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Marcel Proust  
**The Guermentes Way**

Part I

Read by **Neville Jason**



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REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST • V

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1	We had moved – to the Hôtel de Guermantes	12:21
2	Exploring the Hôtel de Guermantes	9:52
3	The Opéra-Comique	8:45
4	Berma in Phèdre again	8:17
5	Early morning walks for a casual rendezvous	6:40
6	Visiting my friend, Robert de Saint-Loup	9:07
7	No time to be sad	5:48
8	'Isn't that Mme de Guermantes's photograph?'	6:28
9	Robert and his mistress	6:09
10	Telephonic connection with my grandmother	5:46
11	An uneasy farewell from Robert	7:59
12	The winter was drawing to an end...	8:14
13	The suburb of Paris to visit Robert's mistress	10:27
14	In the theatre	7:22
15	Another row	10:16
16	A party at the home of Mme de Villeparisis	8:14
17	The 'Mari-Antoinette' lady	7:59
18	Bloch and Legrandin	9:58

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19	Two young men – The Baron and the Duc	3:28
20	'Bloch rose and went over to look at the flowers'	3:40
21	M. de Norpois and the Dreyfus case	7:30
22	The Duc de Guermantes	14:10
23	The Comtesse de Marsantes, Robert's mother	6:36
24	The Prince von Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen	7:42
25	The arrival of Mme Swann	11:11
26	Observing Robert	6:02
27	M. de Charlus	4:56
28	An arm snatched from mine	4:55
29	My grandmother is not well	15:56

**Total time: 3:56:08**

Cover picture: *L'ambitieuse*, by Tissot.  
Courtesy of the Albright/Knox Collection.

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Marcel Proust

# The Guermantes Way

## Part I

In *The Guermantes Way*, Marcel penetrates the inner sanctum of Paris high society, the circle of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, which he has hitherto viewed as both unattainable and quasi-magical; a place inhabited by beings who lead lives completely unlike his own and those of other ordinary mortals.

Marcel's unexpected social advancement is brought about by a combination of circumstances. His family has moved to an apartment which forms part of the Hotel de Guermantes, the Paris residence of the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, whose country estates are at Combray, where Marcel's family used to spend their summers when he was a child.

More recently, while Marcel was on holiday at the seaside resort of Balbec with his grandmother, the old lady renewed the acquaintance of a friend of her youth, the Marquise de Villeparisis, aunt of the Duchesse de Guermantes. The Marquise has introduced Marcel to her nephew, Robert de Saint-Loup, a stylish young officer cadet who delights in the intellectual and

artistic stimulation he finds in Marcel's conversation.

Marcel's new neighbour, the Duchesse de Guermantes, is sufficiently young, attractive, and unobtainable to become the safe object of his youthful adoration, and although he is unable to avoid noticing that she is a real woman with a disagreeable expression and a faulty complexion, the reality is outweighed by his fantasy which incorporates the glory of her title and her ancient name. Marcel's obsession drives him to take his morning walk at the same time as the Duchess takes hers in order to meet her as though by accident, although the Duchess appears, if anything, rather annoyed than pleased by his attentions.

Having been invited by Robert de Saint-Loup to visit him in the garrison town where he is stationed, Marcel finds fascination in army life, with its physical rigour and rough camaraderie. He is reminded that Oriane, Duchesse de Guermantes, is Robert's cousin, and although reluctant to admit to Robert the extent of his love for her, he obtains

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from him the promise of an introduction on their return to Paris.

Robert's mistress is an aspiring young actress, and he is impatient for Marcel to meet her. When they are introduced Marcel realises with a shock that he has seen her before. This woman, so adored and admired by Robert, on whom he lavishes priceless jewels and for whom he defies his family's displeasure, turns out to be 'Rachel when from the Lord', a former prostitute in a brothel frequented at one time by Marcel. Despite his view of Rachel as unworthy of Robert's love, Marcel can see that the emotions she engenders in him are both genuine and devastating.

When they pay a visit to the theatre to see Rachel perform, Marcel observes with fascination the magical transformation made by distance and art, and begins to understand Robert's passion for her. Robert's relationship with Rachel is a stormy one, due to his jealous nature and her seeming need to provoke it, and Marcel is made an unwilling witness of their complicated emotional life.

The scene of Marcel's introduction to high society is the salon of the Marquise de Villeparisis. Not only is the Marquise Robert's aunt and his grandmother's old

friend, but Marcel discovers another link between them in that the Marquise's lover of many years standing is the Baron de Norpois, his father's old friend and colleague.

The Marquise's salon represents the Guermantes Way of the title – the way of the aristocracy. At Combray, Marcel and his parents were in the habit of taking two country walks; one, Swann's Way, which led past the property of Swann, his wife Odette and their daughter Gilberte, and the other the Méséglise Way, which skirted the Guermantes family's extensive estates. These two different routes came to symbolise for Marcel two ways of life – the bourgeois life of love and family, and the life of power and influence which comes with noble birth.

In the progress of the cycle *Remembrance of Things Past*, the first book, *Swann's Way*, introduces the reader to Marcel's family at Combray and their neighbour Charles Swann, the scholarly man of fashion. *Swann in Love* tells the story of Swann's passion for the courtesan Odette de Crécy, and Marcel's childish love for their daughter Gilberte. The following part, *Within a Budding Grove*, sees the end of Marcel's affair with Gilberte, and the

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beginning of his love for Albertine, one of a band of charming young girls he meets at the seaside resort of Balbec. It is there that Marcel becomes acquainted with those members of the aristocracy who are to introduce him into the circle of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

In *The Guermantes Way* Proust shows us the struggles for political and social supremacy, the ebb and flow of power and influence, being played out in the Marquise's drawing room beneath a veneer of elegant manners almost Oriental in their subtlety.

Characters from former books are reintroduced, and among them we meet once again the arch snob and flatterer Legrandin who, having warned Marcel about the dangers of going into society, is found to have been tirelessly attempting to obtain entry himself; Marcel's old friend the scholarly and brilliant but socially inept Bloch; and the predatory Baron de Charlus, whose keen interest in the innocent Marcel excites his hostess's concern.

Amongst the subjects currently under discussion in the Marquise's salon is the Dreyfus case. Bloch, who is attending the trial of Emile Zola, eminent champion of Dreyfus, is anxious to sound out the company's opinions. The case has divided

France into two opposing camps – with the aristocrats of the Faubourg Saint-Germain solidly arrayed on the anti-Dreyfus side. The opinion expressed by one nobleman present is that Dreyfus can be neither patriot nor traitor, because as a Jew he is not a Frenchman. This argument must have been particularly offensive to the half-Jewish Proust.

Part I of *The Guermantes Way* ends with the illness of Marcel's grandmother, whose selfless love has been as important to him as that of his mother, and his dawning realisation that the time is approaching when he must lose her.

**Notes by Neville Jason**

# Marcel Proust

# The Guermites Way

## Part I

Read by **Neville Jason**

In *The Guermites Way – Part I* Marcel penetrates the inner sanctum of Paris high society and falls in love with the fascinating Duchesse de Guermites. With his unmatched powers of observation Proust vividly describes the struggles for political, social and sexual supremacy played out beneath a veneer of elegant manners. This is the fifth part of Naxos AudioBooks' recording of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.



**Neville Jason** trained at RADA where he was awarded the Diction Prize by Sir John Gielgud. He has worked with the English Stage Co., the Old Vic Company and the RSC as well as in films and musicals. In television he has appeared in popular serials such as *Maigret*, *Emergency Ward 10* and *Doctor Who*, as well as playing classical roles such *Orestes* and *Horatio*. Formerly a member of the BBC Radio Drama Co., he is frequently to be heard on radio. As well as *Remembrance of Things Past*, he also reads Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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