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Marcel Proust
Sodom and Gomorrah
(Cities of the Plain) Part I

Read by **Neville Jason**



NA316112D

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST • VII

1	Part I: Standing on the staircase	7:30
2	Asking for a light	5:26
3	A race of beings...	10:59
4	From this day onwards,...	4:04
5	Part II: The party at the Princesse de Guermantes	5:55
6	Looking for an introduction to the Prince	8:12
7	M. de Charlus, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes	7:41
8	Discussions about discussions – the Dreyfus affair	7:54
9	The sons of Madame de Surgis	5:46
10	A hand on my shoulder – Robert de Saint-Loup	9:47
11	A conversation with M. Swann	9:54
12	M. Swann continues the story	5:56
13	The Princesse de Guermantes' feeling for Palamède	2:38
14	The Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes leave	7:16
15	Back home – and waiting for Albertine	11:15
16	When Albertine had gone...	6:40

17	The Heart's Intermissions – back in Balbec	6:39
18	On the first night – 'complete physical collapse'	8:46
19	An inward Lethe meandering	7:36
20	The indolent charm of a seaside existence	6:01
21	The arrival of my mother	3:58
22	Images of the past while Albertine waits	7:03
23	More grief and an interrupted train journey	6:50
24	Suspicious of a Gomorrhan nature in Albertine	6:18
25	Doubts and rejections	7:17
26	Affairs viewed and imagined from a distance	5:05
27	Mme de Cambremer's barouche	6:02
28	Monet, Chopin and the dowager Marquise	8:13
29	Heated confused emotions with Albertine	9:36
30	Further dilatoriness and reflections of Andr�e	10:19
31	Two sisters from a watermill	5:48
32	More Gomorrhan distractions	6:20

Total time: 3:50:59

Marcel Proust

Sodom and Gomorrah

(Cities of the Plain) Part I

Sodom and Gomorrah (Cities of the Plain) Part I opens with the Narrator, Marcel, awaiting the return of the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes in the Hotel de Guermantes, their mansion in Paris, in which Marcel's family occupies an apartment. The ducal premises also provides accommodation for Madame de Villeparisis, aunt of the Duke and Duchess, while on a lower level, both architecturally and socially, the tailor Jupien runs his business with the help of his niece.

The Duke's brother, the Baron de Charlus, arrives to visit Madame de Villeparisis, and finding her out or indisposed, is about to leave when he finds himself confronted with Jupien.

Their meeting provides the occasion for Marcel to witness a homosexual encounter which opens his eyes to the Baron's sexual proclivities, and enlightens him regarding de Charlus's hitherto inexplicable behaviour towards himself. It also affords the author the opportunity of drawing a skilful and witty parallel between a horticultural and a human conjunction, as Marcel's absorption

in the scene between Charlus and Jupien leads to his missing the possible fertilisation of the Duchess's orchid, which has been left out in the courtyard in the hope of attracting the attentions of a passing bee.

In this way Proust introduces us to the theme of homosexuality, male and female, announced in the title. It is a subject on which Proust speaks with an understanding and sympathy born of his own homosexual way of life, which he felt obliged to keep secret, and which he carefully disguises in this autobiographical novel, where the Narrator, who is undoubtedly Proust himself, falls in love only with women.

Proust scholars and researchers have identified female characters in the book as disguised versions of men with whom Proust had had love affairs, although it is also suggested that his relationships with certain women are unlikely to have been entirely platonic. However, I would suggest that these speculations are of interest principally in explaining the depth of understanding Proust shows in his exposition of the theme

of same-sex love, and his sympathy for the pain and frustration it causes those whose sexual nature is condemned by society and who are obliged to live lives of secrecy and duplicity.

There is particular poignancy in Proust's reference to 'sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie all her life long and even in the hour when they close her dying eyes', in view of his own need to hide his private life from his adored mother, and to his description of 'the poet who one day was feasted at every table, applauded in every theatre in London, and on the next was driven from every lodging, unable to find a pillow upon which to lay his head', clearly recognisable as Oscar Wilde, then living out the remains of his life as an exile in Paris, and a friend of the young Proust.

And perhaps it is as well for those who would condemn Proust for his lack of openness regarding his sexuality, to be reminded of the distance society has travelled since his lifetime, and of the legal punishment and social ostracism which then awaited those who were known to transgress the accepted norms of sexual behaviour.

If the activities of the Baron de Charlus serve as an introduction to the world of Sodom, it is the Narrator's love for Albertine

which takes us into the realm of Gommorah, or female homosexuality.

The subject of unrequited love is no novelty in literature, and yet in Proust's hands it is fashioned anew. It would be a remarkable psychologist who could analyse Proust more perceptively than he analyses himself.

He unerringly connects the painful sense of exclusion Marcel feels when he fears Albertine does not love him, with the childhood experience of his mother's refusal at Combray to give him the benediction of her goodnight kiss. Here is the classic Oedipal situation in which his wish to have his mother entirely to himself is thwarted by the existence of his father.

Added to the pain which is felt by every rejected lover is the knowledge that he has no chance of possessing Albertine if his suspicions about her 'Sapphism' are confirmed. He would in that case be constitutionally unable ever to satisfy her desires.

If it is true, as has been suggested, that the character of Albertine is a disguised version of Proust's real-life male lover, the author's own situation will be seen as equally impossible – that of a man in love with a man who preferred women. And it is Proust's personal experience of an anguished

yearning for love he can never obtain which invests his fictional study with such compelling authenticity.

But not only Oedipal frustration and gender preference stand between the Narrator/Proust and the unconditional love for which he craves; there is also that last and greatest obstacle of them all – death. On the occasion of his second visit to Balbec, memories of the first visit undertaken in the company of his grandmother suddenly overwhelm Marcel, and he is faced for the first time with the irreversible reality of the death of the person who, next to his mother, he loved most in the world.

Here again Proust displays the depth of his psychological insight as he charts Marcel's slow progress from despair to resignation in observing the workings of his unconscious mind through the medium of his dreams.

Once more the reader is privileged to witness the miracle performed by the author of turning the events of his transient life into an enduring work of art.

Sodom and Gomorrah – (Cities of the Plain) is the seventh part of Naxos AudioBooks' abridged version of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

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 Crecy, 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 sees the death of Marcel's beloved grandmother following a stroke. Now that Marcel is no longer in love with the Duchesse de Guermantes, her attitude towards him changes, and she invites him to dine. Seeing nobility at close quarters, Marcel is made aware of the fallibility of his fantasies about them. He receives an invitation from the Baron de Charlus, and is outraged by the manner of his reception. Charles Swann announces that he is suffering from a terminal illness.

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 Gomorrhe I* (Cities of the Plain I) in 1921; *Sodom et Gomorrhe II* in 1922; *La Prisonnière* (The Captive) in 1923; *Albertine Disparue* (The Sweet Cheat Gone) in 1925; *Le Temps Retrouve* (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**

- PIERNÉ** PIANO TRIO OP. 45 8.223189
Norbert Szelecsényi, piano, Béla Bánfalvi, violin, Katalin Vass, cello
- D'INDY** PIANO QUINTET IN G MINOR 8.223691
Ilona Prunyi, piano, New Budapest Quartet
- WALDTEUFEL** VOLUME 6: BELLA, POLKA-MAZURKA 8.223684
Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (Kosice), Alfred Walter
- BRETÓN** PIANO TRIO IN E MAJOR 8.223745
György Oravec, piano, New Budapest Quartet
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Múza Rubackyté, piano
- DEBUSSY** ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2 PIANOS 8.223378
Daniel Blumenthal, Robert Groslot, pianos

Music programming by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture: The Circle of the Rue Royale, 1868, James Jacques Joseph Tissot.
Courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library, London.

Marcel Proust
Sodom and Gomorrah
(Cities of the Plain) Part I

Read by **Neville Jason**

Accidentally witnessing an encounter between the Baron de Charlus and the tailor Jupien opens Marcel's eyes to a world hidden from him until now. Meanwhile his love for Albertine is poisoned by the suspicion that she is attracted to her own sex. *Sodom and Gomorrah – Cities of the Plain* addresses the subject of homosexual love with insight and understanding.



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, TV and musicals. He is frequently heard on radio. As well as *Remembrance of Things Past*, he also reads Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *Far From The Madding Crowd*, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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