

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Marcel Proust
The Guermentes Way
Part II

Read by **Neville Jason**

CLASSIC
FICTION

MODERN
CLASSICS



NA314112D

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST • VI

1	Professor E...gives his diagnosis	9:27
2	When...my grandmother had been put to bed...	11:08
3	There came a time...	10:22
4	The arrival of Dr Dieulafoy	5:24
5	I had been born again, life lay intact before me	4:42
6	Albertine arrives	7:49
7	Françoise interrupts	13:01
8	A late arrival at the home of Mme de Villeparisis	10:36
9	Mme de Stermaria – anxious anticipation	5:26
10	The welcome voice of Robert de Saint-Loup	6:29
11	The influence of Robert	7:31
12	The home of the Guermantes	9:46
13	Further introductions	6:52
14	The Curvoisiers – the rival faction of the family	13:39
15	Sitting down to the table	6:54

16	Green asparagus grown in the open air...	13:33
17	The General de Monserfeuil	8:29
18	I find King Edward charming,	7:19
19	Already I had made several attempts to slip away	6:48
20	I arrive at the home of the Baron de Charlus	6:34
21	I looked at M. de Charlus...	11:21
22	My anger had not calmed M. de Charlus	13:23
23	At the home of the Duke de Guermantes	5:30
24	M. Swann arrives	12:01
25	M. Swann makes a revelation	6:56

Total time: 3:40:57

Marcel Proust

The Guermantes Way

Part II

Part II of *The Guermantes Way* continues the story of Marcel's entry into Parisian aristocratic society.

Marcel's family is now living in an apartment which forms part of the Hotel de Guermantes, Paris residence of the Duke and Duchess de Guermantes. Marcel, without having been introduced to the Duchess, has fallen in love with her, and endeavours to encounter her, as if by accident, on his morning walks. However, it is evident that the Duchess is irritated rather than pleased by his attentions.

Marcel's grandmother, who represents the most important influence in his life next to that of his mother, is in failing health. Having been advised by an important consultant that, despite her inclinations to the contrary, she is well enough to take some fresh air, she sets out for a walk in the Champs Elysées with Marcel, during the course of which she is taken ill.

The Guermantes Way Part II takes up the story as Marcel, who has guessed that his grandmother has suffered a stroke, seeks

assistance from an eminent doctor, an acquaintance of his parents, whom he meets by chance in the street.

Proust's somewhat cynical attitude to doctors is exemplified by his description of the character of Professor E., as it is in his treatment of other members of the medical profession elsewhere in the novel. Vain, fussy and opinionated, the Professor may be professionally competent but lacks real human sympathy and understanding. His power to cure, too, is extremely limited but, as Proust remarks of our eternal optimism, 'we continue to light candles and to consult doctors.'

Proust's father was an eminent public health official, and the members of his father's circle, together with the numerous doctors Proust himself was obliged to consult as a result of his poor health, will have provided the author with ample opportunity to study the profession at first hand. His detailed account of sick-room procedure and of the physical decline of Marcel's grandmother indicates the

familiarity with medical matters of the chronic invalid.

After the death of his beloved grandmother, youth and nature combine to assist Marcel in his recovery, and a change of season brings a change of mood. Physical desire prompts thoughts of encounters with the female sex, and he plans a romantic dinner with Mme de Stermaria, an attractive young divorcee whose acquaintance he made at Balbec, and whose sexual availability has been hinted at by Robert de Saint-Loup. But, surprisingly, it is with Albertine that the sexual encounter takes place. Although Marcel is no longer in love with her, as he was at Balbec, Albertine appears to have matured physically and in other ways, which leads Marcel to believe, as it turns out correctly, that she would not, as before, repel his advances.

Disappointed by Mme de Stermaria's refusal of his invitation, Marcel is rescued from despair by the appearance of Robert de Saint-Loup, just returned from Morocco on leave, who takes him off to dine. The café to which they go numbers among its clients a group of Jewish intellectuals, of whom Marcel's old friend Bloch is a member, and a sprinkling of young aristocrats, of whose arrogance and anti-

Semitism Marcel is made aware but against which his friendship with Saint-Loup provides protection.

During his grandmother's illness, Marcel's mother has taken him to task for making a fool of himself chasing after the Duchesse de Guermantes, and Marcel's infatuation with the unattainable older woman fades. But once the spell is broken and Marcel's assumed indifference becomes genuine, the Duchess begins to take an interest in him and invites him to dine with her and her husband.

This gives Marcel the opportunity of which he has always dreamed, of witnessing the charmed life of the members of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, that almost hermetically sealed circle of France's noblest aristocracy. But this experience proves very different from what he had anticipated, and Marcel is forced to observe the chasm between the resounding titles which symbolise France's historic greatness, and the fallible personalities who inhabit them.

Meanwhile, Marcel has received an invitation to call upon the Baron de Charlus, the Duc de Guermantes' brother, to whom he was introduced at Balbec by his grandmother's friend, the Marquise de Villeparisis. The Baron's attitude, as he veers

from the warmest amiability to the most vicious scorn, puzzles Marcel. The innocent young man is unaware of the Baron's homosexuality, and is unable to account for his hysterical behaviour towards him.

De Charlus was based by Proust on two real-life models, but nonetheless remains a wonderfully imaginative creation. Proust's description of the tension caused in the personality of Charlus by the repression of his publicly unacknowledged homosexuality, his need to emphasise his masculinity by acts of physical virility, his attempt to counteract feelings of shame by asserting his social and intellectual superiority over others, his vicious attacks on the weakness he observes in others but so strenuously denies in himself, shows the author to be not only a great writer, but a remarkable psychologist.

The final section of Part II of *The Guermantes Way* reintroduces the figure of Swann, now much altered by a life-threatening disease. Swann pays a visit to the Duchess de Guermantes, with whom he shares a wit and intelligence that has made them allies in the past. In the face of Swann's revelation regarding the state of his health, the Duchess is torn between her social obligation to be on time for a dinner

party and the necessity of considering Swann's news with appropriate seriousness. She opts for the former, despite eventually being obliged to delay her exit for a much more mundane reason. In making her decision she is following not only her husband's wishes, but the dictates of a social order which override her personal inclination, a fact recognised by Swann, who has led his life according to the same rules. The Duke and Duchess's outer forms of courtesy and consideration hide a deep selfishness, the result of their self-indulgent manner of living and an ingrained conviction that they are different from, and superior to, other people – especially those who do not inhabit their world.

We are left with the feeling that Proust may not approve of the people who inhabit the upper reaches of society, but that, like Swann, he understands them. Marcel may have discovered that they are not the magic figures he imagined them to be, but he sees them nonetheless as part of an historical continuum, and finds the same fascination in their world as in 'a herbarium, filled with plants of another day'.

The author is well aware that snobbery, arrogance, pride, selfishness and cruelty are not unique to the aristocracy. We may not

share the wealth and privilege of the gently-born, but as human beings we share their failings, and Proust appears to invite those among us without sin to cast the first stone.

The previous books

Swann's Way, set in the village of Combray, introduces the reader to Marcel's family, their servants including the redoubtable Françoise, and their neighbour Charles Swann, the scholarly man of fashion. There are two country walks favoured by Marcel's family; *Swann's Way*, which lies in the direction of Swann's property, and the *Guermantes Way*, which skirts the estate of the noble Guermantes family.

Swann in Love tells the story of Swann's passion for the former courtesan Odette de Crécy, and Marcel's childish love for their daughter Gilberte.

Within a Budding Grove Part I sees the end of Marcel's infatuation with Gilberte. Following an illness he is sent to recuperate at the seaside resort of Balbec together with his grandmother, who renews her acquaintance with an old school friend, the Marquise de Villeparisis.

In *Within a Budding Grove Part II* Marcel meets a band of charming, young girls, to one of whom, Albertine, he is particularly attracted. He encounters the painter Elstir,

whom the reader has met earlier as a member of Mme Verdurin's bohemian circle. He is also introduced to the sinister Baron de Charlus, and to Mme de Villeparisis's nephew, the Marquis Robert de Saint-Loup.

The Guermantes Way Part I finds Marcel's family installed in an apartment which forms part of the Paris mansion of the Guermantes family. Marcel becomes obsessed with the Duchesse de Guermantes, who does not reciprocate his interest. At a reception given by the Marquise de Villeparisis, Marcel discovers that his father's colleague, the former diplomat M. de Norpois, has been the lover of the Marquise for many years.

The Guermantes Way Part II is the sixth part of Naxos AudioBooks' abridged version of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

The Author

Marcel Proust was born on July 10, 1871. His father, a distinguished professor of medicine, was from a Catholic family, while his mother was Jewish. Although intent on becoming a writer from an early age, Proust was riddled with self-doubt.

During his twenties he co-founded a short-lived review, *Le Banquet*, contributed to *La Revue Blanche* and had his first book

published, a collection of essays entitled *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*.

He became an enthusiastic admirer of Ruskin and translated his *Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies* into French. A novel, *Jean Santeuil*, was abandoned and eventually published long after his death, in 1954.

For much of his youth he led the life of a man about town, frequenting fashionable Paris drawing rooms and literary salons, which were to form the background of a number of his stories and sketches.

The death of his adored mother in 1905 resulted in a nervous collapse and aggravated his chronic asthma and insomnia. But despite his grief and the sense of loss from which he never recovered, his mother's death freed him with regard to his homosexual emotional life, and allowed him to address homosexuality in his writing, albeit in a manner which treated such experiences as happening to others rather than to himself.

In 1907 he moved into an apartment in the Boulevard Haussmann where, in the bedroom which he had had lined with cork to keep out noise, he embarked upon his great work *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*).

This long cycle of autobiographical novels was published in eight sections: *Du Côté de Chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*) in 1913; *A L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs* (*Within a Budding Grove*) in 1918; *Le Côté de Guermantes I* (*The Guermantes Way I*) in 1920; *Le Côté de Guermantes II* and *Sodom et Gomorre I* (*Cities of the Plain I*) in 1921; *Sodom et Gomorre II* in 1922; *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*) in 1923; *Albertine Disparue* (*The Sweet Cheat Gone*) in 1925; *Le Temps Retrouvé* (*Time Regained*) in 1927.

Proust was obliged to publish *Swann's Way* at his own expense, and even after it had appeared, had trouble finding a publisher for the next volume, *A L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*. However, when it appeared in 1918 it received considerable acclaim, and was awarded the Prix Goncourt the following year.

By the time Proust died, on November 18, 1922, the first four parts of the cycle had been published, leaving the others to appear posthumously. The English translation from which this abridged version has been prepared was made by C.K. Scott Moncrieff.

Notes by Neville Jason

**The music on this recording is taken from the
MARCO POLO catalogue**

WIDOR PIANO TRIO/PIANO QUINTET 8.223193
Ilona Prunyi, Piano/New Budapest Quartet

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Cover picture: La mondaine (The Woman of Fashion) by Tissot (1836-1902).
The Bridgeman Art Library.

Marcel Proust

The Guermantes Way

Part II

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The Guermantes Way Part II continues the story of Marcel's entry into the highest circles of French aristocracy. Having renewed his acquaintance with the enchanting Albertine who now submits to his amorous advances, Marcel finds himself pursued by the predatory Baron de Charlus.



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 *Dr Who*, as well as playing classical roles such as 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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Abridged by Neville Jason. Produced by Nicolas Soames
Post-production: Andy Karamallakis, Paul Libson Audio
Services
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