword. The young man could not take his eyes away from the signed rapier: on it one could see, in bold relief, the figure of the infernal ferryman, a gaff in his hand.

'Well, Monsieur, shall we go?' said Sainte Colombe.

Marin Maris raised his head and they went out.

Marin Marais was thinking of the blacksmith at the moment of striking the blade on his anvil. He seemed to see again the little shoemaker's anvil his father would place on his thigh and on which he would strike with his hammer. He thought of his father's hand and of the roughness made by the hammer when he passed his hand over the boy's face in the evenings when he was four or five years old, before he had left the workshop for the chantry. He thought that every craft has its own hands: the viola da gamba players' callouses on the finger pads of their left hands, the corns on the right-hand thumbs of cobbler-shoemakers.

It was snowing as they left the house of Monsieur de Sainte Colombe. The latter was enveloped in a vast brown cloak and only his eyes could be seen through the woollen scarf. It was the only time Monsieur Marais saw his master outside his garden or his house. He was said never to leave them. They followed the Bièvre downstream. The wind was shrill; their footsteps made the frost-bound earth crackle. Sainte Colombe had taken his pupil by the arm and he put a finger to his lips as a sign to keep silent. They strode on with loudly echoing steps, their upper bodies bent towards the road, fighting against the wind that struck at their open eyes.

'Can you hear, Monsieur,' he cried, 'how the melody floats free in relation to the bass?'

XII

'This is Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois,' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe.

'I know that as well as anyone. I sang there for ten years, Monsieur.'

'Here we are,' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe.

He knocked on the entrance with the grotesque door-knocker. It was a narrow portal of carved wood. They could hear the bells of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois ringing. An old woman stuck out her head. She was wearing an old-fashioned pointed coiffe over her forehead. Then they were standing beside the stove in Monsieur Baugin's studio. The painter was busy painting a still-life on a table: a half-filled glass of red wine, a lute on its side, an open music score, a black velvet purse, some playing cards with the knave of

clubs uppermost, a chessboard on which were arranged a vase holding three carnations and an octagonal mirror leaning against the studio wall.

'All that death shall take away is in its night,' Sainte Colombe whispered in his pupil's ear. 'They are all the pleasures of this world that are taking their leave, bidding us adieu.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe asked the painter if he could retrieve the painting he had loaned him: the painter had wanted to show it to a Flemish merchant who had had a copy made of it. Monsieur Baugin signalled to the old woman wearing the pointed coiffe over her forehead; she nodded and went to find the rolled wafers in their ebony frame. He showed it to Monsieur Marais, pointing to the wine glass and the curled forms of the little yellow biscuits. Then the imperturbable old dame busied herself wrapping it up in bits of cloth and string. They watched the painter painting. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe again whispered in Monsieur Marais' ear:

'Listen to the sound Monsieur Baugin's brush makes.'

They closed their eyes and listened to him painting. Then Monsieur de Sainte Colombe said:

'You have learnt the art of the bow.'

As Monsieur Baugin turned round and asked them what they were muttering about:

'I was speaking of the bow and was comparing it with your brush,' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe.

'I think your mind must be wandering,' replied the painter, laughing. 'I love gold. Personally, I seek the road that leads to the mysterious fires.'

They took their leave of Monsieur Baugin. The pointed white coiffe bobbed brusquely at them as the door was closing behind their backs. In the street the snow had begun falling even thicker and faster. They could hardly see anything and kept stumbling in the deep layers of snow. They entered a *jeu de paume* where people were playing court tennis. They ordered bowls of soup and drank them, blowing on the steam shrouding the liquid, as they walked through the rooms. They saw courtiers playing surrounded by their supporters. The young ladies accompanying them applauded the best shots. In another room, mounted on a trestle stage, they saw two women reciting. One of them was saying in a penetrating voice:

'Sorrowful, raising heavenwards eyes wet with tears that glistened through the torches and the spears. Beautiful, unadorned, clad in the simplicity of beauty just awakened from its slumbers. What could I do? I know not if that disarray, the shadows, the torches, the shouts and the silence . . .'

The other replied slowly, an octave lower:

'I wished to speak to him and my voice was lost. Motionless, possessed by a prolonged astonishment, I sought in vain to find distraction in his image. Too apparent before my eyes, I believed I was speaking to him, I loved even the tears that I caused him to shed . . .'*

While the actresses were declaiming with strange, broad gestures, Sainte Colombe whispered in Marais' ear:

'That is how the emphasis in a phrase should be articulated. Music too is a human language.'

They left the *jeu de paume*. The snow had stopped falling but now reached to the tops of their boots. Night had fallen with no moon and no stars. A man passed by with a torch he was protecting with his hand, and they followed him. A few flakes were still drifting down.

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe took his pupil's arm and stopped him: in front of them a little boy had dropped his breeches and was pissing, making a hole in the snow. The sound of the hot urine piercing the snow was mingled with the noise of snow crystals slowly melting. Saint Colombe once more put his fingers to his lips.

* These lines, printed here as prose, are alexandrines from Racine's *Britannicus*, spoken by Néron, Act II. ii.

'You have learnt the staccato bowing of embellishments,' he said.

'It makes a chromatic declination,' retorted Marin Marais.

And he added: 'I shall place a chromatic declination in your tomb, Monsieur.'

The which he did, in fact, years later. Monsieur Marais went on:

'Perhaps true music is akin to silence?'

'No,' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe. He was busy wrapping the woollen scarf round his head and he pushed his hat down firmly to keep it in place. Shifting the cross-belt that was getting in the way of his legs, and still holding under his arm the picture of the rolled wafers, he turned away and pissed against the wall. He turned back to Marin Marais saying:

'It's getting late. My feet are cold. I bid you good night.'

And he left him there and then.

XIII

It was the beginning of spring. Sainte Colombe drove Marais out of his hut. Each carrying a viol, without a word, under a fine drizzle, they crossed the garden in the direction of the house which they entered noisily. He shouted for the girls to come. He had an angry look on his face. He said:

'Now, Monsieur. Now. What you have to do is to give birth to an emotion in our ears.'

Toinette came running down the stairs. She sat beside the tall window that opened on the garden. Madeleine came and kissed Marin Marais who informed her, as he was settling the viol between his thighs and getting it in tune, that he had played before the king in the royal chapel. Madeleine's eyes took on a more serious expression. The atmosphere was

tense, like a string about to snap. While Madeleine was wiping the raindrops from his viol with her apron, Marin Marais whispered in her ear:

'He's furious because yesterday I played before the king in the royal chapel.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's face clouded over again. Toinette gave a warning sign. Taking no notice of her, Marin Marais was explaining to Madeleine how they had slipped a footwarmer full of hot charcoal under the queen's feet. The footwarmer . . .

'Play!' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe.

'Look, Madeleine. I scorched the bottom of my viol. It was one of the bodyguard who noticed that my viol was burning and signalled to me with his pike. It isn't burnt. It isn't really burnt. It's blackened a bit and . . .'

Two hands came down on the wooden table with a violent slap. They all jumped. Through clenched teeth, Monsieur de Sainte Colombe roared:

'Play!'

'Look, Madeleine!' Marin went on.

'Play!' said Toinette.

Sainte Colombe dashed across the room, snatched the instrument out of his hands.

'No!' shouted Marin, jumping up to get his viol back. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was now beside himself. He started brandishing the viol over his head. Marin Marais went running after him round the room,

holding out his arms to recover his instrument and to prevent his master from doing something irreparable. He was shouting 'No! No!' Madeleine, frozen with terror, kept twisting her apron in her hands. Toinette had jumped up and was running after them.

Sainte Colombe strode to the hearth, swung the viol in the air, smashed it against the fireplace's stone mantlepiece. The mirror hanging above it was shattered by the blow. Marin Marais had suddenly crouched down and was howling. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe threw to the floor what remained of the viol and jumped on it with his jackboots. Toinette was shouting her father's name and pulling him by his doublet. Then they were all four of them silent. They stood there motionless, dazed. They stared uncomprehendingly at the havoc. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe, pale, head lowered, was gazing only at his hands. He was trying to bring up groaning sighs. But he could not.

'Father, father!' Toinette cried, hugging his shoulders and back and sobbing.

He was flexing his fingers and gradually beginning to utter brief gasping groans like a man who is drowning and cannot get his breath. Finally he left the room. Monsieur Marais was weeping in the arms of Madeleine who had knelt down beside him, trembling all over. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe returned with a

purse whose strings he was undoing. He counted the louis it contained, stepped forward, threw the purse at Marin Marais' feet and turned away.

'Monsieur, you might give us some explanation of what you've done!'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe turned back to him and said calmly:

'Monsieur, what is an instrument? An instrument is not music. You have there in that purse enough to buy yourself a circus horse on which to pirouette before the king.'

Madeleine was weeping, her arm across her eyes, and making vain efforts to stand up. Sobs were shaking her back. She remained on her knees between them.

'Listen, Monsieur, to the sobs torn from her by my daughter's anguish: they are closer to music than all your scales. Leave this place for ever, Monsieur, you are a great circus performer, a master juggler. The plates go flying round your head and you never lose your balance but you are a paltry musician. You are a musician no bigger than a plum or a cockchafer. You should go and play at Versailles, or rather on the Pont Neuf,* where

* The bridge linking the quai du Louvre with the Left Bank. It was once the traditional rendezvous for mountebanks and street performers. The church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois stands near the Right Bank end.

the passers-by would throw you their small change to buy wine with.'

Monsieur de Sainte Colombe left the room, banging the door behind him. Monsieur Marais dashed into the courtyard to make his departure. All the doors were banging.

Madeleine ran out on to the road behind him and caught up with him. The rain had stopped. She put an arm round his shoulders. He was crying.

'I shall teach you everything my father taught me,' she told him.

'Your father is mad and wicked,' Marin Marais said.

'No.'

She shook her head in a silent 'No.' Then she said once again:

'No.'

She saw his tears flowing and brushed one of them away. She saw Marin's hands moving towards her own, bare and wet with rain. She offered her fingers. They touched with a sense of shock. Then they linked their fingers passionately, joined their bellies, joined their lips. They started kissing.

XIV

Marin Marais used to come without Monsieur de Sainte Colombe's knowledge. Madeleine would show him on the viol all the techniques her father had taught her. Standing in front of him, she would make him practise them, positioning his hand on the stops, placing his calf so that the instrument was thrust forward for greater resonance, checking his elbow and upper right arm for the bowing. In this manner their fingers would meet. Then they would make love in shadowy corners. They loved one another. Sometimes they would hide under Sainte Colombe's hut to catch whatever new embellishments he had created, to listen to how his playing was developing, to what were becoming his favourite chords.

When he reached the age of twenty, during the

summer of 1676, Monsieur Marais informed Mademoiselle de Sainte Colombe that he had been engaged by the court as musician to the king or *musicqueur du roy*. They were in the garden; she urged him to creep under the wooden hut built in the low branches of the ancient mulberry tree. She had taught him everything she knew.

One day it so happened that a thunderstorm broke while Marin Marais was ensconced beneath the cabin and having caught cold he sneezed violently several times. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe rushed out into the rain, caught him with his chin on his knees crouching on the wet earth, and started to kick him and call for his menservants. He managed to reach his feet and legs with his kicks and to make him get out, seized him by the collar and asked the first manservant to arrive to bring him the whip. Madeleine de Sainte Colombe intervened. She told her father that she loved Marin, and finally succeeded in calming him down. The thunderclouds had passed over as swiftly as they had been violent and they dragged into the garden armchairs in which they took their seats.

'I wish to see no more of you, Monsieur,' said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe. 'This is the last time.'

'You shall see me no more.'

'Do you wish to wed my elder daughter?'

'I cannot yet give my word.'

'Toinette is at the lute maker's and will come home late,' said Madeleine, turning her face away.

She went and sat on the grass next to Marin Marais, leaning against her father's big chair. The grass was already almost dry and smelt strongly of hay. Her father was gazing beyond the willow tree towards the green forests. She watched Marin's hand slowly approaching. He laid his fingers on Madeleine's breast and slid it slowly down to her belly. She pressed her thighs together and shivered. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe could not see them. He was too busy talking:

'I do not know if I shall give you my daughter's hand. Doubtless you have found a situation where you will make a good living. You will live in a palace and the king will enjoy the melodies with which you surround his pleasures. In my opinion, it little matters whether one practises one's art in a great palace of stone with a hundred chambers or in a wooden hut shaking in the branches of a mulberry tree. For me there is something more than art, more than the fingers, more than the ear, more than inventiveness: it is the passionate life I lead.'

'You are living a passionate life?' asked Marin Marais.

'Father, are you leading a passionate life?'

Madeleine and Marin had both spoken at the same

time and at the same time had turned to look at the musician.

'Monsieur, you bring pleasure to a visible king. Pleasing was never my way. I am calling, I swear to you, I am calling with my hand an invisible thing.

'And that is why I did not count upon you accompanying me on my way, along my humble little path of grass and stones. I belong to the tombs. You publish clever compositions and you ingeniously provide them with the fingerings and embellishments you keep stealing from me. But it's all just black and white on paper!'

With his handkerchief, Marin Marais wiped away some drops of blood from his lips. He suddenly leaned towards his master.

'Monsieur, I have long been wanting to ask you one question.'

'Yes.'

'Why do you never publish the melodies you play?'

'Oh children, I do not compose! I have never written down anything. They're all no more than offerings of water, bubbles of water, wormwood, little wriggling caterpillars I sometimes invent as I recall a name or a pleasure.'

'But where is the music in your water bubbles and caterpillars?'

'When I draw my bow across the strings, it is a little

bit of my living heart I am tearing out. What I do is nothing but the discipline of a life in which there is never a day off. I am fulfilling my destiny.'

XV

On the one hand the Freethinkers were being persecuted, on the other the Gentlemen of Port-Royal were on the run. The latter had planned to buy an island in America and to establish themselves there as the persecuted Protestants had done. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe had kept up his friendship with Monsieur de Bures. Monsieur Coustel said that the Solitaires* drove themselves to such excesses of humiliation that they preferred the word *monsieur* even to the word *saint*. In the rue Saint-Dominique-d'Enfer, even the children addressed one another as

* i.e. The Jansenists, the Messieurs de Port-Royal. Their school was situated in the rue Saint-Dominique-d'Enfer at Chevreuse south of Versailles, where Racine was one of their most famous pupils.

'Monsieur' and never used a more familiar form.

Sometimes one of these Gentlemen would have a carriage sent for him to come and play on the occasion of the death of one of their members or for Tenebrae. At such times Monsieur de Sainte Colombe could not help thinking of his dead wife and of the circumstances that had preceded her passing. He kept alive a love that nothing could diminish. It seemed to him that it was the same love, the same abandonment, the same night, the same cold.

On Ash Wednesday, when he had accompanied the office of Tenebrae in the chapel belonging to Madame de Pont-Carré's residence, he had put away his score and was getting ready to return home. He was sitting in the little side-aisle, on a straw-bottomed chair. His viol was standing beside him, covered with its cloth. The organist and two sisters were performing a new piece he did not know and it was beautiful. He turned his head to the right: she was seated beside him. He bowed. She smiled at him, slightly raising her hand; she was wearing black mittens and rings.

'It's time to go home now,' she said.

He stood up, took his viol and followed her into the darkness of the aisle, passing the statues of saints swathed in violet cloths.

In the lane, he opened the carriage door, lowered the step and got in after her, putting in his viol first. He

told the coachman he was going home. He could feel the soft texture of his wife's dress as she sat beside him. He asked her whether in times past he had proved to her how much he loved her.

'I do indeed remember that you demonstrated your love for me,' she told him, 'though I must say I should not have been offended if you had expressed it in a more eloquent manner.'

'Was it so poor and so rare?'

'It was as poor as it was frequent, my friend, and most often dumb. I loved you. How I should like to be able to suggest again your favourite dessert of crushed peaches!'

The carriage stopped. They were already in front of the house. He had got out of the carriage and was holding out his hand to help her down.

'I can't,' she said.

He had a pained look which made Madame de Sainte Colombe put out her hand to him.

'You don't look well,' she said.

He took out his viol in its covering and laid it on the road. He sat on the step and wept.

She had got out. He got up quickly and opened the main gate. They crossed the paved courtyard, climbed the steps, entered the living room where he leaned his viol against the stone fireplace. He said:

'My sadness is something I cannot explain. You are

right to reproach me. Words can never express what I want to say and I know not how to say it . . .'

He opened the door giving on the balustrade and the garden beyond. They walked on the lawn. He pointed to the hut and said:

'That's where I talk – in that hut!'

He had started weeping again, softly. They went down to the boat. Madame de Sainte Colombe got into the white boat while he held the craft steady, keeping it close to the river bank. She had lifted the hem of her skirt to set her foot on the wet planks of the boat. He stood up. He kept his eyes lowered. He did not notice that the boat had vanished. After a while, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he went on:

'I know not how to say it, Madame. Twelve years have passed but the sheets on our bed have not yet grown cold.'

XVI

Monsieur Marais' visits became ever rarer. Madeleine would go to meet him at Versailles or at Vauboyen where they made love in a room at an inn. Madeleine told him everything. In this way she let him know that her father had composed the most beautiful melodies in all the world and that he would let no one hear them. Among them was one called *Tears*. Another was called the *Barque of Charon*.

Once they got a real fright. They were in the house because Marin Marais was hoping to overhear the airs Madeleine had told him about by creeping under the branches of the mulberry tree. She was standing in front of him in the living room. Marin was in a chair. She had drawn near. She thrust her breasts forward, close to his face. She undid the top of her dress, drew

aside her undergarment. Her breasts leaped out. Marin Marais could only bury his face in them.

'Manon!' Monsieur de Sainte Colombe cried.

Marin Marais hid himself in the nearest window recess. Madeleine went white and hastily put her undergarments in order.

'Yes, father.'

'We must practice our major thirds and diminished fifths.'

'Yes, father.'

He came into the room. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe did not see Marin Marais. They left immediately. When he heard them in the distance tuning their viols, Marin Marais left his hiding place and was making to leave the house unnoticed by way of the garden. He stumbled upon Toinette, leaning on the balustrade, gazing at the garden. She caught his arm.

'What about me? How do you like this?'

She shoved out her breasts as her sister had done. Marin Marais laughed, kissed her and hurriedly made his way out.

XVII

On another occasion, some time later, one summer day when Guignotte, Madeleine and Toinette had decided to go to the chapel and dust the saints' statues, whisk away the spider's webs, wash the tiled floors, clean the chairs and benches, put flowers on the altar, Marin Marais accompanied them. He went up into the open loft and played a piece on the organ. Down below, he could see Toinette with a floorcloth washing the steps round the altar. She waved to him. He went down. It was very hot. They went hand in hand through the sacristy door, ran across the cemetery, jumped over the little boundary wall and found themselves in the shrubbery at the edge of the woods.

Toinette was all out of breath. Her dress showed the

tops of her breasts gleaming with sweat. Her eyes were shining. She thrust her breasts forward.

'The sweat is staining the neckline of my dress,' she said.

'Your breasts are bigger than your sister's.'

He was gazing down at her breasts. He wanted to kiss them, took her arm, intending to leave her and go. He looked confused.

'My belly is all on fire,' she told him, taking his hand and holding it between her own. She pulled him towards her.

'Your sister . . .' he murmured and put his arms around her. They held each other tightly. He kissed her eyes. He undid her undergarment.

'Take off all your clothes and take me,' she told him.

She was still a child. She insisted:

'Take off all my clothes! Then you take off all yours!'

Her body was already like a woman's, round and firm. After they had had their fill of one another, as she was putting on her shift, her naked body was illuminated from one side by the light from the setting sun, and her heavy breasts, her thighs stood out against the foliage of the wood: she seemed to him the most beautiful woman in the world.

'I'm not ashamed,' she said.

'I am ashamed.'

'I wanted you.'

He helped her lace up her dress. She lifted her arms, bending them over her head. He was lacing up her waist. She was wearing no knickers under her shift. She said:

'And now, Madeleine is going to feel pretty small.'

XVIII

They were half naked in Madeleine's room. Marin Marais leaned against the bedpost. He told her:

'I'm leaving you. You could see I had nothing at the bottom of my belly for you.'

She took his hands and gradually, putting her face between Marin Marais' hands, she started crying. He heaved a sigh. The curtain loop holding back the bedcurtains dropped as he was pulling at his breeches about to lace the front of them up. She took the laces out of his hands and put her lips there.

'Your tears are sweet and they touch me. I am leaving you because I no longer dream of your breasts. I have seen other faces. Our hearts are famished creatures. Our minds know no repose. Life

is beautiful to the extent that it is a savage thing, like our victims.'

She was silent, toying with the strings, stroking his belly without looking at him. Then she raised her head, suddenly faced him, flushing, and muttered:

'Stop talking and get out of here!'

XIX

Mademoiselle de Sainte Colombe fell ill and became so thin and weak that she took to her bed. She was pregnant. Marin Marais did not dare inquire after her health but he had arranged with Toinette to meet him on a certain day, beyond the washing place on the Bièvre. There, he got news of Madeleine's pregnancy. She gave birth to a little boy, still-born. He entrusted Toinette with a parcel which she handed to her sister: it contained high laced boots of rough suede which his father had made at his request. Madeleine had tried to burn them on the fire but Toinette had stopped her. She got better. She read the desert Fathers. As time went by, he stopped coming.

In 1675, he was studying composition with Monsieur Lully. In 1679, Caignet died. At twenty-three, Marin

Marais was appointed Musician in Ordinary to the Privy Chamber, taking the place of his first master. He also took on the direction of the orchestra with Monsieur Lully.* He composed operas.** He married Catherine d'Amicourt and had nineteen children. In the year 1710 when the charnel houses of Port-Royal were opened (the year in which the king gave orders that the walls should be razed, and that the corpses of Messieurs Hamon and Racine should be exhumed and thrown to the dogs), he returned to the theme of *La Rêveuse* – the woman dreaming.

In 1686, he was living in the rue du Jour, near the church of Saint-Eustache.† Toinette had married the son of Monsieur Pardoux, who, like his father, was a maker of stringed instruments in the city, and who gave her five children.

* Jean-Baptise Lully, 1633–1687, Superintendant of the King's Music. Enshrined in a magnificent mausoleum in the Eglise des Petits-Pères, near the Place des Victoires.

** *Alcide* (1693), *Ariadne et Bacchus* (1696), *Alcione* (1706), *Sémélé* (1709). The storm scene in *Alcione* created a sensation both musically and visually.

† Beside Les Halles.

XX

The ninth time he sensed close beside him the presence of his wife was in the spring. It was at the time of the great persecution of June 1679.* He had put out the wine and the dish of wafers on the music table. He was playing in the hut. He stopped and asked her:

'How is it that after your death you are able to come here? Where is my boat? Where are my tears when I see you? Are you not rather some daydream? Am I a madman?'

'Do not distress yourself. Your boat rotted away in the river long ago. The other world is no more

* The persecution of Port-Royal des Champs began in 1656. The abbey was destroyed in 1710.

impermeable than was your barque.'

'It pains me, Madame, not being able to touch you.'

'There is nothing to touch, Monsieur, but the wind.'

She was speaking slowly, as the dead always do. She added:

'Do you think there is no suffering in being only of the wind? Sometimes it brings notes of music to our ears. Sometimes the light carries fragments of our appearances to your gaze.'

She fell silent again. She was watching her husband's hands, which he had laid upon the red wood of his viol.

'You do not know how to speak, do you?' she said. 'What do you want, my friend? Play!'

'What are you looking at in such silence?'

'Go on, play! I was looking at your wrinkled hand on the wood of the viol.'

He stopped moving. He looked at his wife, and then, for the first time in his life, or at least as if he had never seen it until then, he looked at his hand – emaciated, yellow, the skin wrinkled indeed. He placed both hands in front of him. They were spotted with death and it made him happy. Those signs of old age brought him closer to her or to her condition. His heart was beating as if it would burst with the joy he was feeling and his fingers were trembling.

'My hands,' he said. 'You are speaking about my hands!'

XXI

By then, the sun had already disappeared. The sky was laden with rain clouds and it was getting dark. The air was heavy with damp and seemed to announce an approaching shower. He followed the Bièvre. He saw the house and its little tower and bumped into the high walls protecting it. Far off, from time to time, he caught the sound of his master's viol. It moved him. He followed the wall to the river bank and, seizing the roots of a tree that floodwaters had laid bare, he managed to climb round the end of the wall and get his feet on the slope belonging to the Sainte Colombes' garden. There was nothing left of the willow but its trunk. The boat was no longer there either. He thought to himself: 'The willow has been washed away. The boat has sunk. I loved the daughters who

now no doubt are mothers. I knew their beauty.' He did not notice the hens or the geese crowding round his feet: Madeleine must no longer be living here. In days gone by she used to herd them into their hen house and one could hear them complaining and bustling about in the dark.

He crept into the shadow of the wall and, guided by the sound of the viol, approached his master's hut where, wrapping himself in his rain mantle, he laid his ear to the wooden wall. They were prolonged arpeggio lamentations. They resembled the airs once improvised by Couperin the Younger on the organ of Saint-Gervais. Through the narrow aperture of the window glimmered the light of a candle. Then, as the viol stopped playing, he heard him talking to someone, though he could hear no replies.

'My hands,' he was saying. 'You are speaking of my hands!'

And also: 'What are you looking at in such silence?'

After an hour had passed, Monsieur Marais departed, taking the same difficult road by which he had come.

XXII

During the winter of 1684 a willow had broken under the weight of ice and the river bank had been damaged by it. Through the empty space in the foliage one could see a woodcutter's cottage in the forest. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe had been very affected by this broken willow because it coincided with the illness of his daughter Madeleine. He would sit by the bedside of his elder daughter. He suffered at not being able to say anything to her, however much he tried. He would caress his daughter's bony face with his old hands. One evening, during one of these visits, she asked her father if he would play *La Rêveuse*, which Monsieur Marais had once composed for her in the days when he loved her. He refused and left the bedroom in a rage. Nevertheless, Monsieur de Sainte

Colombe shortly after that went to call on Toinette on the island,* in Monsieur Pardoux' workshop, and asked her to warn Monsieur Marais. There followed the sad events known to us now. Not only did he never speak a word for ten months but Monsieur de Sainte Colombe never touched his viol either: it was the first time he had felt such revulsion. Guignotte had died. He had never bent her to his will, nor even touched the hair she wore hanging freely down her back, though he would have liked to. There was no one now to prepare his clay pipe and his jug of wine. He told the menservants they could go and loll on their beds in the garret, or spend their days playing cards. He preferred to be alone, with a few lighted wax tapers, sitting beside his table, or with a common tallow candle in his hut. He did not read. He never opened his book bound in red morocco leather. He received his pupils without so much as a glance or a bow, so that in the end he had to tell them not to come and bother him any more with their music.

In those times, Monsieur Marais would come late at night and listen, his ear against the hut's wooden wall, to the silence.

*The Ile de la Cité on the Seine in Paris, where Notre Dame stands.

XXIII

One afternoon, Toinette and Luc Pardoux had gone to find Monsieur Marais when he was on duty at Versailles: Madeleine de Sainte Colombe had been suddenly stricken by a high fever caused by an attack of smallpox. It was thought she might die. A guard came and told the Musician in Ordinary of the Privy Chamber that Toinette was waiting outside.

He came out in a great state of confusion, with his lace flounces, his gold-swagged scarlet heels. Marin Marais was in a bad mood. With the message still in his hand, he at first said he could not come. Then he asked how old Madeleine was. She was then thirty-nine years old and Toinette said that her sister could not bear the prospect of entering her fortieth year still unmarried. Her husband, Monsieur Pardoux the

younger, expressed the opinion that Madeleine must be out of her mind. She had begun to eat coarse bread then had refused all meat. Now the woman who had replaced Guignotte was feeding her with a spoon. Monsieur de Sainte Colombe had had the idea of giving her peaches in syrup to keep her alive. It was a notion he had got from his wife, so he said. Monsieur Marais had covered his eyes with his hand when Toinette had uttered the name of Monsieur de Sainte Colombe. Madeleine could keep nothing down. As the Gentlemen of Port-Royal declared that smallpox was a call to saintliness and to the cloister Madeleine de Sainte Colombe retorted that *her* saintly duty lay in service to her father, her cloister was that *vorde* on the Bièvre and that now she had made this declaration it was useless to go on repeating it. As for being disfigured, she said she did not wish to be pitied for it; she was already as wiry as a thistle and about as charming; in the past a man had even abandoned her because her breasts, when she had grown thin from suffering, had shrunk to the size of hazelnuts. She no longer went to communion, though that should not be ascribed to the influence of Monsieur de Bures or Monsieur Lancelot.* But she was still devout.

For years she had gone to the chapel to pray. She

*Freethinkers, founders and teachers at Port-Royal.

would go up into the organ loft, gazing down at the choir stalls and the paved flooring surrounding the altar, and sit down at the organ. She said that she offered this music to God.

Monsieur Marais asked how Monsieur de Sainte Colombe was faring. Toinette replied that he was well but that he would not play the piece called *La Rêveuse*. Six months ago, Madeleine could still weed and hoe the garden and plant flower seeds. But now she was too weak to be able to visit the chapel. Whenever she was able to walk without falling, she insisted on serving her father at table in the evenings, standing either out of a spirit of humility or else a dislike of the idea of eating anything, behind his chair. Monsieur Pardoux declared she had told his wife that, at night, she scorched her bare arms with hot candle grease. Madeleine had shown Toinette the scars on her upper arms. She could not sleep, but neither could her father now. Her father would watch her wandering back and forth in the moonlight, round the hen house, or else kneeling in prayer among the long grasses.

XXIV

Toinette persuaded Marin Marais. She took him there after having warned her father of his visit, so that Monsieur de Sainte Colombe would not have to meet him. The bedroom he entered had a smell of fusty silks.

'You're all so magnificently beribboned, Monsieur, and so plump,' said Madeleine de Sainte Colombe.

He made no reply. He shoved a stool near the bed and sat down but found it too low. He preferred to stand, overcome by a sense of acute embarrassment, one arm leaning against a pillar of the bed. She thought his blue satin hose were too tight: whenever he moved, they moulded his buttocks, showed the folds in his belly and manly parts. She said:

'Thank you for coming from Versailles. I should like

to hear you play that air you composed for me in former days and which has been published.'

He replied that she was probably referring to *La Rêveuse*. She looked him straight in the eyes and said:

'Yes. And you know why.'

He was silent. He bowed without a word, then suddenly turned to Toinette and asked her to go and get Madeleine's viol.

'Your cheeks have grown hollow. Your eyes are sunken. Your hands are become so thin!' he said in a horrified tone of voice as soon as Toinette had left.

'I appreciate the delicacy of your observations.'

'Your voice is lower than it used to be.'

'Yours has gone up an octave.'

'Can it really be that you are not pining away for something? You have got so thin.'

'I do not believe I have suffered any recent heartbreak.'

Marin Marais withdrew his hands from the counterpane. He retreated until he had his back to the bedchamber wall, in the shadow cast by the window bay. He spoke very softly:

'Do you hold it against me?'

'Yes, Marin.'

'Does what I have become since then still fill you with hatred for me?'

'Not just for you, Monsieur! I have been nourishing