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

Read by **Neville Jason**



NA316712D

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST • VIII

| | | |
|----|---|-------|
| 1 | Waiting at the Balbec station with Albertine | 5:45 |
| 2 | In a carriage with a reader of <i>Revue des Deux Mondes</i> | 5:01 |
| 3 | Noticing M. de Charlus | 7:42 |
| 4 | On the Wednesday train to dine at la Raspelière | 8:14 |
| 5 | Cottard, the doctor, tells of the 'great scholars...' | 9:33 |
| 6 | An encounter with the Princess Sherbatoff | 5:45 |
| 7 | Arriving at la Raspelière | 5:36 |
| 8 | The entry of M. de Charlus and Morel | 8:59 |
| 9 | Mme de Cambremer starts to enjoy herself | 7:58 |
| 10 | Memories of a conversation that afternoon | 9:15 |
| 11 | Saniette, the antiquarian, receives the attention... | 5:07 |
| 12 | To put an end to Saniette's torture... | 4:15 |
| 13 | Rising from supper, M. de Charlus gives his titles | 5:27 |
| 14 | More expositions from M. de Charlus and some music | 8:36 |
| 15 | Last refreshments and conversation, and farewells | 11:07 |
| 16 | Musing on M. de Charlus's footmen and a letter | 10:12 |

| | | |
|----|--|-------|
| 17 | Driving with Albertine | 6:59 |
| 18 | Complications with M. de Charlus and Morel | 4:39 |
| 19 | Back with Albertine | 8:31 |
| 20 | Next morning... | 6:57 |
| 21 | M. de Charlus lived in a state of deception | 11:39 |
| 22 | M. de Charlus is disappointed and hurt | 5:27 |
| 23 | Returning with Morel | 7:53 |
| 24 | In the brothel at Maineville | 6:34 |
| 25 | Morel receives another surprise | 2:55 |
| 26 | More society complications | 6:08 |
| 27 | 'Odd habits' of Albertine? | 8:09 |
| 28 | The train leaves but anxieties continue | 4:09 |
| 29 | Waiting for an opportunity for a final rupture | 8:06 |
| 30 | Staying the night at Balbec | 7:26 |
| 31 | More torments | 6:40 |
| 32 | Alone in my room | 10:35 |

Total time: 3:51:46

Marcel Proust

Sodom and Gomorrah

(Cities of the Plain) Part II

Sodom and Gomorrah (Cities of the Plain) Part II continues the story of the Narrator Marcel's second visit to the coastal resort of Balbec where he makes further discoveries relating to the homosexual behaviour of his acquaintances.

The ageing Baron de Charlus, in love with the gifted but unscrupulous violinist Charles Morel, continues to search out casual sexual encounters elsewhere and dines openly at the hotel with a Duchess's footman. Morel, apparently bisexual, either gives or withholds his favours from male admirers, according to how it will benefit him. Bloch's uncle, M. Nissim Bernard, infatuated with a young waiter, mistakes the young man's identical twin, who does not share his brother's sexual tastes, for the object of his passion, with disastrous results. The Prince de Guermantes, whom we have previously met at a brilliant ball given by him and his wife in their mansion, the magnificent Hotel de Guermantes, engages the services of Morel in the somewhat less salubrious surroundings of a seaside brothel, once again with unforeseen and hilarious consequences.

These episodes are at once both comic and tragic. In other hands they might be the stuff of a Feydeau-style farce. But Proust is no *farceur*. Whilst he has a keen appreciation of the humour implicit in these situations, he is too sensitive and complex an artist not to be aware of their dark side. He knows too well the pain of being forced to hide his sexual nature, even from those dearest to him, and the loneliness of feeling different from other men. Humour is there, but tempered with compassion for the powerlessness of men swept away by a passion which, in a society which permits them no outlet, becomes so urgent it breaches the barriers of their lives and precipitates them into ludicrous and embarrassing situations.

Female homosexuality, for the Narrator, has no such comic side. In the face of his love for Albertine it exists as a terrible threat against which he is powerless. As long as he feels Albertine is faithful to him he is able to consider parting with her, but once she is revealed as a lover of women, he is tormented with the passionate need to make her his own.

For Marcel the Narrator, as in the case of Marcel his creator, is one of those doomed to yearn after phantoms. The incident in his childhood, recounted in *Swann's Way*, where he refuses to go to sleep until his mother comes to kiss him goodnight, and then is granted more than his wish when his father allows her to spend the night in his room, creates a terrible tension between the desire to have his mother to himself, and the guilt and fear caused by having his wish to exclude his father granted. This powerful Oedipal struggle has set up a subconscious need to repeat the painful experience endlessly in a vain effort to try to come to terms with it.

In real life Proust's passionate attachment to his mother appears to have led to psychosomatic illness, homosexual desire, and the inability to form lasting and satisfactory relationships. When his fictional alter ego falls in love with Albertine he unconsciously chooses a woman with homosexual desires, and therefore incapable of giving herself completely to him. As he imagines her caressing other women, or hears her over the telephone enjoying herself with friends in a cafe, he suffers the same painful sense of exclusion – of the woman he loves enjoying herself with others rather than with him – that he felt as a child lying in bed on a summer's night with the window open, listening to the

sounds of chatting and laughter wafting up to him, while his mother entertained guests in the garden below.

Whilst homosexuality is the principal theme of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, it is by no means the only one, and Proust's fascination with human behaviour finds much to interest him in other sections of society, particularly in the bohemian circle of M. and Mme Verdurin, which has moved down to the seaside for the summer. Proust paints a vividly observant picture of the little clique of 'the faithful', held together by its overbearing 'Mistress' who lives in terror of being abandoned by its members. He shows us the cruelty of M. Verdurin as he tortures the awkward and diffident Saniette, the social pretensions of Mme. Verdurin for whom 'bores' become amusing once they begin to attend her 'Wednesdays', the arrogance of the local aristocracy who consider they do her a favour in accepting her invitations, the affectation of the 'faithful' who pride themselves on being artistically 'advanced', and their pretence that they have rejected other salons, which in reality they would have no chance of entering, in favour of this one.

All this is presented by the Narrator with an honesty and compassion which not only observes the faults and pretensions of others, but is not afraid to acknowledge them in himself. Proust holds us up a mirror

in which we cannot help but see our own image. In his flawed characters we recognise ourselves, and are obliged to accept that, in our own way, we all possess our share of human failings.

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

Notes by Neville Jason

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 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.

In *Sodom and Gomorrah (Cities of the Plain) Part I* Marcel observes a homosexual encounter between the Baron de Charlus and the tailor Jupien, which leads to the author's meditations on the theme of homosexuality. Marcel continues to rise in the *haute monde* as he receives an invitation to a ball given by the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes. He pays a second visit to Balbec, where feelings of grief for the death of his grandmother vie with those of his desire for Albertine.

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 Proust 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 early stories and sketches, and subsequently of *Remembrance of Things Past*...

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 originally 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 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
NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

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Music programmed by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture: Beach Promenade, Joaquin y Bastida Sorolla (1863-1923).
Courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library, London.

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

Read by **Neville Jason**

In *Sodom and Gomorrah (Cities of the Plain) Part II* Marcel continues his voyage of discovery through the homosexual world, where the affairs of the ageing Baron de Charlus lead to unexpected and hilarious adventures. But the discovery of a secret in the past of his mistress, Albertine, fills Marcel with fear and forces him to change his plans.



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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Total time
3:51:46

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