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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Barbara Kathryn Cottle entitled "The Novels and Plays of Françoise Sagan." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in French.

John A. Macedonia
Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Walter E. Stiefel

John McBride

Paul J. Cogan

Accepted for the Council:

Hilton A. Smith
Dean of the Graduate School

THE NOVELS AND PLAYS OF FRANÇOISE SAGAN

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Council of

The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Barbara Kathryn Cottle

December 1962

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most controversial young Frenchwomen of today, Françoise Sagan became famous by writing, at the unprecedented age of 18, a novel which was awarded the Prix des Critiques in 1954, Bonjour tristesse. Since that time, she has written four other novels and two plays. Her first work was translated into fourteen languages,[1] and her other works have enjoyed a similar success. Controversial because of her personality as well as because of her novels, Sagan remains a dominating figure of contemporary French literature.

The purpose of this thesis is to present a critical study of the novels and plays of Françoise Sagan. The novels will be considered first, and the two plays last. They will be examined by means of summaries and critical analyses. The conclusion will present the main philosophical ideas to be found in Sagan's works and will attempt to explain the importance of her role in contemporary literature.

Although she is still very young and has only recently made her debut in the literary world, some of her novels have already been made into films, which has assured her an even larger public.

She has been described as "un puissant témoin de son temps,"[2] and a whole myth has sprung up about her. She has been the subject of many articles, in which "il s'agit généralement de commentaires d'une très haute tenue et signés des plus grands noms de la critique."[3] Her literary gifts have been proclaimed almost unanimously:

> "Dons exceptionnels," "dons déjà remarquables," "dons d'écrivain évidents," "du talent. . .un métier déjà très assuré," "oeuvre de talent," "beaucoup de talent, et une personnalité certaine," "surprenante dextérité."[4]

Jacques Chardonne says that she belongs to "la famille des grands écrivains,"[5] and François Mauriac wrote that "le mérite littéraire éclate dès la première page et n'est pas discutable."[6]

Born Françoise Quoirez, she took the name Sagan from the works of her favorite author, Marcel Proust.[7] It is under this name that she has become famous. The best means of understanding Sagan's genius is through her works, and any rapports between her background and her novels will be established in the analyses which follow.

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[1] Malcolm Cowley (ed.), Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), p. 301.

[2] Pierre de Boisdeffre, Le secret de Françoise Sagan, cited in Gerard Mourgue, Françoise Sagan: Témoins du XX^e Siècle (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1958), p. 7.

[3] Michel Guggenheim, "Françoise Sagan devant la Critique," French Review, XXXII, (October, 1958), p. 3.

[4] Ibid., p. 4.

[5] Ibid., p. 4.

[6] Ibid., p. 4.

[7] Cowley, op. cit., p. 301.

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CHAPTER I

BONJOUR TRISTESSE

(1954)

This story, told in the first person, opens as the heroine examines a new sentiment which pervades her, one whose complete egoism causes her some shame, not unmixed with fear, which sets her apart from "the others." In an opening paragraph which is almost poetic in its lyricism, Françoise Sagan sets the tone of the story. She describes the mixed feelings of awe and fear of a young girl experiencing, for the first time, a feeling so personal, so completely the result of her own actions, that it remains impossible to communicate. It forms a private barrier between her and "the others" by virtue of this very intimacy; it leaves her alone with a thought which both frightens and fascinates her, and of which she can talk to no one:

> Sur ce sentiment inconnu dont l'ennui, la douceur [illegible], m'obsèdent, j'hésite à apposer le nom, le beau nom grave de tristesse. C'est un sentiment si complet, si égoïste que j'en ai presque honte alors que la tristesse m'a toujours paru honorable. Je ne la connaissais pas, elle, mais l'ennui, le regret, plus rarement le remords. Aujourd'hui, quelque chose se replie sur moi comme une soie, énervante et douce, et me sépare des autres. (page 13)

As the action begins, the reader is transported to the preceding summer, when the heroine was 17 and completely happy, before the intervention of this strange "tristesse." Cécile, just out of school, has gone to live with her father, Raymond, a handsome widower of 40, and his mistress of the moment, Elsa, a beautiful redhead, charming but painfully lacking in intelligence. Cécile finds nothing

strange in her father's having a mistress, though she is shocked upon learning that his fancy changes every six months! This, she soon accepts, due to her father's charm and genuine affection for her as well as to her lack of initiative and desire for an easy life. Soon after realizing the situation of which she has become a part, she says:

> . . .Mais bientôt sa séduction, cette vie nouvelle et facile, mes dispositions, m'y amenèrent. (page 14)

Raymond has rented a villa on the Mediterranean and proposes that the three of them spend the summer there, subject to Cécile's willing approval of Elsa as a companion, an approval which is readily given. The white and beautiful villa faces the sea where they spend every day. Cécile finds herself almost drugged by the combination of water, blistering sun, and intense heat, a combination which tends to dull her senses and leads her into an indifferent idleness from which she will find it increasingly difficult to free herself. Watching the sand trickle slowly through her fingers, she says:

> . . .je me disais qu'il s'enfuyait comme le temps, que c'était une idée facile et qu'il était agréable d'avoir des idées faciles. C'était l'été. (pages 15 - 16)

It is at this point that Cécile meets Cyril, a young college student. She is immediately attracted to him, not only because of his physical attributes, but also because of something very responsible and protective that she sees in his face, a strength of character of which she is completely devoid. The prospects of sailing with Cyril and of spending long hours in the amusing company of her father and Elsa render her happiness almost too complete.

Content, and absorbed in her own happiness, Cécile is startled by her father's sudden announcement that a visitor is coming. She is immediately apprehensive, fearing lest the slightest intrusion

menace her pleasure. Her concern, however, turns to bewilderment when she learns that the visitor is Anne Larsen, the last person she would have expected. Anne, a beautiful divorcee of 42, is an intelligent, somewhat aloof, and indifferent woman. She was a friend of Cécile's mother, one whose only connection with the rest of the family was that, two years earlier, she had assumed the responsibility of teaching Cécile, who had just come out of the convent, about clothes and life. As a result, Cécile, though awed by Anne, admired her immensely and thought her wonderful. However, her admiration was tempered by fear, for Anne was never one of their kind of persons. Cécile and her father lead a gay, superficial life; they are attracted only by beauty, are somewhat frightened by profundity, and all they ask of their friends is that they be handsome. As Cécile puts it: "Que cherchions-nous, sinon plaire?" Their kind of people, therefore, are usually shallow, stupid, loud, and often vulgar in their efforts to please by being amusing. Anne is the antithesis of such a life: as a thinker, she stimulates others to thought and action; she gives a meaning to things; her very presence is a disturbing force that precludes boredom and laziness. For Cécile, who had wished the summer to pass in a blur of sunshine, salt water, and cool nights, the arrival of Anne can only signal the end of her idle pleasures. Indeed, she speaks of the days remaining before Anne's arrival as the last real days of vacation. Cécile does not hesitate to point out to her father the embarrassing situation which will probably result from a meeting between Anne and Elsa. But, since it is unavoidable, they end by laughing about Raymond's romantic entanglements, and one clearly sees his unfatherly attitude toward his daughter:

—Mon vieux complice, dit-il. Que ferais-je sans toi?

(page 21)

On the day of Anne's arrival, Cécile refuses to accompany her father and Elsa to the station to meet her; she prefers to remain on the beach alone. She is soon joined by Cyril who, though shocked by her "famille à trois", has become very fond of Cécile. There, in the sun, they exchange their first gentle yet passionate kisses. They are suddenly interrupted by the sound of a horn: it is Anne. Without realizing it, and with no intention to do so, (Anne assumes a role which will be imposed on her throughout the novel: that of intruder.) She is no longer merely a disturbing guest; she is an invader of privacy, an intruder who forces others to introspection and to feelings of guilt about the uselessness of their lives. Her first words, which must have sent a wave of foreboding through Cécile, show her immediate perception of their idle vacation life and seem to imply that she will surely find a remedy, a way to invigorate these sleepy people:

—C'est la maison de la Belle-au-Bois-dormant!
(page 26)

It seems that there has been a misunderstanding. Anne decided to drive down instead of taking the train, so Raymond and Elsa were waiting in vain at the station while she made her entrance at the villa. When Cécile explains this to her, she is shocked to see the hurt look and the disappointment which cross Anne's face, looks caused, not by the thought that she has inconvenienced them, but by the realization that Elsa is there, obviously as Raymond's mistress. Cécile cannot understand this reaction on Anne's part. She had always thought that Anne was much too intelligent to be attracted by Raymond. She leaves Anne in her room and goes downstairs to await the return of her father and Elsa.

Raymond returns, naturally worried about Anne's failure to appear at the station. Just as Cécile begins to explain the confusion to him, Anne herself appears, looking fresh and beautiful. She is in complete control of herself and of the situation, and Raymond is enchanted by the apparent ease with which he manages to get through the necessary introductions. Only Cécile is aware of the tension, while Raymond goes about amiably making conversation and uncorking bottles. Through her brief description of her father's actions, Cécile shows that even she has remarked his utter superficiality and stubborn refusal to look beyond the surface of things. He is oblivious to everything except himself and the impression he is making.

> Mon père s'ébrouait. A ses yeux, tout allait bien. Il faisait des phrases, débouchait des bouteilles. (page 29)

As a whole, the evening passes pleasantly, and Anne seems not to notice that Elsa and Raymond retire together.

Here, Sagan drops the thread of her story, for a moment, to indulge in the evocation of past experiences and to emphasize the importance of the sea and its rhythm as an influence in her present life. This rhythm is reflected in her restless search for an intangible pleasure, a search which progresses hesitantly, then suddenly, as though spent by its own futile efforts, retreats and finds itself at the original point of departure, only to start all over again in a never-ending rhythm of advance and retreat, always falling just short of the goal. In a rare spirit of self-analysis, she admits her great love of pleasure, the only consistent part of her personality, and her generally cynical attitude towards love, a cynicism inspired by her father's complete frankness about his love affairs and their brief duration. As a result, her ideal becomes rather distorted:

> . . .Je me répétais volontiers des formules lapidaires, celle d'Oscar Wilde, entre autres: "Le péché est la seule note de couleur vive qui subsiste dans le monde moderne."

> . . .Je croyais que ma vie pourrait se calquer sur cette phrase, s' en inspirer. . .Idéalement, j' envisageais une vie de bassesses et de turpitudes. (page 34)

The next morning, she finds Anne already up and perfectly made-up, a refreshing contrast to the tired Elsa, who by this time has become painfully sunburned and is beginning to peel. Already Cécile is feeling Anne's superiority, her power. Protected by a mask of indifference, Anne presents a picture of superior intelligence bent on reform, and it is against this superiority that Cécile struggles, knowing all the time that her defeat is inevitable. She had recognized this advantage earlier in speaking of Anne's influence:

> . . .C' était à la fois excitant et fatigant, humiliant en fin de compte car je sentais qu' elle avait raison. (page 23)

Anne's first attempt at the domination which Cécile dreads occurs when she learns that Cécile has failed her exams. Anne is completely horrified; she simply must take them again in October and pass. Raymond, typically, fails to understand the cause for so much concern, the need for any sort of diploma:

> —Ma fille trouvera toujours des hommes pour la faire vivre, dit mon père noblement. (page 40)

Anne, however, closes the argument by declaring that Cécile must study during the vacation. This announcement throws Cécile into a state of dispair. Despite all entreaties, Anne remains firm, and Cécile is left with a feeling of doom, heightened by the recognition of the attraction her father is beginning to feel for Anne.

It is soon evident that Anne is quite in love with Raymond. However, she manages to maintain her air of indifference and to play her role with subtlety and finesse. Thus she puts into even

greater relief the contrast between Elsa and herself, and makes herself more desirable in Raymond's eyes. Her ideas of love are much deeper, much less transient, than those of Cécile and her father. By quickly dismissing Cécile's conception of love, Anne forces her into a painful recognition:

> . . . Je pensai qu'elle avait raison, que je vivais comme un animal, au gré des autres, que j'étais pauvre et faible. Je me méprisais et cela m'était affreusement pénible parce que je n'y étais pas habituée, ne me jugeant pour ainsi dire pas, ni en bien ni en mal. (page 47)

During the following days, Cécile spends much of her time with Cyril, trying desperately to deny any threat to her security, as if by ignoring its presence, she might open her eyes to find it gone. Suddenly the peace is shattered and her worst fears are realized.

Raymond decides that it would be pleasant to spend an evening in Cannes, dancing at the casino. The three women are enchanted by the idea, especially Elsa, who hopes that in a more familiar and flattering atmosphere she will be able to regain the ground she has been steadily losing to Anne. Indeed, she manages to mask the ravages of the sun and produces a very lovely picture - until Anne appears. Anne, in a grey dress which seems to reflect the sea at dawn, is more than beautiful; she is an extraordinary combination of beauty and mature charm that calls out - subtly - for instantaneous and passionate recognition.

There can be only one result. Shortly after their arrival at Cannes, Elsa reports to Cécile that she cannot find Raymond. Cécile, knowing that her suspicions were not unfounded, finds Anne and her father in his car, planning to go home. Her first reaction is one of complete disgust. She experiences a deep pity for Elsa, who is anxiously awaiting the results of the search, and who breaks

into uncontrollable sobs when Cécile tells her that Anne has become ill and that Raymond has taken her home. Her shock and disappointment in both her father and Anne break loose almost against her will:

> —Tu amènes une fille rousse à la mer sous un soleil qu'elle ne supporte pas et quand elle est toute pelée, tu l'abandonnes. C'est trop facile! Qu'est-ce que je vais lui dire à Elsa, moi? . . .Je vais . . .je vais lui dire que mon père a trouvé une autre dame avec qui coucher et qu'elle repasse, c'est ça? (pages 59-60)

She immediately regrets the sentence, attributes it to too much whiskey, and tries to be tactful with Elsa. Nevertheless, a strange feeling of emptiness persists.

The next morning, Cécile is immediately aware of a taut silence between her father and Anne. The cause is soon revealed: they want to get married! Stunned and unbelieving, Cécile agrees that it is a good idea and tries to understand. She sees the immediate loss of their independence, and the new, worthwhile life that Anne will impose upon them. The thought that a responsible, intelligent person will always be there to help her, however, is somewhat comforting. It is much easier to float with the current than to fight against it, so she finds herself already despising the type of life that she and her father have led and feels a little proud that this magnificent personality, of whom she has never thought as a woman, has chosen her father for her husband. She remains certain, this time, that marriage is a good thing for them.

For one week they are all very happy. Softened a bit by love, Anne seems more human to Cécile, and inspires in the younger girl a strong desire to experience this same subtle transformation. She and Cyril spend more and more time together, and their feelings continue to grow. One day Anne surprises them in the woods, kissing. She orders Cyril away, forbids Cécile to see him again, and outlines

a plan of study for the remaining days of the vacation in order that Cécile might pass her exams in October. Sure that her father will defend her against such a routine, Cécile hurries home, only to find that her father has also fallen under the domination of Anne, who extracts from Cécile the promise to study for one month. She tries to do this, but the frivolity she has so long adored refuses to allow her to concentrate, and she continues to long for Cyril. Now that she is aware of her superficiality, she attributes its recognition to Anne, who has caused her to despise herself for her petty thoughts and desires and for her complete lack of initiative and character. She suddenly realizes that she is too unprepared for the new life that will certainly follow the marriage of Raymond and Anne. The first part of the book ends on an ominous note as she determines to rid herself of the one disturbing element in her idle and peaceful life, Anne:

> . . .oui, c'est bien là ce que je reprochais à Anne; elle m'empêchait de m'aimer moi-même. Moi, si naturellement faite pour le bonheur, l'amabilité, l'insouciance, j'entrais par elle dans un monde de reproches, de mauvaise conscience, où, trop inexperte à l'introspection, je me perdais moi-même . . .j'allais être influencée, remaniée, orientée par Anne. Je n'en souffrirais même pas: elle agirait par l'intelligence, l'ironie, la douceur, je n'étais pas capable de lui résister; dans six mois, je n'en aurais même plus envie.
>
> Il fallait absolument se secouer, retrouver mon père et notre vie d'antan. . .La liberté . . .je ne peux dire "d'être moi-même" puisque je n'étais rien qu'une pâte modelable, mais celle de refuser les moules. (pages 77-78)

From the very beginning of the second part, Cécile shows the results of the introspection into which she has already been forced by Anne. Deprived of the unthinking, easy life which was so natural to her, she realizes, not without a certain horror, that

she is becoming more and more hostile toward Anne. She sees Anne as an object which will forever separate her from her father and both of them from their gay life. It is perhaps this permanence which she fears most of all. To allow Anne to share their life for a short while is one thing; to give themselves to her, permanently, is quite another. Therefore, she vacillates between a proud love for Anne and an envious, vicious hatred. She tries to tell herself that Anne loves Raymond and will make him very happy, but then she remembers Anne's dominant character and the changes she will make in their life, and she finds herself hating her father's fiancée with renewed ferocity. The result is that the atmosphere becomes almost unbearable; even Raymond finally feels the effects. Little can disturb his happiness, though , and he feels that by offering Cécile a respite from her study he has solved all their problems. By now, even this is too late, for Cécile has become very involved in analysing her sentiments toward Anne and in her determination to rid them of any threat to their security in the future. The future, as she idealizes it, is a continuation of their past life, with her romantic adventures as the chief interest and with her father playing the role of advisor, a future in which there is no place for Anne. At times, the intensity of her emotions terrifies her, and she silently implores Anne to ask her what is wrong, to question her, so that she may tell her everything and be won over and delivered from her private torment forever. Anne does not do this, though she senses that something is wrong. It takes only a touch of her hand to quiet the nervous tremblings which are becoming more and more common to Cécile. And yet, this very hand has come to symbolize the future for Cécile, a future with Anne, calm, steady, meaningful, responsible. The hand of comradeship that her father

offers her, on the contrary, symbolizes the past: happy memories, fleeting love affairs, a hand powerless to help her now. The future - her future - is in her own hands for a few brief days, and she must prevent, at any cost, the possibility of Anne's wrecking their lives.

One day, Elsa returns for her luggage. Cécile is surprised that she has finally tanned evenly and is more beautiful than ever. She quickly tells Elsa of the coming marriage between her father and Anne, and in the face of Elsa's apparent astonishment, she feels a slight shame for her father. It is as though he were too old for anything but marriage. To hide this, she proclaims that the marriage must not happen and that only Elsa can prevent it, because Raymond really loves only her. She skillfully appeals to Elsa's vanity, probably convincing herself at the same time, and pleads with her to help them for their sake and for the love which Elsa and Raymond share. Then she adds, with a rare touch of humor:

> J'achevai in petto: ". . . et pour les petits Chinois."
> (page 96)

Elsa is easily convinced, and Cécile sends her to stay with Cyril and his mother, after advising her that she will discuss her plans with them the next day.

Cécile feels intense pride in her success and begins immediately to formulate plans, plans which collapse, as usual, the minute she sees Anne. She can never bring herself to completely hate Anne; it is only when she is alone that her emotions become so fierce, because at other times she feels only shame for an unfounded hatred. Upon seeing Anne and her father so obviously happy together, she decides to ask Elsa to leave and to forget Raymond, and she is seized by a strong desire to tell Anne what she has been plotting. However, she resists this desire and shocks everyone by announcing her resolve to study every day and to graduate.

To celebrate her new resolutions and her pride in the ability to conceive a workable plot and to have so well analysed Elsa, she drinks so much at dinner, that when she goes to Cyril's house the next morning, she is still in a daze.

It is obvious that Elsa has exaggerated the tragedy of Cécile's situation, and Cyril immediately declares his love for her and his intention to marry her. The last thing Cécile has ever wanted is marriage, and she replies weakly that Anne probably would not approve. Cyril insists, and Elsa points out that Anne will probably want to choose Cécile's husband for her. This again raises the problem of Anne, and in face of the desperation of Cyril and Elsa, Cécile feels a certain amount of pride in outlining a plan which she has no intention of executing: Cyril is to pretend to be in love with Elsa, and they are to make sure that Raymond sees them as often as possible. His vanity will be wounded, especially since Cyril is so much younger than he, and he will feel compelled to take Elsa away from her new lover, if only to prove that he can. This vanity will cost him Anne, for she will never understand such actions. In refuting the objections that they raise, Cécile realizes that she is once again convincing herself. Even Cyril seems willing to acquiesce if it means that someday he will be able to marry Cécile. The plan begins to take shape, not because of any special dislike that Cécile might have felt toward Anne, but because she has a hangover, the sun is hot, and too much effort is required to argue. Indeed, this capacity of the sun to produce a dulling of the senses, an emotional inertia, an influence often present in the book, reminds one of L'Étranger by Camus.

She still regards the whole thing as a game, believing that since she made it up she can stop it at will. She has already decided

that if her father seems caught in the trap, she will call it off; she has even decided that it might be nice to be married to Cyril and have lunch every Sunday with Anne and Raymond. Her complete lack of consistency is becoming more and more obvious; she does not know what she really wants.

Suddenly Cyril and Elsa appear together in Cyril's boat, and the trio on the beach cannot help seeing them. Raymond seems only surprised, but Anne turns quickly to comfort Cécile and to assume all the responsibility. She thus makes the already unhappy Cécile feel even worse; for a moment she makes her want to entrust herself completely to Anne. As a result of this scene, both Raymond and Anne are extremely kind to Cécile and try to make amends. Though she is aware that the whole situation is nothing more than a little drama of which she is author, director, and prompter, Cécile is hurt by the sight of Elsa and Cyril together, and she realizes that if the situation were real, she could ask for nothing more than the extreme kindness of Anne.

Playing on her father's vanity, Cécile tells him one day, after encountering Elsa, that it is really what he should have expected, that after all, Cyril is quite young. Raymond protests that this never would have happened had he not fallen in love with Anne, but Cécile has made her point. Still, she hesitates between pride in her success and repentance. She avoids Cyril, lest she succumb to the temptation to improve her plan. One day Anne surprises her in her room when she is supposed to be studying. Anne is angry to find her idle. Since Cécile had referred so often to an essay she was supposedly writing on Pascal, Anne accuses her of lying. Because she had made up the story about the essay to please Anne, she is hurt by this accusation. Angry, she flashes to Cyril's house to continue her plot. Slipping up to his room, she finds him taking

a nap. She begins to leave, after realizing what anyone who happened to enter might think, when Cyril calls to her. Then, almost indifferently, in a confusion mixed with inertia and desire, she becomes his mistress, thinking: "cela devait arriver, cela devait arriver." Still unsure of her love for him, she returns home, trying to hide her trembling, the result of shame and pleasure, from Anne.

Though she has said nothing, Anne cannot have failed to notice the change in Cécile, and, as she feels a definite responsibility toward the young girl, she locks her in her room during the hours which are supposed to be devoted to study. Horrified and furious, Cécile cannot believe that this is really happening to her. She later apologizes to Anne, but she has resolved to carry out her plans entirely. She does this, immediately, by arranging to run into Elsa and Cyril while she is walking in the woods with her father. Raymond is furious at the sight, but Cécile seems not to mind and points out to him that he probably could not get Elsa back, now, even if he tried.

In her new role as Cyril's mistress, Cécile finds that she is losing interest in the triangle composed of her father, Anne, and Elsa. She wishes only that things continue smoothly until their return to Paris, where she is determined that she will see Cyril, just as she manages to see him now, despite Anne.

She does continue, though, to tell Cyril and Elsa where they may run into Raymond and Anne. Thus, they all meet one night in Saint Raphaël. Elsa is particularly lovely, and the remarks of a companion cause Raymond to feel acutely jealous, though he still vows that he loves only Anne. Again, Cécile feels especially content with her father and Anne; she begins to see everything through Anne's eyes. She shares her opinions and hopes that her

horrid little plot will fail. The next morning, a discussion reveals to her the wide gap between her intelligence and sensibility and those of Anne; it causes her to assume an indifferent attitude, not devoid of anger, prompted, perhaps, by a feeling of inferiority:

> —À quoi attachez-vous de l'importance? À votre tranquillité, à votre indépendance?
>
> —À rien, dis-je. Je ne pense guère, vous savez.
>
> (page 158)

In a brief essay about her father, Cécile describes him as frivolous, inconstant, and materialistic. There is no doubt of his love for Anne, but he probably does not realize her deep love for him nor the drastic changes she will eventually make in his life. It is quite evident, though, that if Cécile's plan works, he will soon console himself with another woman. At the present time, he is suffering, for Elsa has become a symbol of his youth, and he feels that he must prove that he is still young. Cécile is in a position to help her father - without arousing Anne's suspicions - but she remains silent, for if they are all to live together, she must force Anne to try to understand their way of life, to cease to despise it, and to accept it. She no longer feels remorse for her plans; she hopes, instead, that Anne will accept everything and that they will be able to stay together.

Then she meets Elsa and learns that her father has asked his former mistress to have tea with him in the village. When Elsa asks Cécile if she should go, Cécile, frightened by the obvious success of her plans and knowing in advance what the result will be, can no longer bear the responsibility. She runs away and leaves the decision to Elsa. To her father and Anne, she leaves the task of dealing with the situation she has created.

The afternoon passes well, and Cécile wonders idly how Raymond and Elsa are getting along. Suddenly, she sees Anne running from the woods toward the house, and the realization of what must have happened strikes her. She pursues Anne and reaches her just as she is entering her car. For the first time, she sees Anne's tears and realizes how deeply she has hurt a living creature. The feeling of guilt is too much; she pleads with Anne to stay, but the answer is final and accurate:

> —Vous n'avez besoin de personne, murmura-t-elle, ni vous ni lui. (page 175)

Cécile begins to sob only when her father returns, brushing pine needles from his suit and asking for Anne.

Anne has scarcely left when both Cécile and Raymond realize that they must have her back. Their despair is uncontrollable, and, deciding that Anne had a duty toward them, they sit down to write to her, begging her to forgive them and to return. They become almost happy in writing; forgetting momentarily the serious event which has necessitated the letter. Just as they are finishing and already picturing the reconciliation scene, they receive a telephone call informing them that Ann has had an accident, that she is dead. The rest is a nightmare. They can never be sure if it was really an accident or suicide; this is the last proof of Anne's utter superiority. She has allowed them to think it was an accident, thus absolving themselves of blame. Nothing holds any reality for them; the sight of Elsa and Cyril nauseates them; the unfinished letters remain on the floor where they had fallen.

Alone in Paris after Anne's funeral, Raymond and Cécile finally manage to talk of Anne in a normal fashion, and then, slowly at first, their life begins again, picking up the threads where they

had been dropped, the same patterns, the same interests. Only now, there is this something that sets Cécile apart, something she cannot escape:

> Seulement quand je suis dans mon lit, à l'aube, avec le seul bruit des voitures dans Paris, ma mémoire parfois me trahit: l'été revient et tous ses souvenirs. Anne, Anne! Je répète ce nom très bas et très longtemps dans le noir. Quelque chose monte alors en moi que j'accueille par son nom, les yeux fermés: Bonjour Tristesse.
>
> (pages 187-188)

CHAPTER II

UN CERTAIN SOURIRE

(1956)

In her second novel, Sagan has changed the locale, the time, and the plot, but her heroine remains essentially the same girl, except that instead of Cécile, she now calls herself Dominique, and the sentiment she feels most often has become boredom, "ennui." In the beginning she speaks of a spring afternoon "comme les autres," as she introduces herself, Paris, and Bertrand, her present lover.

Dominique and Bertrand, students and lovers, have become acquainted the preceding summer by means of letters. This bored young girl, who finds no pleasure in reality, prefers to compose her dramas from within herself, and shows from the beginning a marked preference for the unreal. In speaking of her relationship with Bertrand, established first through letters, she says:

> D'une certaine manière, établir les accords d'une passion par lettres me ressemblait assez. (page 15)

Later, while looking at him and remembering the beginnings of their liaison:

> Il ne m'est rien, pensai-je soudain, il m'ennuie, je suis indifférente à tout, je ne suis rien, rien, parfaitement rien. (page 16)

This indifference goes much deeper than that shown by Anne in Bonjour tristesse. Dominique's indifference serves as a shield between her and reality, which she feels unable to face. By diminishing her own importance, and the interest she takes in living, she hopes to reduce her responsibility, for, like Cécile, she totally lacks initiative; she lives completely at the whim of others:

> . . .il y avait quelque chose en moi qui me destinait à suivre la nuque bien rasée d'un jeune homme, à me laisser toujours emmener, sans résistance, avec ces petites pensées glaciales et glissantes comme des poissons. (page 16)

Bertrand also seems to typify the "mal du siècle"-"ennui." He is inhibited by an intense awareness of self which causes him to fear others and to simulate a disdain for them.

> . . .Bertrand passait son temps à chercher les comédies chez les autres, à tel point qu'il vivait un peu dans la crainte de se jouer lui-même une comédie dont il ne serait pas conscient. (page 17)

Both Dominique and Bertrand are tormented by a cruel, self-imposed solitude. Dominique has learned to accept hers much better than had Cécile; her little world is a refuge, not a prison. Her life begins to acquire meaning only when she meets Luc, but it is a passive achievement on her part because she is once again allowing herself to be led. As she says later on, "J'avais toujours été choisie."

Luc, sophisticated, older, successful, sure of himself, both frightens and attracts Dominique. The attraction is felt immediately, at their first meeting, but her timidity and desire for self-effacement cause her to retreat as quickly, though she secretly looks forward to their next meeting.

Despite her liaison with Bertrand and her belief that they share a deep feeling, there is actually very little which attaches Dominique to him, except perhaps inertia and their mutual fear of others. Love, or any emotion, for her, is so transient that the effort to feel the real thing is just too great; for brief periods, a simulation will do. She expresses this attitude rather clearly:

> Cette absence d'émotions véritables me semblait être la manière la plus normale de vivre. Vivre, au fond, c'était s'arranger pour être le plus content possible. (page 21)

Her life follows a regular pattern, chosen not by her, but by her friends, and she feels comfortable in it, taking pleasure in her "goût d'ennui."

When Dominique and Bertrand are invited to lunch with Luc and his wife, Dominique sees what will come to represent to her an ideal woman, a woman who can make men happy, a gentle woman: Françoise, Luc's wife. This is perhaps the woman she would like to be, but, she knows already that the older woman possesses a sensitivity that she, Dominique, will never have. Consequently, she feels a bit jealous of Françoise, especially as she realizes how handsome Luc is and that he does not belong to her, but to Françoise.

When Luc is around, things seem to move quickly and Dominique comes alive. She and Bertrand lunch often with Luc and Françoise. Bertrand perceives Dominique's growing attraction to Luc and becomes jealous, but there is nothing he can do. The news that Françoise is going to spend ten days in the country lessens anxiety for all three of them. This relief lasts only until Luc asks Dominique to have dinner with him - alone - the following evening. Suddenly, she realizes how far she has allowed herself to be carried in the game, and she wishes desperately for Françoise, whose presence seems to assure security. Is this not, once again, the tormented Cécile longing for a stable, sensible Ann to come to her aid and relieve her of all responsibility? Françoise does not help her any more than Anne helps Cécile, so she begins to imagine that her dinner with Luc will be the beginning of a passionate ten-day affair. She is disappointed, therefore, when he

arrives late, appears preoccupied, and shows absolutely no desire to be alone with her. Instead, they join a group of his friends for dinner. Dominique finds herself greatly admiring Luc's friends just as Cécile admired her father's friends. She wishes to be like them; she never questions their reality, their worth. Indeed, she is incapable of judging the true value of a person. She has no idea of the meaning of existence and makes no effort to establish a set of values by which she may measure another's worth. She knows only pleasure and lives by it, allowing to the one who gives her pleasure the privilege of choosing her friends and entertainment for her.

Realizing that only whiskey will loosen Dominique's tongue, Luc makes her drink while he talks to her about Françoise and their happy life. She receives a little shock, then, when he tells her that he would like very much to have an affair with her. Dominique's first thought is of Françoise, but Luc assures her:

> Françoise, je le lui dirais peut-être. Elle vous aime bien, vous savez. (page 37)

Luc emphasizes that his proposal is only "pour s'amuser"; there is no deep feeling attached at all. Still shocked but far from feeling any insult, Dominique agrees to think it over.

Though she realizes the danger that can result from an acceptance of Luc's proposal—the suffering after their inevitable parting and the destruction of what she and Bertrand possess—Dominique is tempted to accept. Finally, she decides to continue as she always has, to allow herself to be led and to see what happens; after all, why begin to make decisions now? Though she sees Luc often in the following days, he makes no further reference to the proposed affair.

Suddenly Françoise is back, and Dominique feels that she has somehow lost Luc forever. The four plan a visit to Bertrand's mother. During this week end in the country, Luc first kisses her, and she realizes that perhaps all is not lost. Happy again, she pushes Bertrand out of her thoughts; then, on seeing Françoise, she is immediately seized by a desire to tell her that she is falling in love with Luc, to ask her to please take him away. Once again there is an echo of Cécile's urge to tell Anne about her diabolical plot, thus shifting the responsibility of the outcome from her own hands. Like Cécile, Dominique lacks the courage, and like Anne, Françoise remains unaware of impending danger.

A few days after the week end, Dominique and Luc meet for a drink, and once again he brings up the subject of their proposed affair. He assures her that there will be nothing serious in it, that he is quite fond of her, but that he will always go back to Françoise:

> —Toi non plus d'ailleurs, ce n'est pas très sérieux. Rien n'est très sérieux. Rien ne vaut contre Françoise.
> (page 80)
>
> . . .Après je reviendrais à Françoise. Qu'est-ce que tu risques? De t'attacher à moi, de souffrir, après? Mais quoi? Ça vaut mieux que de t'ennuyer. Tu aimes mieux être heureuse et malheureuse que rien, non?
> (page 81)

This, then, is what Luc is offering her: a purely selfish means of satisfying his own desires. Only he runs no risk at all, though Dominique fails to see that, for she accepts, feeling sure that she is cynical enough never to fall in love with him, not realizing that she already has.

During the few weeks left in the school year, Dominique continues to see Bertrand, but spends most of her time studying with Françoise, who is extremely kind to her, and steals moments with Luc, who

promises to write to her during the vacation.

Thoroughly bored at home, but enjoying it just the same, Dominique lazily awaits a letter from Luc. Finally, it comes and proposes a meeting in Avignon. Saying that she is going to visit a girl friend, Dominique leaves to meet him, feeling strangely sad as she says good-by to her parents, as though she realizes that this time she is really leaving her childhood with its lack of complications far behind her.

They leave Avignon immediately and go to the sea, to Cannes. There Dominique finds perfect contentment for two weeks with Luc and is unable to imagine the end of their idyll:

> Nous irions doucement vers l'hiver, vers la mort, en parlant de provisoire. (page 113)

Indeed, she wonders what she will do when he leaves her, where she will go. Only once does she reveal this to Luc, purely by accident, when they are talking about Françoise:

> Il y a Françoise que tu rends heureuse, et moi que tu rendras un peu malheureuse à la rentrée. (page 115)

She immediately regrets the admission and tries to conceal it. Luc is only too willing to overlook it, as his recognition of her love would place a certain responsibility on him, a responsibility which he, like Raymond in Bonjour tristesse, is unwilling to assume.

Suddenly, it is all over, and Dominique congratulates herself on her ability to control her emotions. She will live, from now on, only for the moments she will be able to spend with Luc, moments which become less and less frequent, then cease as Françoise learns of the vacation through a friend. Awakened to life for a few moments because of Luc, Dominique returns to her "ennui" as soon as he leaves. Now, it no longer depends on her, but on someone else, Luc.

But even she realizes finally that hers is destined to be an unhappy love, for Luc does not love her and never will.

After an absence of over a month, Luc finally does call. By now, Dominique has once more found her defense in her solitude, and she can evoke their shared happiness with nothing more than "un certain sourire," knowing that there will be others for her, but that it will never be the same again.

These three main characters bear a strong resemblance to Cécile, Raymond, and Anne; they are really only projections of them. Again, Cécile has fought against Anne, this time coming closer to triumph, but Anne has won at last. In Un certain sourire the relationships between the characters have changed slightly. Françoise (Anne) is now married to Luc (Raymond). Dominique (Cécile) is still jealous of this happy couple, but now the older man is no longer her father, he is someone else's husband. Therefore, she may express her love for him through a brief affair. Cécile has rewon the father she could not bear to lose to Anne by the substitution of adultery for incest.

CHAPTER III

AIMEZ-VOUS BRAHMS

(1959)

Paule, 39, successful and lonely, is silently taking stock of her life while she waits for Roger, her lover of many years. She is acutely conscious of the passage of time:

> . . . Elle s' était mise devant ce miroir pour tuer le temps et - cette idée la fit sourire - elle découvrait que c' était lui qui la tuait à petit feu, doucement, s' attaquant à une apparence qu' elle savait avoir été aimée. (pages 11-12)

Happy memories suddenly overwhelm her and, as a result, she feels completely defeated in her present life. The burden of her freedom - a freedom of which only Roger takes advantage - has become too much for her; she can no longer bear her loneliness. But even while thinking this, she realizes that it will be impossible to explain to Roger:

> . . .Il dirait "oui, bien sûr" avec l' espèce de satisfaction qu' il prenait chaque fois à découvrir les tricheries de la vie, un réel enthousiasme à commenter l' absurdité de l' existence, leur entêtement à la prolonger. (page 13)

Roger, perpetually youthful, inconstant, has been her lover for six years. During this time he has become dependent on Paule and feels lost when he does not see her for a few days. Her eternal availability and constant devotion have caused him to take her for granted as long as they are both in Paris. As a result, Paule is often alone and very unhappy because of Roger' s amourous wanderings, even though she knows that he will always come back to her. The subject, in fact, has become a joke between them, a joke which is growing less and less funny for Paule.

In the car on the way to dinner, Paule absent-mindedly turns on the radio, and the familiar gesture suddenly makes her once again aware of the passage of time:

> —Combien de fois ai-je fait ce geste:
> Allumer la radio de ta voiture en partant dîner avec toi?
> (page 17)

Roger, still sensitive to her every mood, worries lest the remark be a sign of boredom, though it is he who is making her so aware of the passage of time as he unconsciously pushes her into the role of confidante. He confesses his desire to act young and takes pleasure in relating his brief affairs to her. There is no doubt of his love for her, but it is in many ways a selfish love, for he is unwilling to give up any of his freedom, to give himself completely to her:

> . . .Il se sentait bien chaque fois qu'il voyait Paule, il n'aimait qu'elle. Seulement, ce soir, en la quittant, il avait senti sa tristesse et il n'avait su que dire. Elle lui demandait quelque chose confusément, il le savait bien, quelque chose qu'il ne pouvait pas lui donner, qu'il n'avait jamais pu donner à personne. (pages 21-22)

The next morning, Paule, who is an interior decorator, goes to visit Mme. Van den Besh, a wealthy American who wishes to have her apartment redecorated. It is then that she meets Simon, Mme. Van den Besh's son, a strikingly handsome young man who is pathetically comical. Paule's first conversation with him shows the peculiar nature of his personality:

> —Que voulez-vous que je vous dise? dit-il. Je ne vous connais pas. Si je vous connaissais déjà, je vous dirais que je suis très heureux de vous revoir.
> Elle le regarda, interloquée.
> —Pourquoi?
> —Comme ça..
> Il détourna la tête. Elle le trouvait de plus en plus étrange.
> (page 25)

—Je suis avocat stagiaire, reprit Simon. C'est beaucoup de travail, couché à minuit, levé à l'aube. . .
—Il est dix heures, fit remarquer Paule.
—On a guillotiné mon principal client ce matin, dit-il d'une voix traînante.
Elle sursauta. Il gardait les yeux baissés.
—Mon Dieu, dit-elle . . .et il est mort?
Ils éclatèrent de rire ensemble. (pages 25-26)

Just as Paule is leaving the apartment, Simon, who has waited an hour for her, drives up and offers her a ride. On the way to her office, she learns that he is only 25, and although she does not hesitate to tell him her age, he remains visibly impressed. He asks her to have lunch with him some time, but the effort to become acquainted with someone new is more than Paule can bear, and she tells him that she is very busy.

Simon is evidently dissatisfied with his work, as is his employer, who merely tolerates him. His strange antics are well known in the office and are accepted indulgently. Weak and lazy, he nevertheless remains an engaging figure, frequently a bizarre one:

. . .En prenant le trottoir, il buta et se mit à boiter aussitôt, l'air doux et résigné. Les femmes se retournaient sur son passage, et Simon sentait leur pensées frapper son dos: "Si jeune, si beau et infirme, quel dommage!" Encore qu'il ne tirât de son physique aucune assurance, seulement un soulagement: "Je n'aurais jamais eu la force d'être laid." Et, à cette idée, il entrevoyait une vie d'ascète, tantôt peintre maudit, tantôt berger des Landes. (pages 31-32)

That evening in Paule's apartment, Roger, still worried about Paule's sadness of the night before, finally asks her if he is too selfish. She is in too joyful a mood, however, to start a discussion of that sort, so she tells him only that she sometimes feels incapable of keeping up with him, but that she is happy. This is what he really wants to hear, and, to reassure her, he adds:

—Tu sais, toutes ces petites histoires qui m'arrivent, c'est . . . enfin tu connais leur valeur. (page 38)

Later, while they are dancing, she begins to tell him about her meeting with Simon. At that moment, she looks up and sees Simon, who is slightly drunk and completely enchanted to have found her. Roger immediately becomes jealous and tries to drive him off, but Simon pays no attention to anyone except Paule. She finally explains to Roger that Simon is the son of Mme. Van den Besh, with whom Roger has had an affair in the past. As a result, he agrees to let the young boy stay, finding him more and more amusing. Simon does little more than watch Paule and drink, but when they get ready to leave, he rises and promptly collapses. Roger is very disgusted with him, but he agrees that they must drive Simon home, and later he goes home with Paule, for the first time in days.

The next day at lunch time, Simon shows up at Paule's shop and insists that she have lunch with him. As they are riding toward the Bois de Boulogne, he speaks of a former girl friend that might well be a self-portrait by Sagan:

. . . elle avait l'air sinistre, elle conduisait sa quatre chevaux à toute vitesse, les dents serrées, elle fumait des gauloises en se réveillant. . . et, à moi, elle me disait que l'amour n'est que le contact de deux épidermes. (pages 50-51)

Later, during the meal, Simon tells Paule about the legal profession and begins to describe a trial to her. Suddenly he jumps up and points an accusing finger at her and says, with perhaps a great deal more perception than he realizes:

—Et vous, je vous accuse de n'avoir pas fait votre devoir d'être humain. Au nom de ce mort, je vous accuse d'avoir laissé passer l'amour, d'avoir négligé le devoir d'être heureuse, d'avoir vécu de faux-fuyants, d'expédients et de résignation. Vous devriez être condamnée à mort, vous serez condamnée à la solitude. (page 53)

Simon is growing fond of Paule, but soon she no longer thinks of him, as she begins to wonder if she might have missed a telephone call from Roger. When he is with her, Roger believes, along with Paule, that their love is the most important thing in their lives; but as soon as he is away from her, out in public, he realizes the value of his freedom, and is reluctant to abandon it.

Paule is hoping that Roger will call her, but he has just found out that a young actress, Maisy, is willing to become his mistress for a while, so instead of spending the week end with Paule as they had planned, he telephones her that he must go to Lille; thus he is free to spend it with Maisy.

Disappointed and at loose ends, Paule decides to go to Mme. Ven den Besh's apartment on Saturday afternoon to see if she can work with her. Just as she is leaving, Simon comes in and asks to see her to the door. In the hall, he suddenly traps her, and she has the frightening premonition that he is going to kiss her, and, startled and confused, she runs away. The next day she finds a note under her door:

> . . .Il y a un très beau concert à six heures, salle Pleyel. . .Aimez-vous Brahms? Je m'excuse pour hier. (page 69)

At first she laughs, then begins to wonder if she does like Brahms. She cannot remember. Her whole life seems to be made up of her work and Roger, who is so seldom there. That simple question "aimez-vous Brahms?" seems to represent all that she has forgotten, all the things that she has pushed out of her life. What does she care for now, besides her own life, her happiness? She calls Simon, but he is not there, and she decides to go to the concert anyway. They nearly miss each other, but manage to get in just as the music is starting. Simon is very upset because he has run into

Roger and Maisy. Though he feels that Roger is taking advantage of Paule's trust, he remains silent, thus sparing Paule any pain. The knowledge makes him feel very protective toward her. Later, he tells her that he loves her, accuses her of allowing Roger to neglect her, and makes it clear that he will try to steal her from Roger. Hurt by his accusation, she runs away.

That same afternoon, Roger and Maisy return from the country. When Maisy says that she would like to see him again and that she has heard that he is not free, he quickly replies that he is free. But for him:

> . . ."Je suis un homme libre." Ca voulait dire: "libre de ne pas prendre de responsabilités." Il accéléra: il voulait revoir Paule au plus vite; elle seule pouvait le rassurer, et elle le ferait. (page 84)

More and more, Paule is becoming her own worst enemy. It is she who convinces Roger that he has no real responsibility toward her.

When Paule tells Roger that she has been to the concert with Simon, he first wonders if she knows about Maisy, but then his fear turns to jealousy when he realizes that Simon, who is only 25, seems to please her. When she assures Roger that Simon's youth is a failing, he feels immense relief and tells her how much he trusts her. Her reaction to his statement is one of resignation; it could also describe the situation which exists between Françoise and Luc in Un certain sourire:

> "Les hommes sont inconscients, pensait Paule sans amertume. 'J'ai tellement confiance en toi', tellement confiance que je peux te tromper, te laisser seule, et qu'il n'est pas possible que le contraire arrive. C'est sublime." (page 88)

Roger lets slip a remark which confirms Paule's fear that he was not in Lille during the weekend. But she says nothing, and he remains

blissfully unaware of his mistake.

The next morning, Paule receives a note from Simon who apologizes for his remarks of the day before and tells her that he is leaving town to work on a case and that he loves her. Unsure of herself and unhappy, Paule replies, "Revenez vite." Simon takes this literally and arrives that very night, after midnight. His reception is much different from what he had expected; in fact, it is a rather cool one, and Simon is immediately unhappy again. However, Paule is very glad that he has come, and though she does nothing more than kiss his hand in a moment of extreme tenderness, he is ecstatically happy.

Then Mme. Van den Besh decides to give a dinner, to which she plans to invite Paule and Roger. It is a boring dinner from the very start, and Roger insists on leaving early, taking Paule with him. She awaits an explanation, but there is none. He merely drops her at her door, rushing back to Maisy, with whom he is thoroughly infatuated. Just as Roger drives away, Paule notices Simon's car parked in front of her apartment. He calls to her and asks her to get in the car for a moment. Paule is very touched, and soon she finds herself kissing Simon; then frightened, she jumps from the car and hurries upstairs. The next morning she writes him a note, asking him not to try to see her again, for she is too fond of him and does not wish to hurt him.

For ten days, Simon tries to obey Paule's request. Then, when he can stand the separation no longer, he waits for her outside her shop after work. Paule, lonely and hurt by Roger's growing indifference, is overjoyed at seeing Simon, realizes that she has really missed him, and finds herself suddenly in his arms. She has at last tired of being the loving half of a couple; she wishes to strike back at the happy couple that she and Roger once were. Even

though she cannot really love this time, she is assured of being loved, for Simon is happy just being near her. She feels a great tenderness towards Simon, but it is a tenderness tempered with almost overpowering weariness, a sentiment of which she is not the master. It is this fatigue which is most evident in her:

> . . . Chacun lui conseillait de changer d'air, et elle songeait, tristement, qu'elle allait simplement changer d'amant: moins dérangeant, plus parisien, tellement fréquent. . . (page 124)

Thus Paule, who has once left a young, handsome husband, and who is now being taken for granted by the man whom she has made her whole life, takes on a new lover, a young and passionate lover. This change is due to no profound feelings toward Simon; it is, rather, an antidote to her solitude, an attempt to escape boredom.

Simon is ecstatic. Like a spoiled child, he has told himself that he must have Paule, and he has enjoyed the chase almost as much as the conquest. The love he feels for her is total, jealous, almost abnormal - a love similar to the one Sagan will evoke later in Les Merveilleux Nuages and reminiscent of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night:

> Simon était heureux. Il se sentait plus responsable vis-à-vis de Paule, pourtant de quinze ans son aînée, qu'il ne l'eût été envers une jeune vierge de seize. Tout en restant émerveillé de la condescendance de Paule et, pour la première fois, retirant de cette étreinte une impression de cadeau, il lui semblait indispensable de veiller, l'oeil fixe, comme pour la protéger à l'avance du mal qu'un jour il pourrait lui faire. Il veillait, il montait la garde contre ses propres lâchetés, ses comédies passées, ses terreurs, ses ennuis subits et sa faiblesse. Il la rendrait heureuse, il serait heureux, et il se disait avec étonnement qu'il ne s'était jamais formulé ce genre de serments au cours de ses plus grandes conquêtes. (pages 127-128)

Simon quickly endears himself to Paule. He says that he is too happy to work; instead, he drives around Paris all day, passing Paule's shop at least ten times, looking dazed and happy, until six o'clock, when Paule is free. For the first time, Paule has the impression that she is giving, that the happiness of someone else depends entirely on her, and this feeling fulfils a need so great that she, in turn, is almost happy.

During this time, Roger has been traveling in the north, near Lille, calling both Maisy and Paule almost every day. He has not failed to notice the change in Paule's voice, which seems to become more and more distant, and he is seized by the sudden desire to see her:

> . . .Il n'avait jamais pu passer quinze jours loin d'elle sans qu'elle lui manque. À Paris, bien sûr, où il la savait prête à le voir, toujours à sa disposition, il pouvait espacer leurs rencontres; mais Lille la lui rendait comme aux premiers jours où il vivait suspendu à sa vie, craignant de la conquérir comme il craignait maintenant de la perdre. (page 133)

When he tells Paule that he is coming back, she replies only that she must see him. They arrange a meeting for the following day, but when he arrives in Paris late that night, he goes straight to her apartment. For the first time, he realizes that he is afraid to go up, unsure of the reception he will receive. He is not even sure that she is alone! Discouraged, he starts home, then changes his mind and goes to Maisy's apartment, where he spends the night. Hoping anxiously that everything will turn out all right with Paule, he leaves Maisy only a few minutes before the arranged meeting.

Paule and Roger lunch together. Just as they are beginning to eat, she remembers that she has promised to call Simon at noon. It is now one o'clock, and Simon, characteristically impetuous, has been trying for an hour to find out if the telephone is out of order.

He is very glad to hear from her, even when he learns that she is having lunch with Roger. Paule has already decided that she will tell Roger about Simon immediately, but she does not make the admission as gracefully as she had imagined. His failure to remonstrate with her tells her that he is unhappy, but when she hints that everything still depends on him, he says nothing. He remains unwilling to sacrifice his liberty, even for the sake of happiness. He tries to disparage the whole affair between Paule and Simon, and Paule retaliates by trying to hurt him. Suddenly, they are fighting, and Paule rushes from the restaurant with Roger just behind her, apologizing. They stop at her car, where she tells him that it would be better if they did not see each other for a while. He makes no effort to stop her; then:

> Elle partit très vite pour qu'il ne voie pas les larmes qui lui brouillaient la vue. Machinalement, elle mit les essuie-glace et son geste lui arracha un petit rire désolé. (page 142)

Roger immediately returns to Maisy, but soon, in a little village in the country, he realizes that the affair is over, that he no longer cares for her. Disillusioned and very tired, he leaves her without a word, hurrying back to Paris, but - and it is this that causes him such anguish - not to Paule.

Paule, in the meantime, is having problems with Simon, who refuses to do anything except follow her around or wait for her in the apartment. In addition, he is drinking to pass the time more quickly. When she tells him that he must go back to work or she will not see him anymore, he is so hurt and frightened of losing her that, in reassuring him, she finds herself feeling something closely akin to love for him.

During all the years of their affair, Roger and Paule have made it a practice to go away to the mountains in February. Shortly before

the usual time, Roger telephones Paule to ask her if she would like him to buy her a ticket when he buys his. She almost accepts, thinking that perhaps he really needs her, that he may be offering her the love she so desperately wants. Then she realizes that she could not be happy, being unsure of him, and she refuses the invitation. The thought of what might have been, however, leaves her tired and depressed. She goes home and finds Simon in a gay mood, dressed to go out. He has mixed cocktails for them, and Paule drinks with him while they make plans for the evening. The effects of the drink, coupled with Simon's high spirits, soon cheer her, and she remains happy until she overhears a woman at a near-by table speculate about her age. Her age begins to weigh on her immediately, and she insists that Simon take her home. She wants to send him away, but he, who also heard the woman's remark, refuses to leave, and says instead that he must talk to Paule. He has suddenly changed roles with her; he is now the strong one, the comforting one. His love for her has reached new depths, a more mature level:

> —Je ne fais pas un drame, je veux au contraire éviter que tu en fasses. Naturellement, tu me les cacherais. Mais tu n'as pas à me les cacher. Je ne suis pas un petit garçon, Paule. Je suis tout à fait en mesure de te comprendre et peut-être de t'aider. Je suis très heureux avec toi, tu le sais, mais mon ambition ne se borne pas là: je veux que toi, tu sois heureuse avec moi. Pour le moment, tu tiens trop à Roger pour l'être. Mais il faut que tu veuilles bien considérer notre histoire comme une chose positive, que tu dois m'aider à construire et non comme un heureux hasard. Voilà. . . .
>
> (page 163-164)

> —Je ne suis pas inconséquent, tu sais. J'ai vingt-cinq ans, je n'avais jamais vécu avant toi et sûrement je ne vivrai plus après. Tu es la femme et surtout l'être humain qu'il me faut. Je le sais. Si tu le voulais, je t'épouserais demain.
>
> (page 164)

Surprised at the depth of his understanding, Paule feels very safe in his arms. She no longer protests her age.

All this time, however, Roger's eternal presence is felt. Paule still loves him; he is, in fact, so much a part of her that she can no longer separate their two lives. Simon is aware of this and struggles against it, but Paule realizes that his struggle is useless, for it is inevitable that she will hurt him some day, that she will go back to Roger.

One night Simon and Paule meet Roger and a brunette, in a restaurant. They barely acknowledge each other's presence, and Simon has to restrain himself from hitting Roger. In one brief moment, Paule realizes that everything is over for her and Simon, that her love for Roger is indestructible:

> . . . À un moment, son bras nu frôla la main de Roger, plaquée sur le dos de la femme brune, elle ouvrit les yeux. Ils se regardèrent, Roger, Paule, chacun derrière l'épaule de "l'autre." C'était un slow sans rythme, immobile. Ils se contemplaient à dix centimètres, sans aucune expression, sans se sourire, sans se reconnaître, semblait-il, puis soudainement la main de Roger lâcha le dos de la femme, se tendit vers le bras de Paule, l'effleura du bout des doigts et il y eut une expression si suppliante sur son visage qu'elle ferma les yeux. Simon tourna et ils se perdirent de vue.
>
> (page 183)

That night, even Simon realizes that the end has finally come. The next day, Paule is not surprised to get a note from Roger, who begs her to see him. She telephones him to arrange a meeting, but in ten minutes he is there. It is a tender scene: both apologize, both admit their unhappiness apart. Roger accepts the responsibility for their misunderstanding, and Paule feels both saved and lost.

Simon's grief at their parting is complete and agonizing. Paule almost envies him the nobility of it, for she knows that she will never again feel a pain so noble. As he leaves for the last time,

she shuts the door on her youth, forever, and leans back, waiting for the future.

À huit heurs, le téléphone sonna. Avant même de décrocher, elle savait ce qu' elle allait entendre:

—Je m' excuse, disait Roger, j' ai un dîner d' affaires, je viendrai plus tard, est-ce que. . . (page 187)

CHAPTER IV

DANS UN MOIS DANS UN AN

(1957)

Before beginning a résumé of this novel, it is expedient to outline its characters: Alain Maligrasse, a middle-aged publisher who likes the company of young people; Fanny, his wife, who shares his interests and is very devoted; Édouard, Alain's nephew, an innocent young boy from Caen; Bernard, a critic who wishes to become a novelist; Nicole, Bernard's wife; Josée, a wealthy young girl who drifts from love affair to love affair, presently the mistress of Jacques, a medical student; Béatrice, an actress; Jolyet, a theatrical producer.

Bernard is discouraged, both by his unsuccessful career and by his troubled amorous affairs. He is no longer attracted to his wife, but is passionately in love with Josée, who ignores him. He often walks the streets of Paris all night, trying to summon courage to telephone Josée. When he finally does call, Jacques answers the telephone, so he hangs up, more discouraged than ever. At home, there is always his devoted wife, Nicole, whose love seems a liability rather than an asset to him. He is burdened by a responsibility for her happiness, a responsibility he does not wish to assume, for it will mean only another failure in his life.

At this point, Sagan interrupts their story and turns to that of Alain and Fanny, who are growing old and are making a desperate attempt to stay youthful through the company of young people. Fanny realizes that her husband admires Béatrice, the young actress, but she does not know that he also harbors a strong love for her. His admiration has become a joke between himself and Fanny, but he

finds it increasingly difficult to laugh at what has become, for him, a deep and powerful feeling.

Béatrice is young, beautiful, and spoiled. Her only passion is that of ambition, and she tolerates people only for the length of time that they can be useful to her. She uses the word "love" often but fails to realize its meaning. The stage and her career are her life, and she lives for nothing else.

In an erratic style which is characteristic of this novel, Sagan abandons these characters and resumes the narration she interrupted above. The great ambitions in Bernard's life are to write a good book and to possess Josée. Three years earlier, he wrote a fairly good book, but inspiration has eluded him since. Josée is completely out of his reach, since she is infatuated with Jacques. Nicole's greatest capacity seems to be for disturbing her husband, Bernard. He tries to forget her, because she causes him to feel guilty. During his rare moments at home, her excessive attention infuriates him. As a result, he leaves, and has accomplished nothing. His sentiments are neither deep nor lasting, but they are overpowering while they last:

> . . .Il aimait bien Fanny. Il les aimait bien tous. Il n'aimait personne. Josée l'agaçait. Il la lui fallait. C'était tout. De quoi se tuer. (page 27)

As a sudden reaction to a feeling of guilt inspired by the sad presence of Nicole, Bernard invites her to go to a party that Alain and Fanny are giving. Nicole, who knows nothing of Paris nor of Bernard's friends, is delighted. Later, in the publishing house where he works, and where Alain is an editor, Bernard receives a telephone call from Béatrice, with whom he had an affair a few years earlier. At the present time, she is very anxious to meet

an author who might want her in one of his plays. Bernard's rather condescending attitude towards Béatrice never fails to astonish Alain, who hangs on her every word.

On the night of the party at Alain's house, Jacques drives Josée there and arranges to meet her later at her apartment. Even her attachment to him, which is the most permanent in the book, seems to have very weak foundations, as she thinks:

> ... .Jacques F . . ., étudiant en médecine, mon légionnaire. Tout ça est comique. Ce n'est même pas une question physique, je ne sais pas si c'est ce reflet qu'il me renvoie de moi qui m'attire, ou cette absence de reflet, ou lui-même. Mais il n'a pas d'intérêt. Il n'est sûrement même pas cruel. Il existe, voilà l'expression. (page 34)

It is at the party that Béatrice meets Alain's cousin, Édouard, who has just arrived from Caen. She finds Édouard fascinating, and he is immediately impressed by her beauty. She, however, is unable to interest herself in anything except the proposed meeting with the author, and she follows Bernard, who has arranged this meeting for her, back to Nicole, asking a thousand questions. While he is answering her, Josée comes in, and only then does the party begin for Bernard. He is ashamed to have her see him with his wife, but he introduces them and then watches in agony while Josée makes herself very charming to Nicole. Josée has felt a vague curiosity about Bernard, but has given him up as being too much like herself, too unstable. Now she feels a mild pity for Nicole and would like to help her, but suddenly, all feeling seems too much:

> Josée hésita un instant. Il y avait encore trois ans de cela, elle l'aurait interrogée, aurait essayé de l'aider. Mais elle était fatiguée. Fatiguée d'elle-même, de sa vie. Que signifiaient ce garçon brutal, et ce salon? Elle savait déjà, aussi, qu'il ne s'agissait plus de trouver une réponse mais d'attendre que la question ne se posât plus.
> (pages 41-42)

Bernard, meanwhile, walks to the bar to avoid the discussion between Josée and Nicole. There, he finds that he must listen to Édouard's questions about Béatrice, with whom he has fallen hopelessly in love. Then, the pianist begins to play, and Bernard goes back to sit at Josée's feet. Suddenly, listening to the music, he sees what he wishes to write, clearly and wholly, a sort of eulogy of Josée. Perhaps this idea is borrowed from Sagan's favorite author, Proust, as she writes:

> . . ."Voilà, pensa-t-il avec exaltation, c'est cette petite phrase! Ah! Proust, mais il y a Proust; je n'ai rien à faire de Proust à la fin." (page 44)

In reading this, one thinks of the little musical phrase by Vinteuil which seemed to symbolize Swann's love for Odette in Proust's Du Côté de Chez Swann.

After the party, Édouard asks to see Béatrice home, but since she already has a car, she drives him home instead. Always ready for new admirers, she gives him her telephone number when she lets him out, and he leaves her, walking on air. But Béatrice, once at home, promptly forgets everything except her career; as is her practice, she begins to recite her favorite lines from Racine:

> "Dans un mois, dans un an, comment souffrirons-nous,
> "Seigneur, que tant de mers me séparent de vous,
> "Que le jour recommence et que le jour finisse
> "Sans que jamais Titus puisse voir Bérénice?" (page 23)

Fearing that her friends will see nothing more than sheer physical attraction in her affair, Josée has hidden Jacques from them. Finally, she resolves to show him to Fanny, and she asks him to call for her there, where she has gone for tea. Just before she is ready to leave, Bernard enters. He is enchanted to find her there and immediately begs her to have dinner with him sometime.

She has just replied that she would love to and is reflecting that her present life with Jacques is becoming boring, since they seldom go out, when Jacques appears. His unsuitability for a girl like her is immediately evident:

> Jacques apparut comme le taureau apparaît dans l'arène, le front bas, tâtant le tapis du pied. (pages 55-56)

But Jacques, insupportable perhaps, shows a finer ability to judge rather quickly:

> —Je te parie que c'est le type du téléphone, dit-il. (page 57)

He remembers that someone called Josée's apartment at four o'clock in the morning and that, when he answered the telephone, the caller hung up. At the time he had said that he was sure it was a man. Now he knows that it was Bernard.

Bernard is so completely shocked at having at last seen Josée's lover that he walks around in a daze, causing a great deal of alarm to Alain when he finally returns to the publishing house. But Alain has other problems to worry him. He is having dinner with Béatrice before her show, and he is imagining a cozy little tête-à-tête during the course of which he might hold her hand, even declare his love for her, much as Dominique imagined her first dinner with Luc in Sagan's Un certain sourire. Béatrice is feeling very gay, and he might have succeeded if he had not used Édouard as a pretext for the meeting. He pretends to be very concerned about Édouard's growing passion for Béatrice, especially since Édouard has been borrowing a lot of money to buy her presents. Somehow, he sees only her superficiality and, still in love with her, he returns home, very unhappy.

Feeling completely destroyed by the knowledge that Josée has a lover and by his inability to write anything of value, Bernard has

decided to leave Paris for a while. Nicole is desolate; she refuses to return to her parents and intends to stay alone in the apartment, waiting for Bernard to reappear. She realizes her total inadequacy as Bernard leaves, and he seems to feel victimized by fate:

> . . .Il semblait à Bernard, à mesure qu'il faisait ses bagages que toute sa vie avait toujours été prévue. Il était normal qu'il ait eu un physique agréable, une jeunesse inquiète, une liaison avec Béatrice, une longue liaison avec la littérature. Et encore plus normal qu'il ait épousé cette jeune femme un peu insignifiante qu'il faisait souffrir à présent d'une souffrance animale à laquelle il ne comprenait rien. (page 71)

He promises to write to her, but he is thinking of Josée, who is going to inspire him to write once again, and of the beautiful letters he will write to her. First he goes to Italy, but he soon tires of it and returns to France. He decides to spend a few weeks in Poitiers, where he finds himself emotionally spent and still lacking in inspiration:

> . . .Il ne savait pas quel échec l'attendait ni quelle fausse découverte. Mais il savait qu'il s'ennuierait profondément, délibérément, probablement avec désespoir et que cet ennui, ce désespoir iraient peut-être assez loin pour le sortir de son impasse. L'impasse, il le savait après dix jours de voiture, ce n'était ni sa passion pour Josée, ni son échec en littérature, ni sa désaffection de Nicole. Mais quelque chose qui manquait à cette passion, à cette impuissance, à cette désaffection. Quelque chose qui aurait dû combler ce vide matinal, cet agacement de lui-même. (pages 76-77)

He works on a novel and tries to pass the time quickly, resisting the impulse to telephone Josée. At the end of a week, however, he realizes that his novel is bad and that he is ruining his life for nothing; as a result, he becomes very depressed. He writes to Alain, who advises him to cease this introspection and look around him, and his reaction seems a reflection of Jean-Paul Sartre:

> . . . Personne n'a jamais le temps de se regarder vraiment et la plupart ne cherchent chez les autres que les yeux, pour s'y voir. (page 80)

Thus he abandons himself to his fate, determined to see it through.

At the same time, in Paris, Édouard has finally succeeded in making Béatrice his mistress, and he is deliriously happy. For Béatrice, it is only another role to play, but for Édouard, it is the answer to all his dreams. For a while, they are very happy. Then Béatrice, whose only love is her career, receives an offer from André Jolyet, a well-known producer, to appear in a play for him. She tries to telephone Bernard to ask his advice, but Nicole tells her that he is in Poitiers. Nicole sounds so sad and lonely that Béatrice resolves to visit her, but then she is invited out by Jolyet, so she asks Josée to go in her place to see Nicole.

First, Josée and Nicole go for a ride in the country; then they stop at an inn for lunch, and there Nicole discloses to Josée that she is pregnant. Josée is frightened for her, for Nicole is not supposed to have children. She has not told Bernard and refuses to do so, even though Josée pleads with her. For days afterwards, Josée tries to call Bernard in Poitiers, but without success. She also fails to persuade Nicole to go to him. Since Nicole is looking progressively worse and Josée fears she may die, Josée decides to go to Poitiers herself to tell Bernard. She asks Jacques to go with her, but his classes will not permit it, so she sets off alone. She is uncomfortable about the meeting, for she has recently received a letter from Bernard in which he declared his love for her.

When Josée arrives at Bernard's hotel and sees him, she realizes that her coming has been a mistake. Because of the letter he has written her, he can only assume that she has come as a result of it. He is very happy and does not give her a chance to

explain to him. For her part, she is reluctant to destroy his happiness, so she lets him believe what he will for a while. She decides that she will tell him to go home in three days, and as he tells her that this is the first real thing that has happened to him in a long time, she thinks:

> "C'est probablement exact, pensait Josée. Il a une femme qui l'aime vraiment, qui est vraiment en danger, il est au bord d'un vrai drame, mais la seule vérité pour lui, c'est cette erreur qu'il commet, que je lui laisse commettre. Un vrai bonheur, une fausse histoire d'amour. On n'achève pas les chevaux." Et elle renonça à parler. Elle pouvait se taire car ce qu'elle ressentait n'était ni de la pitié, ni de l'ironie, mais une immense complicité. Un jour, sans doute, elle se tromperait comme lui, et comme lui elle jouerait au bonheur avec un faux partenaire. (pages 104-105)

In Paris, Béatrice is being pursued by both Jolyet and Édouard. Because she is so ambitious, she knows that Jolyet will win, but in the meantime, she is exceptionally sweet to Édouard, whom she knows that she is going to hurt. One night, she goes out with Jolyet, who realizes almost immediately that she is his for the asking. Instead of asking, however, he simply talks to her, then takes her home, where he leaves her in the elevator. She is very upset, for she still does not know if he loves her.

When Jolyet leaves Béatrice, he goes to a bar where he encounters Alain, very drunk. Alain is ruining himself because of his love for Béatrice, and even Jolyet is shocked at his condition. The two begin to talk about her and Alain continues to drink, for he believes his cause to be hopeless.

Josée and Bernard finally return to Paris, and Josée discovers that Jacques had left two days before. She cannot get in touch with him, so she calls Fanny who invites her to dinner that night.

Josée is immediately struck by Alain's appearance. It is evident that he has been drinking heavily, which is unusual for him. After dinner, he excuses himself and goes to his room. Then Fanny tells Josée that Alain's infatuation with Béatrice is ruining their lives. The situation depresses Josée, for there is nothing to be done, and she returns home determined to find Jacques.

She spends hours looking in all the cafes, and finally she finds Jacques. He treats her very coldly at first, for he has immediately guessed what happened at Poitiers and is very insulted. She confesses, then, that she really needs him, and they go back to her apartment together; all is forgiven.

When Bernard finally gets to Nicole, she is very ill and has already lost their baby. She begins to cry on his shoulder as he tries vainly to think of something to say:

> . . .Il sentait les remous de ses épaules dans ses mains. Il disait: "Là, là", d'une voix apaisante. Et subitement il comprit que c'était sa femme, son bien, qu'elle n'était qu'à lui, qu'elle ne pensait qu'à lui, qu'elle avait failli mourir. Que c'était sans doute la seule chose qu'il possédât et qu'il avait failli la perdre. Il fut envahi d'un sentiment de possession et de pitié d'eux-mêmes si déchirant qu'il détourna la tête. "On naît en criant, ce n'est pas pour rien, la suite ne peut être que des atténuations de ce cri." Cette chose étrange qui lui remontait à la gorge et le laissait sans forces aussi, sur l'épaule de Nicole qu'il n'aimait plus, c'était le retour de ce premier hurlement, à sa naissance. Tout le reste n'avait été que fuites, sursauts, comédies. Il oublia Josée un instant, livré uniquement à son désespoir.
>
> (pages 136-137)

He tries to comfort Nicole, but soon his thoughts turn once again to Josée, and he leaves to try to telephone her. He does so, but she does not answer. While he is thinking of her and their love, he expresses the idea that is predominant in Sagan's works, an idea which explains the title of this book and which is perhaps the

only concrete one which Sagan proclaims:

> . . . Quand il lui parlait de leur amour, elle lui parlait, elle, de la brièveté des amours. "Dans un an ou deux mois, tu ne m'aimeras plus." Seule, parmi les gens qu'il connaissait, Josée avait le complet sentiment du temps. Les autres, poussés par un profond instinct, essayaient de croire à la durée, à l'arrêt définitif de leur solitude; et il était comme eux. (page 138)

This seems to be Sagan's concept of love, of any passion, that "dans un mois, dans un an" it will be completely forgotten, to be evoked perhaps by nothing more than "un certain sourire." Nothing is real, nothing is lasting; one does not love, one only plays the role of a lover. Then, when this role becomes stale, one throws it aside to acquire a new one. There is no one great love, no great passion; everything is a simulation of the real. The people in this book face reality no more than do those in Château en Suède, where everyone parades about dressed in eighteenth century costumes, refusing to recognize the passage of time.

One evening, Béatrice invites Jolyet to her apartment for a drink, hoping that he will declare his love for her. She is naturally very angry when Édouard, who is there, refuses to leave and insists on playing the master of the house. Though she knows that Jolyet is aware of the affair between her and Édouard, she feels compromised. She finally insults the poor Édouard and he realizes that the end is very near. Béatrice is not, however, ready to give him up; he loves her too much, and she is not sure of Jolyet.

Édouard, in the meantime, has spent nearly all his money on gifts for Béatrice, and finally, in desperation, he turns to his uncle and aunt, Alain and Fanny. They are very glad to see him; Fanny is looking better than ever since she has decided to ignore Alain's infatuation and make life as pleasant as possible for him at home.

Béatrice's name is mentioned, however, and soon Alain leaves, obviously to look for her. Thus Fanny and Édouard are left alone to console each other, both feeling alone and unloved. Where Sagan is concerned, there can be only one result, for what is love if it is not pleasure? The next morning Édouard regrets his folly, a little, and leaves before Fanny awakens.

Soon after their return to Paris, Josée calls Bernard to say that she must see him. They arrange a meeting, and Bernard goes, knowing that it will be their last. Once again, Sagan expresses her philosophy as she describes this last meeting:

> . . .ils étaient deux exemples de la vie mal faite et ça leur était égal. . .Et la cigarette trempée que Bernard essayait en vain d'allumer était à l'image de leur vie. Parce qu'ils ne sauraient jamais, vraiment, être heureux et qu'ils le savaient déjà. Et, obscurément, ils savaient aussi que ça ne faisait rien. Mais rien. (pages 156-157)

Édouard, who has spent his last penny on flowers for Fanny, finds himself obliged to pay his debts, but he knows that it will be impossible unless he can borrow from a friend. The person to whom he naturally turns is Josée. She likes Édouard very much, and she and Jacques try to cheer him. He insists, however, on trying to see Béatrice again to get a final answer. She gives it, admitting that she no longer loves him, and Édouard understands that she never loved him. He returns to Josée, and she and Jacques install him in the guest room, where he stays until summer.

Alain has rapidly deteriorated; his life now consists of drinking, in sordid bars, with prostitutes. In what might be Sagan's announcement of the sequel to this book, Alain describes himself:

> "Je suis comme l'étranger de Baudelaire, disait-il à Bernard atterré, je regarde les nuages, les merveilleux nuages." (page 166)

There seems to be nothing left for Alain, who has despaired, feeling

that his life is empty, useless.

Summer comes, and everyone leaves Paris except Bernard, who stays to work on his book. He sees Josée when she returns from a trip to Sweden with Jacques and Édouard, and he realizes that he still loves her, though it is hopeless.

Béatrice is now rehearsing a play which is to make her famous. She is anxious to become Jolyet's mistress, for everyone thinks that she already is, and she is beginning to wonder just what is wrong. They go out after the rehearsal, and during their conversation, Béatrice, without perhaps realizing it, describes all of Sagan's characters very well:

> . . . Nous ne sommes pas grand-chose. Heureusement que nous l'ignorons souvent. Ou nous ne ferions rien.
> (page 175)

But do they really do anything? Does Béatrice, who seems the epitome of ambition, ever experience a real emotion? She never loves; she never really hates. Her whole life is a comedy, an unreal situation. It is only on the stage that she feels that "elle vivait enfin". She can simulate all the passions, but she herself feels nothing; she is completely indifferent. When she is finally a huge success in the play and becomes Jolyet's mistress, she is still indifferent. Nothing has any reality for her; she is hardly aware of what is happening. She realizes that her first few minutes on the stage were probably the only true ones of her life, and she accepts this as her fate.

Soon after Béatrice's success, Alain and Fanny give a party. Once again the same musician is there, playing the same tune; this time, it not only draws the attention of Bernard, but also of Josée. Nothing has changed, neither the music nor the people. They have accomplished nothing. Only time has changed. And this is the way

their lives will always be, drifting aimlessly, the days so much alike that they can no longer tell the date. As Bernard and Josée say, talking of her affair with Jacques and of their lives:

> —Un jour vous ne l'aimerez plus, dit-il doucement, et un jour je ne vous aimerai sans doute plus non plus.
>
> Et nous serons à nouveau seuls et ce sera pareil. Et il y aura une autre année de passée. . .
>
> —Je le sais, dit-elle. (page 188)
>
> —Josée, dit-il, ce n'est pas possible. Qu'avons-nous fait tous. . .Que s'est-il passé? Qu'est-ce que tout cela veut dire?
>
> —"Il ne faut pas commencer à penser de cette manière, dit-elle tendrement, c'est à devenir fou." (pages 188-189)

CHAPTER V

LES MERVEILLEUX NUAGES

(1961)

Sagan takes the title for this novel from a poem in prose by Charles Baudelaire, "L'Étranger":

> – Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? Ton père, ta mère, ta soeur, ou ton frère?
> – Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni soeur, ni frère.
> – Tes amis?
> – Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu.
> – Ta patrie?
> – J'ignore sous quelle latitude elle est située.
> – La beauté?
> – Je l'aimerais volontiers déesse et immortelle.
> – L'or?
> – Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu.
> – Eh! Qu'aimes-tu donc, extraordinaire étranger?
> – J'aime les nuages . . .les nuages qui passent. . . là-bas . . .là-bas . . .les merveilleux nuages! (page 9)

This poem also describes the characters of Dans un mois, dans un an, to which Les merveilleux nuages is a sequel. In the latter, the action takes place about two years after the events recounted in the earlier novel.

Josée, now married to an American, Alan Ash, lives in Florida. Discouraged and tired by her life in Paris, she was very glad to accept Alan's proposal of marriage for she also loved him. But Alan's love for her is a morbibly jealous one; he cannot bear to think of her past affairs. The thought that anyone else has ever been able to make her happy sends him into a jealous rage, yet he questions her constantly about her past life. The current object of his insane and unfounded jealousy is Brandon Kinnel, a young American who is a very

good friend of Alan and Josée. Brandon believes himself to be in love with her, but Josée hardly notices him; she is truly in love with her husband. Alan's jealousy is extremely obvious to everyone who knows him. Because of it, Brandon has often advised Josée to get a divorce, but she has paid no attention to him. Alan's favorite trick is to place Josée in a compromising situation with someone whom he knows to be attracted to her, Brandon in this case. One might say that he enjoys his jealousy, that he encourages it:

> – Quels sont les atouts de Brandon? demanda-t-il rêveusement, et il s'arrêta de marcher, s'appuya à la fenêtre.
> – Nuls, dit-elle..
> – Voyons . . .reprit-il. Il est bel homme, solide, rassurant . . .Il est le seul homme possible à Key Largo en ce moment. Sa femme est intelligente et sait se tenir. Et je l'imagine très bien me mettant knockout si je t'insultais. Tu sais: le parfait gentleman: "Il y a des choses, mon cher, qu'un homme ne doit pas souffrir et lady Josée, au dessus de tout soupçon . . .etc." Il se mit à rire.
> – Tu ne dis rien. La scène te paraît inimaginable?
> – Non. Rien ne me paraît inimaginable.
> – Même de coucher avec lui?
> – Non. Mais ça ne me paraît pas désirable non plus.
> – Ça viendra, va. (page 25)

Once he has decided that Brandon is in love with Josée and that she might have an affair with him, Alan goes everywhere with the Kinnels; he places Josée with Brandon as often as possible, then mentally withdraws to watch the results.

One day Alan and Josée plan to go fishing with Brandon and Eve Kinnel. Just as they reach the dock, Alan, pleading too much sun, asks Eve to drive him home, and rejects Josée's offer to accompany him. Thus he offers her a whole afternoon on the boat with Brandon. Alan is very proud of the success of his scheme until, just as the boat

is leaving, Josée pleads with Brandon to jump back on shore, which he does. Josée then remains on board, while everyone on shore watches her, puzzled. When she returns, the others cannot understand her gaiety, but she remains undaunted by their morose attitude. They have dinner, a silent one except for the jokes which Josée tells, one after another. She is feeling almost like her old self; she even pretends that she made Brandon jump from the boat because she was jealous of Eve and Alan. Then Alan remarks sarcastically that her jokes are very charming, and:

> —J'en ai une très drole, dit Josée, qui vous fera beaucoup rire, mais au dessert. (page 40)

When the dessert arrives, it is a cake with one candle:

> —Une bougie, dit Josée. C'est la première fois que je te trompe. (page 41)

They are all shocked, believing it some crude joke, but then Josée tells them about Ricardo, the sailor on the boat. The others find it hard to believe, but Alan gets up immediately and leaves. Suddenly trembling, Josée changes the topic of conversation, watching Alan depart.

The Kinnels take Josée home, where, frightened of the scene which she knows will take place, she asks Brandon to lend her the money to go back to Paris. Both he and Eve tell her that this would be a very cowardly thing to do. Then, refusing their offer to wait outside for her, she goes into the house to Alan. Since the house is completely dark, Josée hopes that Alan is asleep so that he will not hear her. But, just as she turns on the light, she sees him, sitting on the couch, looking at her. Startled, she begins to stutter, almost tells him that she was lying, but then he tells her very calmly that he has called his lawyer because he wishes a divorce. Josée is

stunned by this announcement, but she feels vaguely saved. She lets him continue to tell her about his call to his mother who has approved his decision. His mother said that she was glad to see him acting like a man at last. It is this remark that upset him; he is so attached to Josée that to divorce her seems the most foolish thing he could do. While Josée is thinking, "il a quelque chose de fou qui me plaît," he suddenly changes. They fall into each others arms, both realizing that a divorce will never take place. This decision comes, however, only as a means of satisfying Alan's morbid love for Josée:

> —Je te garde. Je ne te pardonne pas, dit-il. Je ne te pardonnerai jamais.
> —Je sais, dit-elle. (page 48)

Already enjoying this new reason for jealousy, Alan immediately asks:

> —Il t'a fait plaisir? Dis-moi . . .il t'a fait plaisir?
> (page 48)

Josée stays with Alan, but she can no longer bear to go out, for even a glance is enough to send Alan into a jealous rage which invariably ends in a scene. For his part, Alan has never tired of alluding to her affair with Ricardo:

> . . .si je devais travailler, je me ferais pêcheur et je t'emmènerais sur mon bateau. Il paraît que tu aimes les pêcheurs. . . (page 52)

More than once, Josée regrets Alan's wealth, for he does not have to work. Instead, he spends all the day following her around, never letting her out of his sight. He refuses to let her leave even for a few weeks. Despite her boredom and the general feeling that she is a prisoner, Josée finds something in Alan which strongly attracts her to him, something besides her fear that he will kill himself if she leaves him, that makes her stay with him:

> . . . Alan avait un prestige à ses yeux plus fort que ses tares: il était détaché. Détaché de lui-même jusqu'au suicide qu'il avait déjà manqué par hasard un hiver. Et puis il ne se chérissait pas, il n'avait pas pour lui ces dorlotements affreux des autres gens, il n'avait même pas une bonne idée de lui-même. Il était désarmé devant elle, il disait: "Je te veux et si tu pars, rien ne me consolera, même pas le plaisir de pleurer." Il l'effrayait. Car il lui était indifférent d'être beau alors qu'elle aimait plaire, indifférent d'être riche alors qu'elle aimait dépenser, indifférent d'exister alors qu'elle aimait la vie. Son indifférence ne cédait que devant elle. Et d'une façon si affamée . . . si morbide. (pages 52-53)

Josée has been forced into an acceptance of something that she has always feared, responsibility. Alan has made her responsible not only for his happiness, but also for his life. He is indifferent to everything except her; she is all his interest, his whole life. His morbid love for her is almost suffocating; it will certainly destroy both of them some day. Yet she must accept it, she must continue the horrible game of love, or submit herself to an even greater responsibility - the responsibility for Alan's death - for he will surely kill himself if she leaves him forever. She shrinks before this charge, for she feels that she has done nothing in her life so worthwhile that she can allow herself to be the cause of another's death. She prefers, therefore, to continue to be Alan's "raison d'être" rather than to assume the guilt of a murderess.

Finally, at the end of September, deliverance comes in the form of a telegram from Alan's mother, who is going to have an operation in New York. They immediately pack their baggage to go to her.

Josée goes dutifully to see Alan's mother in the hospital, though she knows that her dislike for her mother-in-law is reciprocated. The operation is not a serious one, but Mrs. Ash, like her son, is very

theatrical. She is now playing the role of a dying woman who is leaving her son and all her worldly possessions to her daughter-in-law. Of Alan, Josée has already noted:

> . . . elle remarqua une fois de plus son goût du théâtre. Il s'adossait pour certaines repliques, repartait à la fin de la scène, semblait toujours sanctionner ses phrases par des mouvements. (page 26)

Now she can no longer stand this artificiality which seems to be a characteristic of the Ash family:

> —Ah, non, dit Josée en se levant. Ah non, j'en ai assez. Je ne vais pas, en plus, gémir sur vous. Vous n'avez pas un vieil oncle, aussi, dans la famille qui ait besoin qu'on le plaigne? (page 60)

When Mrs. Ash begins to question her about Ricardo, Josée rushes out of the room, unable to stand it any longer. She begins to walk aimlessly down the street when she suddenly sees Bernard, who had been so hopelessly in love with her in Paris two years earlier, and who was one of the main characters of Dans un mois, dans un an. They are delighted to see each other, and their first words may reflect Sagan's idea towards marriage:

> —Josée . . . Je te croyais morte.
>
> —Mariée seulement. (page 62)

This is, in fact, the first novel in which Sagan presents a portrait of a married couple, as such, which is far from flattering.

Bernard has at last written a best-seller, for which he has won a prize; now, he has come to New York for the publication of his book. He is now very rich and much less somber in spirit. He invites Josée to have a drink with him while he questions her about her husband. He describes the best and the worst "types" for a husband, but Josée says that neither describes hers. Laughing, he says that

he is not at all surprised that her husband is "un oiseau rare," but just as she is beginning to explain Alan to him, she bursts into tears:

> . . . Elle pleura longtemps sur Alan et elle-même et sur ce qu'ils avaient été l'un pour l'autre, sur ce qui était fini ou qui allait l'être. Car cette rencontre lui avait fait comprendre ce qu'elle refusait de croire depuis six mois: qu'elle s'était trompée. Et elle avait trop de goût pour elle-même, trop de fierté pour supporter de se tromper plus longtemps. Ce cauchemar trop tendre était terminé.
>
> (page 64)

Finally, Josée tells Bernard that she is going to leave Alan, and she begs him to stay with her until his own departure, when she will accompany him back to France. They part after Bernard has promised to have dinner with her and Alan that evening.

While they are dressing for dinner, Josée tells Alan that Bernard is dining with them. He is immediately suspicious:

> —C'est un amant à toi?
> —Non.
> —Tu n'as jamais rien eu avec lui? Il est borgne ou quoi?
>
> (page 67)

Josée resists the urge to shout at Alan that she is going to divorce him, that he should no longer be interested in her past. Instead, she replies simply that Bernard is very nice and that Alan will probably like him. Alan quickly apologizes for the crude question, and Josée is frightened before this sudden change in his personality, fearing that if he becomes nice she will no longer have a reason to leave him. The success of her plan, or the achievement of his complete unhappiness, depends entirely on him, much as Anne's attitude controlled Cécile's plans. Josée fears his kindness just as Cécile feared Anne's. If she cannot hate Alan, she will never be able to leave him, since she knows that the final result will be his suicide:

> Ne deviens pas humain, pensa Josée, ne commence pas à changer, ne m'enlève pas mes armes ni mes bonnes raisons pour te quitter. Ne me fais pas ça. Elle n'aurait peut-être plus le courage de le quitter et il le fallait. Il le fallait absolument. Maintenant qu'elle s'y était décidée, qu'elle avait entrevu sa vie sans lui, elle vivait en plein vertige au bord des mots. Tant qu'elle ne les aurait pas dits, rien ne serait fait, sa décision n'existait pas. (page 68)

Then, in an excess of honesty, Josée admits that she has had a brief, three-day affair with Bernard in Poitiers. Alan remembers that she has told him this before, an admission she does not remember having made. But Alan says, showing his morbid interest in everything that concerns her, his exacting possessiveness:

> —Tu m'as dit plein de choses. Ce que je ne sais pas de toi, c'est que tu l'as oublié toi-même. Je t'ai tout arraché. (page 69)

Now that Alan has definitely placed Bernard in Josée's past, she is apprehensive about the dinner they are to share, and she begs Alan:

> . . . sois assez gentil pour ne pas insulter Bernard. (page 69)

When Bernard arrives, Josée feels at first that her apprehensions have been in vain, for the two men seem to get along quite well. Suddenly she realizes that she has been so preoccupied with her thoughts that she has forgotten to watch the cocktail shaker. It is only when she sees that Alan is unable to extract a cigarette from his package that she is struck by the fact that he is almost drunk. She usually watches him very closely, for he drinks almost constantly, but tonight she has forgotten. She immediately proposes that they go to dinner, but Alan insists on a last toast, which Bernard, who is aware of the state of his host, refuses. Alan becomes angry and insists on the toast, so Josée, in order to avoid a fight, offers

to drink with Alan and begs Bernard to accept also. They all drink, making ironic little toasts:

> —À Poitiers, dit Alan et il vida son verre d'un trait.
>
> Bernard leva son verre.
>
> —À Key-West, dit-il. Une politesse en vaut une autre.
>
> —À cette charmante soirée, dit Josée.
>
> Et elle éclata de rire. (page 71)

The dinner proceeds well, though Josée feels that she is living a nightmare as she is handed from one to the other of her companions to dance. They start home almost at sunrise. Just before their arrival, Alan tells the taxi driver to find a bar, for he wishes to talk to his "ami" Bernard. Bernard is a bit shocked when Alan proposes that they forget Josée, that they pretend that he, Alan, is just a drunk that Bernard, whom he wishes to call Jean, has met in the bar. Alan first asks Bernard his ideas about love, then procedes to present his problem, startling both Josée and Bernard by his perception:

> . . .Eh bien moi, je suis amoureux. D'une femme. De ma femme. Amoureux d'une manière sadique et dévorante. Que dois-je faire? Elle songe à me quitter. . .Je vais vous expliquer ce que je crois. L'amour on le cherche. On se met à deux pour le chercher. Il se trouve que l'un des deux le possède. Dans ce cas, c'était moi. Ma femme a été ravie. Elle venait comme une biche manger dans ma main ce fruit tendre et inépuisable. C'était la seule biche que je supportasse de nourrir. . .Bref, ma femme s'est gavée, ma femme a envie d'autre chose ou ne supporte pas que je la nourisse de force. Et pourtant j'ai toujours ce fruit qui me pèse dans la paume et que je veux lui donner. Que faire? (pages 74-75)

Josée is stung by his analysis of her because she recognizes its accuracy:

> . . .Il était vrai qu'elle s'était nourrie de l'amour d'Alan, qu'elle y avait trouvé une raison de vivre — ou une occupation, pensa-t-elle furtivement. Il était vrai qu'elle n'en pouvait plus. Qu'elle ne voulait plus être "nourrie de force" comme il disait. (page 76)

Alan then begins to talk of Bernard's own family situation, his adoring wife who bores him, his love for Josée:

> —Donc, votre femme vous ennuie, mon cher Jean. Il y a longtemps, vous avez aimé Josée, enfin vous avez cru que vous pourriez l'aimer, elle vous a cédé, vous avez joué ensemble une comédie triste et sentimentale, sur la même note. Car vos violons s'accordent bien, sur le mode mineur, s'entend. (page 76)

Josée wishes desperately that she could contradict this statement, but it is all too true. She can no longer bear the discussion, and since they have "forgotten" her anyway, she leaves hurriedly, jumps into a taxi, and gives the address of a hotel she knows only by name. She has at last escaped Alan; she is going home. That night, her last in America, she suddenly realizes how far she has gone:

> Seulement, lorsqu'elle eut commandé un billet d'avion pour Paris, une brosse à dents et du dentifrice - le tout pour l'après-midi même, lorsqu'elle se fut couchée en chien de fusil, le jour pénétrant vaguement dans la chambre anonyme, elle se mit à trembler de froid, de fatigue et d'absence. Elle avait l'habitude de dormir le long d'Alan; et pendant une demi-heure, le temps qu'elle s'endorme, sa vie lui apparut une vaste catastrophe. (page 78)

Once in Paris, Josée finds that she wants to go to the country to try to gather the pieces of her life, so she rents a house in Normandy. But she can think only of Alan, wondering what he is doing, if he really misses her or if he has already found someone to take her place. Then one day the postman arrives, for the first time, bringing a telegram to her:

> . . .T'attends d'urgence Paris. Tendresses. Bernard. (page 84)

Bernard, putting himself in Josée's place, has quickly found her, gaining time on the detectives employed in the same search by Alan, who has accompanied Bernard to Paris. Alan knows that Josée came to Paris; he is sure that she will eventually get in touch with Bernard. He therefore follows Bernard constantly, completely attaches himself to his wife's former lover. Now Bernard is beginning to realize what Josée has been going through while she lived with Alan, so he begs her:

> . . .je t'en supplie, fais quelque chose. Divorce ou fuis au Brésil. Mais ne me laisse pas Alan sur le dos. Il ne me quitte pas. Il a presque de l'amitié pour moi en attendant de me haïr si tu m'adresses la parole. Je n'en peux plus. (pages 88-89)

Then, in another discussion about Alan, Bernard says:

> . . .C'est un drôle de type. Quand je le quitte et que je pense qu'il se promène tout seul dans Paris, j'ai des frissons. Il m'a fait découvrir chez moi un instinct maternel que j'ignorais. (page 90)

Bernard leaves Josée after she promises to go to a cocktail party at Séverin's that same afternoon. She spends the time before the party unpacking, giving herself no time to think. The news that Alan is in Paris looking for her has completely unnerved her; she feels incapable of deciding her own fate. Though she has shown a great deal more initiative than Dominique in Un certain sourire and Léopold in Les violons parfois, she still prefers to be led, to be chosen, to make as few decisions as possible.

At the party Josée sees a lot of old friends and begins to enjoy herself. Then, as a Negro entertainer begins to sing, she starts to look around for Bernard, hoping for news of Alan:

> . . .Elle vit d'abord un soulier noir, très ciré, qui étincelait dans l'ombre, puis le pli d'un pantalon, puis sur ce pantalon, à plat, une main. C'était la main d'Alan. À

> présent, elle sentait son regard sur elle, elle n'avait qu'à tourner la tête pour le rencontrer mais quelque chose en elle s'affolait. L'idée stupide, bourgeoise, qu'elle l'avait quitté, qu'il avait des droits sur elle et qu'il allait les proclamer, faire une scène peut-être chez Séverin qu'il ne connaissait pas. . . . Près d'elle, contre elle, respirait doucement cet étranger, cet homme qui ne comprenait rien à cette soirée et que ce mauvais chanteur ennuyait sûrement aussi, cet amant qu'elle n'avait pas vu depuis un mois. Dans le noir, près d'elle, ne lui disant rien, n'osant peut-être rien lui dire: Alan. . . En même temps éclatait dans sa tête l'évidence que lui seul, étranger parmi ses pairs, ses amis à elle, Josée, lui était proche, non pas seulement physiquement mais par un passé indéniable, irratrapable en cette seconde et qui reduisait à rien l'expression de gaieté, de liberté qu'elle avait eue dix minutes plus tôt. (pages 97-98)

Finally, Alan speaks. He was really looking for Bernard who was to have found Josée for him. Josée realizes that they must leave immediately, therefore, as soon as she has introduced her husband to Séverin, they leave together. Alan asks, rather shyly, if he may accompany her to her hotel. As they walk, Josée tries to think of nothing, but Alan feels the urge to talk, to explain himself to Josée. In his speech there might also be found Sagan's own view of life:

> —C'est idiot, Josée, tu sais. Qui a demandé à vivre? C'est comme si on nous avait invités à passer le week-end dans une maison de campagne, pleine de trappes et de parquets glissants, une maison où nous cherchions en vain le maître de maison, Dieu ou n'importe quoi d'autre. Mais il n'y a personne. Un week-end, oui, pas plus. Comment veux-tu qu'on ait le temps de se comprendre, de s'aimer, de se connaître? Quelle est cette sinistre blague? Rien, tu te rends compte. Un jour, il n'y aura plus rien. Le noir. L'absence. La mort. (page 103)

It is only when Alan is with Josée that he does not entertain this morbid view of existence. Josée gives a meaning to his life, a meaning

which disappears when she is not there. Therefore, he watches her constantly; he lives only for her because life would be nothing without her. He lives only as long as she lives; the thought that she could have been killed had the airplane crashed fills him with fear. This is his only fear, that she may die and leave him alone.

Just before they reach Josée's hotel, Alan, who is staying at the Ritz, leaves her after extracting from her a promise to come to see him early the next morning. Once more, Josée is unsure of herself. She no longer knows if a divorce is what she really wants, for she is still very attracted to Alan. It is really a divorce from their life, from the type of life that they lead, that she wants and needs. But Alan has found her weakness, love, and he has based everything on that:

> . . .Je t'aime, tu n'es plus sûre de ne plus m'aimer, j'ai besoin de toi et qu'as-tu à perdre? (page 105)

He is right, and Josée must admit this. But she loves other things, too. If she could live only for him as he lives only for her, they would be happy, but at present he only succeeds in poisoning her existence by his suffocating, demanding love.

The next morning, she goes to the Ritz to talk to Alan about the divorce that she wishes. He is very gay and refuses to discuss it seriously. Then suddenly they are in each other's arms, reunited by the one thing they have in common, the one real bond between them, making love. Both realize that this is a reconciliation, so Alan promises to seek a lodging for them the next day.

They find a very nice apartment, though Alan would much prefer to be back in Key West. He realizes, however, that Josée needs to be with people for a while, with her old friends. As soon as she is tired of them, he plans to return to Florida with her. Josée,

under no illusion that Alan might have changed, does not relish this idea:

> . . . Et quand nous repartirons dans un endroit tranquille, tu te rappelleras le nom de mes gens, comme tu dis, tu me poseras des questions et tu me diras: Pourquoi as-tu offert des chips à Séverin le vendredi 9 octobre? Couchais-tu avec? (page 110)

Josée watches Alan almost as closely as he watches her - to be sure that he does not drink too much, become disagreeable, or make a scene in some friend's home. Alan, on the other hand, plays admirably well the role of an innocent young American husband, enchanted by France and the French friends of his wife, eager to absorb as much culture as possible. This attitude, though an affected one, coupled with his handsomeness, conquers all the people he meets. They cannot understand why Josée does not seem to get along with him very well; he would seem to be a model husband.

They have started their new life together on new bases, though neither believes that the other will change. Still, the unspoken decision is there:

> . . . En fait, pour Alan, c'était: Tu admets que je doive partager toute ta vie, et pour Josée: Tu admets que tu n'es pas toute la vie. (page 113)

Though he allows - or seems to allow - her more freedom, Josée never makes a move that Alan does not follow with his eyes. He is always there, always watching her, even to the point of ignoring other people at a party. He lives with the fear that she will run away from him again. As for Josée, she feels haunted by Alan, and she wonders why she has stayed with him, since he has not really changed. Yet she does; she continues an existence which is slowly smothering her; and even she is not sure why:

> . .. .. .il y avait le lit et elle s' étonnait que cela existe encore, que cela survive à sa fatigue. . . .
> Sans doute elle ne restait pas à cause de ça, mais serait-elle restée sans ça? (page 114)

They continue to see Bernard often, and he tries to keep Josée amused. This is an almost impossible task, for she is constantly aware of Alan's presence, of his eyes following her. She has become almost like a puppet, going where she is led, trying to please everyone. Bernard feels that the only really independent thing she has done is the affair with Ricardo, the fisherman.

Josée and Alan are so completely opposite that they can never understand each other. Each hopes to change the other, but their common interests and pleasures are so completely physical that they remain strangers in every other respect. Josée can, however, describe Alan's philosophy with reasonable accuracy:

> . . .Alan est persuadé que chaque être humain patauge dans sa boue originelle, que rien ne peut l' en tirer, et surtout pas les gestes vagues et les mots incompréhensibles qu' il s' évertue à faire ou à prononcer chaque jour. En ce sens, il est lui-même irréductible, incommunicable. (pages 116-117)

Of her own philosophy, she says:

> —Moi, je ne crois pas à cette nullité. Cette sorte de pathétique m' assomme. Personne n' est noyé. Je crois que chaque homme dessine sa vie à grands gestes volontaires, d' une manière éclatante et définitive. Je ne suis pas sensible à la grisaille. Je vois des sentiments lyriques partout, qu' ils s' appellent l' ennui, l' amour, le cafard ou la paresse. Bref. . . Bref, je ne crois pas que nous soyons des numéros. Mais plutôt des animaux vivants, des animaux lyriques. (page 117)

One day, at a party, Alan tells Josée that he has met a former friend, with whom he had learned to paint at the university. Now that they are installed in their apartment, he has decided to recommence his painting, a skill for which he professes no talent,

just an interest which will occupy his days. Josée is enchanted. At last he has found something that will interest him for at least a little while, something besides her. He plans to work in an empty room of their apartment in the afternoons, leaving Josée to amuse herself - preferably alone, of course. He remains a "gentleman" painter, never affecting the usual costume of artists; he does little actual painting; and he never gets any paint on his immaculate suit. But Josée is very happy anyway, for at last she has a certain degree of freedom. Alan would be surprised to know just what she does with her few free hours every afternoon. She drives through the streets until she comes to a square which has a particularly pretty tree; there she sits, watching the passers-by, looking at the tree, listening to the radio in the car. She sees no one, talks to no one, but it is during these afternoons that she feels that she really lives. True, it is a dream life, but Alan is the only thing that she feels attaches her to reality, and she would like to spend the rest of her existence in this dream world, with time suspended.

Alan also lives apart from reality, occupying himself only with Josée and their life together, never really aware of even the existence of others except in so much as their existence affects his or Josée's. He is the center of his universe, and he sees things only in relation to himself. But in this universe of which he is the center, he is only a moon, not really alive, not really engaged in anything, only a reflection of the sun, Josée, without which he does not exist at all, cannot even be seen. He is a perfect example of the existentialist's idea of a man "non-engagé." For Alan is certainly not "engagé"; his life has no meaning, no purpose. He simply lives, or exists, waiting for death, when he will disappear into nothingness, never having achieved an essence. Once, talking about his always

spotless suit after an afternoon of painting, he says, ". . .j'ai horreur de me salir les mains." He seems here almost an echo of the idealistic hero of Sartre's Les Mains Sales, Hugo, who seeks the state of "engagement," but lacks the touch with reality, the real interest in living, which would furnish it to him. Hugo exhibits the same taste for the theatrical that has been noted in Alan; he feels that life is one big play in a universe which has no meaning. In Sartre's play, Hugo is opposed by a realistic hero, Hoederer, who sums up very well Hugo's lack of purpose, lack of touch with reality, lack of "engagement." Might one not address these same words to Alan?

> . . .Comme tu as peur de te salir les mains. . .Vous autres, les intellectuels, les anarchistes bourgeois, vous en tirez prétexte pour ne rien faire. Ne rien faire, rester immobile, serrer les coudes contre le corps, porter des gants. Moi j'ai les mains sales. Jusqu'aux coudes. Je les ai plongées dans la merde et dans le sang. [1]

It is true of Alan just as it is true of Hugo. Alan also is afraid to mix in humanity. Like most of Sagan's characters, he is not "engagé," but unlike most of them, he has given up. He no longer even tries to give a meaning to his existence. Josée is his only link with reality, just as at times he is hers. This is the essential difference between them. Josée is still seeking a meaning for her life; she is restless; her "ennui" stems from her lack of "engagement." With Alan, she knows that she will never find this meaning, for he is resigned, convinced that life is meaningless, that a purpose is useless, for one always ends in nothingness. For him, life is unreal, a play, a comedy even, in which man is the object of amusement, running around like a rat in a maze, bumping into thousands of obstacles, but always arriving at the same point from which he departed, accomplishing nothing.

According to Sartre's philosophy, man's existence precedes his essence, and, though Sartre never writes of the man perfectly engaged, his characters are constantly striving to give meaning to their lives. Sagan's characters, on the other hand, are prevented in their search by an overpowering "ennui" which forces them to accept idle and useless lives, which turns them into what Sartre would call people of bad faith. They refuse to accept the freedom which will allow them to create their own essence. Rather, they lead passive existences, accepting the values of others: just as Cécile readily accepted her father's way of life, assuming his values without making a choice, and as Dominique resigned herself to always be led, always be chosen, unwilling to exercise her freedom. The existentialist man exists by choosing freely, and if he accepts the values of others, he denies his freedom and remains unengaged, since these values are for him unauthentic. In Sagan's characters this denial stems from their "ennui." Alan's lack of touch with reality might be well expressed in these words of Hugo in Les Mains Sales:

> Il n'y a rien que je puisse être sinon un mort avec six pieds de terre par-dessus la tête. Tout ça je vous le dis, c'est de la comédie. . . . Tout ça! Tout ce que je vous dis là. Vous croyez peut-être que je suis désespéré? Pas du tout: je joue la comédie du désespoir. Est-ce qu'on peut en sortir?[2]

For the existentialist man, the look of another person - the "regard" - reveals to him that he does not exist alone. He must fight to maintain his freedom, for he looses it under the "regard" of another, as this "regard" reduces him to an object and destroys his self-created essence. It is in this sense that one must interpret Sartre's statement in Huis-clos, "l'enfer, c'est les Autres." Their very presence places a responsibility on man, a responsibility which Sagan's characters are usually unwilling to assume. The only

retaliation to this "regard" is to reverse the situation and reduce the other person to an object, also. From a feeling of shame as an object, man can thus rise to a feeling of pride as an observer. This feeling does not last, however, for he can become an object again under another "regard." This frustration in human relations can have many results. For Alan, the result is masochism. He wishes to become completely an object for Josée, who is an object for him. His willingness to do this causes him shame and guilt, for he has denied his freedom, his essence. As a masochist, however, he enjoys these feelings and encourages them. He senses failure only in that he can never become completely an object for Josée, and he retaliates almost sadistically in an effort to destroy her freedom through sexual desire, transforming her into an object of flesh, negating her essence, and recreating her as an assertion of his own superiority, since he has failed to create an essence for himself. But Alan cannot become Josée, and once again he has failed, for neither can he assume her essence as his own. As Sartre says in Huis-clos, "Tu n'es rien d'autre que ta vie." Man, then, seeks constantly to realize his own essence. In Dans un mois, dans un an, Sagan writes that when we see others we look only at their eyes, in order to see ourselves reflected there. With her characters, this reflection is humiliating, for they are not engaged, their reflection is simply one of nothingness. Just as their "ennui" results from their lack of engagement, it also prevents them from creating their own essence, for they are too busy striving to alleviate their boredom or to forget it in an easy, meaningless life aimed at nothing more than pleasure. They are merely killing time until it will kill them.

For a while, Josée is very happy, enjoying her freedom to the fullest extent. Alan seems very content with his painting, and

he has even stopped asking her so many questions. Then one day she tells him how glad she is that he has found something that interests him, even if he does only play at it, and:

> . . .C'est en tout cas aussi bien que de rester des heures dans une voiture à regarder un square.
>
> . . .elle s'arrêta. Comment sais-tu que je . . . que . . . .mon square. . .?
>
> —Je te fais suivre, dit-il. Qu'est-ce que tu crois? Elle le regarda, sidérée. Ce n'était pas de la colère qu'elle ressentait mais plutôt une horrible tranquillité. Allons, rien n'avait changé, la vie continuait. (pages 124-125)

Now that Josée knows the truth, Alan begins to ask her what, or whom, she thinks about during those hours she spends alone on the square. The ensuing argument sends Josée rushing angrily from the apartment and leads Alan to a drunken stupor.

One day Bernard, who is still a constant visitor at the apartment of Josée and Alan, informs Alan that an older woman, Laura Dort, has fallen in love with him, Alan. Alan shows little interest in her, and when Josée remarks that if Alan had an affair it would at least change their life a little, he only laughs. They have all begun to laugh at Alan's jealousy; in fact, he laughs too, but he does not change. That evening they go to a party at Laura's, and she immediately traps Alan. Bernard wisely advises Josée to at least pretend to be jealous, but she knows that Alan would see through such a pretense. Actually, she does not wish her husband to have an affair with Laura, but she has not yet decided what she wants to do. She cannot think of leaving him; nor can she think of staying with him. Just before they leave the party, Laura tells her that she has invited Alan to her country home for the week end, if Josée will accept. Josée is delighted, and Alan seems genuinely

impressed by Laura. Josée is shocked that he should find her so, for in Josée's eyes Laura lacks the principal qualities, "l'humour et le désintéressement." Still, Laura has managed to put Alan into a good mood, and for this Josée is thankful.

The week end starts very well. Josée remembers the last time she spent a week end at Laura's, four years earlier. She was with Marc, her lover of that time, and the happy memory makes her a little sad. That night, she makes an allusion to her former visit, and Alan immediately shows interest, for she has never told him anything about her affair with Marc. When he questions her, though, she only responds that she visited Laura before with friends. Alan is sure, however, that his suspicions are not unfounded, and he resolves that he will find out everything about that former visit very soon.

The next day Laura proposes to show her attic to Alan. As they start to leave, she says that she is sure that Josée does not wish to come, as she has already seen it. Josée realizes that Laura is threatening her, as four years ago she had caught Josée and Marc in a rather compromising situation in the attic. Furious and refusing to allow herself to be intimidated, Josée responds quickly:

> —Vous parlez du grenier où j'ai couché avec Marc? dit-elle paisiblement.
> Il y eut un silence consterné. Josée se tourna vers Alan.
>
> —Je ne sais pas si je t'en ai parlé. Un nommé Marc, quand j'avais vingt ans. Laura te donnera des détails.
> (page 142)

The other guests are shocked, but Alan replies that his wife's past concerns no one except her, and he manages to make a graceful exit, playing the role of the loving, indulgent husband. But afterwards, "il ne fut question que de Marc deux mois." She tries to minimize it

as a very unimportant affair, but Alan is not so easily satisfied.

During this time, Alan continues to see Laura very often. She becomes very interested in his painting and tells him that he does have talent. Bernard reproaches Alan for his treatment of Laura, who is really in love with him, and whom he is simply encouraging. Bernard feels that Josée should do something about the situation, for everyone is making fun of Laura. Finally, his anger getting the best of him, he asks Josée when she plans to leave Alan. Alan then hits Bernard, and the two begin to fight. They accomplish little, however, as both have been drinking, and Josée soon separates them. During the ensuing apologies, Alan announces that he is going to exhibit his paintings under the patronage of Laura. It seems that she has brought a critic, a very good critic, to see Alan's work, which he has thought worth exhibiting. Both Josée and Bernard are astonished, and as Josée goes with Bernard to the door, he remarks that now he regrets having helped Alan to find Josée. He says:

> . . .Je le croyais un peu fou mais gentil. Il n'est pas gentil et il est complètement fou. (page 149)

That night, Josée cannot sleep. She arises and goes into the living room where she sits in a chair in front of the window, watching "les merveilleux nuages," thinking of the sky and clouds that she saw during her flight from New York to Paris:

> . . .Elle avait éprouvé un curieux désir alors, celui de se baigner dans cette mer de nuages, ce mélange d'air, d'eau et de vent qu'elle imaginait sur sa peau, léger et doux, enveloppant comme certains souvenirs d'enfance. Il y avait quelque chose d'incroyable dans ces paysages du ciel, quelque chose qui réduisait votre vie à un rêve idiot "empli de bruit et de fureur," rêve accompli aux dépens de cette sérénité poétique qui comblait les yeux et aurait dû être la vraie vie. Seule, être seule sur une plage, étendue, laissant passer le temps, comme elle l'entendait passer en ce moment dans

> cette pièce déserte, que l'aube hésitait à découvrir. Échapper à la vie, à ce que les autres appelaient la vie, échapper aux sentiments, à ses propres qualités, à ses propres défauts, être seulement une respiration provisoire sur la millionième partie d'un des milliards de galaxies. (page 151)

One cannot help being reminded of a similar passage in Bonjour Tristesse, in which Cécile described the healing effect of the sea, the sun, the clouds, under the influence of which all her problems seemed to disappear:

> Dès l'aube, j'étais dans l'eau, une eau fraîche et transparente où je m'enfouissais, où je m'épuisais en des mouvements désordonnés pour me laver de toutes les ombres, de toutes les poussières de Paris. [3]

This might also well reflect Sagan's own sentiments or explain her great love for the sea, for a warm climate.

Alan finally has the showing for his paintings, and it is a huge success. Josée is very happy for him, for he seems to be genuinely interested in his art and very pleased to receive so many compliments. Laura is constantly in evidence, taking as much pride in the success as if she had done the work herself. Josée manages to escape the exhibition for a few minutes with Séverin who, like Bernard, begins to criticize Alan's treatment of Laura. When he realizes that Josée is very nervous with him and is constantly looking around to see if Alan is watching them, Séverin bursts out with what can only be Sagan's own view of marriage:

> —Ne deviens pas bourgeoise. Tu as épousé celui-là. Et pas les autres. Et alors? (page 157)

Angry, Josée leaves him, looking for Alan to reassure her that they are right and that it is the others who fail to understand them. For once, she feels that she really needs Alan. But she does not tell him. Instead, she talks to him about the showing and is a little

shocked when he tells her that he knows that his painting is really worthless, that he is not interested in it as he had pretended to be, that he did it only because she seemed so happy that he was interested in something besides himself and her. This attitude reminds one of Cécile who, trying to please Anne, who wanted her to take an interest in studying, talked about an essay she was writing on Pascal, an essay she never even began, and then was shocked and hurt when Anne accused her of lying. Like Alan, she had done it only "pour lui faire plaisir."

That evening, after the showing, Laura gives a party for Alan. During the party, Josée suddenly feels the desire to shock everyone, to do something reckless, a feeling she has not had since the episode with Ricardo. She feels very good, very much alive. She begins first to drink; then, just as she is trying to explain herself to Séverin, Marc walks in. This has undoubtedly been planned by Laura, who has always felt very smug with the knowledge of Josée's former affair with Marc. Josée and Marc immediately begin to talk, evoking shared memories. But now Laura feels the necessity to let Alan know that it is the Marc to whom his wife is talking, so she calls Josée over for a minute, cleverly adding that she is so sorry to have to drag her away from Marc. Alan is immediately all ears and wastes no time in asking Josée what is going on. She responds simply that they are talking about old times and that Alan has promised not to be jealous tonight. Then, for a few minutes, she denies any responsibility for Alan or his actions, thinking:

> . . . Qu'il barbouille des toiles sans y croire, qu'il pousse Laura au suicide, qu'il fasse ce qu'il veut. (page 169)

Thus relieved for a while of her charge, feeling extremely free and gay, she gives herself up to a repetition of the episode with Ricardo,

only this time it is with Marc. She only wonders vaguely if Alan has noticed their brief absence from the room. This is perhaps one of the few instances in which Sagan could be called crude.

Josée goes back to the party, half-realizing what she has done, but seemingly unable to stop herself. Thus she tells Marc that she will be glad to see him the next day. She is sure that no one has suspected her infidelity:

> . . . qui pourrait croire que, le jour de l'exposition de son jeune et beau mari, Josée Ash ferait l'amour à moitié habillée dans une salle de bains de cinq mètres carrés avec un vieil ami qu'elle n'aimait pas? Qu'elle n'avait jamais aimé? Même Alan n'y penserait pas.
>
> (page 172)

She seems bent on self-destruction, on destroying everything that she and Alan possess, on making a complete mockery of their marriage. Now she has even surpassed the vilest suspicions of Alan. Once before, in speaking of Alan's jealousy, she said, "Je n'arriverais jamais à être aussi insupportable que lui." But has she not succeeded now? She has repaid his jealousy with infidelity; the two are not equal.

The next day Josée takes a great pleasure in the meeting with Marc, sure that she is still being followed by the private detective whom Alan hired when they first moved into the apartment. Even she does not know why she is doing this, for she certainly prefers Alan to Marc. Yet something seems to be pushing her to destroy the last remnants of her marriage.

When she returns to the apartment, Josée is sure that Alan will have already had the detective's report, and she waits quietly for the scene that she knows is inevitable. Finally, when she can bear it no longer, she asks him about it. But Alan only laughs, telling her that he has fired the detective, for their friends are only

too willing to inform him of the slightest indiscretion on Josée's part. She suddenly relaxes then, as the reason behind her actions becomes clear to her. She has a choice; she can tell him what his detective would have told him, or she can forget it and consider herself lucky. But this is exactly why she did it; it is for this moment that she has been waiting. So she begins to tell Alan about her afternoon with Marc, omitting no detail, no word, no gesture, relieving herself of a great feeling of responsibility in the telling. Alan says nothing at first; he is stunned. Then even he seems to realize that it is all over:

> —Qu'ai-je fait, murmurait-il, qu'ai-je fait de toi, qu'avons-nous fait?
>
> Elle ne répondit pas, elle ne bougeait pas; elle écoutait un grand vide s'installer en elle.
>
> —Je voulais tout de toi, dit-il encore, et le pire.
> —Je ne pouvais plus, dit-elle simplement. (page 185)

For once he has no questions; he knows that it was a great mistake for her to tell him. This, then, is what she has become. She had to do this, to show Alan that their marriage was finished, for she could never find the courage to tell him, to leave him. It has always been unreal to her, and they both know what she means when she says, "le jeu est fini."

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[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mains Sales (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1948), p. 203.

[2] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[3] Françoise Sagan, Bonjour Tristesse (Paris: René Julliard, 1954), p. 15.

CHAPTER VI

CHÂTEAU EN SUÈDE

(1960)

In this play, her first attempt in the field of drama, Sagan demonstrates a talent for comedy that has remained hidden in her novels. Although the theme of "ennui" is still predominant, Sagan herself seems uninvolved, a spectator at her own play. Indeed, it seems that she might have represented herself in this play, in the person of the old grandmother who says nothing, but sits and watches and, one might suspect, often laughs at the curious antics of her children.

The action takes place in a chateau in Sweden, as the title suggests. Hugo Falsen, married to a young girl named Mathilde, has fallen in love with Éléonore. Since divorce is unheard-of in the Falsen family, he has ingeniously announced the death of his first wife, invited all her relatives to her funeral (which she was allowed to watch from a window), waited a decent interval, and married Éléonore. Since Mathilde is now dead, she cannot leave the chateau, so she wanders about, talking to herself, until they begin to call her Ophélie, which quickly supplants her real name.

This chateau is unlike any other in Sweden. Hugo's sister, Agathe, who owns two-thirds of the land, has a great passion for the eighteenth century, and she insists that everyone wear costumes of that epoch. In addition, there are no modern conveniences in the chateau; indeed, they live as though it were the eighteenth century! They are all constantly afraid that one day Agathe will see Hugo's tractor and take it for some horrible instrument of punishment.

When Éléonore married Hugo, she brought Sébastien, her brother, who goes everywhere with her and is an admitted parasite. An utterly useless person, he is nonetheless charming and at times quite witty. His attitude toward the whole situation is a rather sarcastic one, but he accepts his lot cheerfully, for it costs him nothing.

Every winter, someone comes to visit the Falsens at their chateau. This year, it is a distant cousin, Frédéric Falsen. Ophélie seems to have known him many years before at Stockholm, so it is decided that she be kept away from him, lest Hugo's bigamy be discovered. Poor Ophélie spends so much of her time alone in her room that she seems more a ghost than a real person anyway, and Agathe utters a masterpiece of understatement when she says of her: "Il faut dire que cette pauvre Ophélie devient étrange . . . ."

When Frédéric arrives, he shocks everyone by his costume; he is, of course, dressed in the latest fashion. Agathe runs from the room, horrified, while Hugo explains her mania and suggests that Frédéric change into something more "appropriate" as soon as possible.

Frédéric quickly develops a passion for Éléonore who, while not encouraging him, does not discourage him either. He runs into Ophélie often, and is told that she has recently lost her husband and is a little strange. Everyone seems to worry most about the snow, and Frédéric cannot understand why everyone keeps telling him: "il va bientôt neiger!" They are all afraid that the snow will come before he leaves, thus obliging him to spend the winter with them. They are really a tightly-knit little group, though they do not get along very well with each other. They are essentially alike, with the possible exception of Hugo. Their lives

are very superficial, almost as unreal as the eighteenth century atmosphere they affect. Éléonore might well be describing all of them when she says of herself:

> . . .Je n'ai de ma vie éprouvé le moindre sentiment passionné pour qui que ce soit, et j'en suis ravie: J'ai horreur des débordements. Mon frère me plaît et m'amuse, j'aime bien Hugo. C'est tout. La chose qui m'intéresse le plus dans la journée est mon maquillage: j'y passe une heure. J'ai eu quinze liaisons avant d'épouser Hugo, elles m'ont distraite et excédée, dans l'ordre. (page 39)

To keep Frédéric from seeing Ophélie, Sébastien spends a lot of time playing cards with her. She takes a child-like pleasure in the game and in his company, for he is really the only one who pays any attention to her. But Sébastien, like his sister, has little real interest in the world. He is happiest when he is putting forth the least possible effort. As he says of himself:

> La chasse aux perdrix, la chasse à l'argent, la chasse aux femmes. Ça occupe tout le monde, sauf moi. (page 40)

He does, however, find it very amusing that Frédéric is so enamoured of Éléonore. In this passion, Frédéric seems very young and inexperienced, and one can almost hear the echo of the young Simon of Aimez-vous Brahms when Frédéric says of Éleonore, "il me la faut."

After many entreaties, Frédéric finally declares to Éléonore that he can wait no longer, for he really loves her. She surrenders, though she reminds him that she does not love him, and arranges to meet him that night at two o'clock. The meeting starts badly, for Ophélie and Sébastien have planned to meet to play cards in the same place at the same hour. Frédéric is enraged, for he cannot make Ophélie understand that her presence is highly undesirable.

They are soon joined by Sébastien who pretends that Frédéric wants to play cards with them. Finally Éléonore arrives, saying:

> Mais c'est une réunion! Cher Frédéric, moi qui croyais vous trouver seul. (page 50)

The two couples finally separate and all seems well, but Frédéric worries about what Sébastien might tell Hugo. Éléonore comforts him, telling him that Sébastien will tell ". . . Tout ce qui lui passe par la tête. Mais la vérité lui passe rarement par la tête." Frédéric is happy at last, but vaguely uncomfortable upon realizing that he is not the object of Éléonore's self-descriptive remark: ". . . j'ai toujours voulu quelque chose."

ACT II

Éléonore and Sébastien enjoy discussing Frédéric's infatuation with Éléonore. Her little winter love affairs are no more rare, it seems, than are the guests who flock to the Falsen chateau each year. It seems, in fact, that Éléonore and Sébastien have a little game that they play every year with their unsuspecting guest of the moment. Sébastien hints at this when he says, speaking of Hugo's awareness of the situation between his wife and Frédéric:

> . . . Il se doute de quelque chose, je crois, et je l'encourage vivement dans cette voie. (page 54)

Éléonore is not the least shocked by this announcement; she only encourages him not to be too hasty and spoil the game. The two are very close; they seem to understand each other without the necessity of words. This is disconcerting to those around them, for they are very unlike brother and sister. At one point, Frédéric asks Sébastien:

> . . . Comment avez-vous vécu, mon cher, les deux années où vous avez vécu sans Eléonore, lorsqu'elle n'était pas née? (page 55)

Although Frédéric is finally happy to be Éléonore's lover, he would like her to pay more attention to him during the daytime also. He loves her, but for her he seems to be only an object of pleasure which she tends to forget when she does not need it. He cannot understand this woman who feels nothing, truly interests herself in nothing, but all he says is:

> Au fond je me plains d'un vieux mal pour les amants: "l'indifférence." (page 57)

This indifference is one of Éléonore's most significant characteristics. Her basic "ennui" makes her indifferent to everything, even life itself. She and her brother are content to play games with human lives in order to combat their "ennui," human lives to which they are completely indifferent.

Frédéric does not want Hugo to find out about the affair between himself and Éléonore, but he cannot help being insulted that Hugo thinks such a thing impossible. For his part, Hugo begins to wonder why Frédéric is so interested in Éléonore's opinion of him; Frédéric, fearing he has said too much, quickly leaves his host before he traps himself in his own deceit. He must now spend the winter with them, for he has ignored their warnings and allowed himself to stay past the first snowfall, one which will keep the chateau isolated for the rest of the winter. As is his custom, just after this snowfall, Sébastien comes to make a little speech to Hugo in which he excuses himself for imposing on the latter's hospitality, blaming his prolonged visit on the weather. This he does only to relieve himself of any responsibility for himself or his actions. He must blame everything

on something, even on the weather if need be. At Hugo's astonished response, he tries to explain:

> . . .À chaque chute de neige, je me sens contraint par autre chose que ma paresse à rester ici. Ça me repose. Ça repose ma conscience. (page 63)

By now everyone has decided that Ophélie is really mad, and they no longer try to hide her from Frédéric (whom she has already seen very often). She even talks to Hugo about the way he has treated her, about her funeral, and about his love for Éléonore. Most of her time, however, is spent in Sébastien's company.

Éléonore always appears to be very fond of Hugo, and this is very unpleasant for Frédéric. He does not like to leave her alone with her husband, nor does he know just what to say to her when the three of them are together.

Sébastien, for his part, never misses an opportunity to hint to Hugo that there might be more to the friendship between Éléonore and Frédéric than meets the eye. This makes Hugo furious, and he says that he will kill Frédéric if he touches Éléonore! As a result of a discussion of this subject, Hugo begins to reproach Sébastien for his wild life in Stockholm before he came to the Falsen chateau to live. Sébastien replies that he was only trying to verify his theories of life and happiness, none of which succeeded. Then he adds in typical Sagan fashion:

> . . .Pourriez-vous me dire ce que je ferais ici sans ça. . .Si j'avais la moindre petite idée de ce que peut signifier mon existence? Ici, à jouer les morts-vivants, avec en plus l'affreux rictus des macchabées . . .Hein? (page 72)

Indeed, none of these characters have the slightest idea of what their existence means. They no longer try to give it a meaning. They exist, and that is all. They make no effort to create an essence

for themselves according to the existentialist philosophy. They have renounced all freedom; they have no desire to choose, either for themselves or for others. They simply take what is given to them and ask no questions. Since life has no meaning, anything is possible, for there are no values that count. As Sébastien says to Ophélie:

> . . .Je vais t'apprendre un jeu où il faut tricher. Tu entends "il faut." Comme dans la vie, en somme. (page 74)

In Sartre's Le Diable et le Bon Dieu the hero, Goetz, also found that in life "il faut tricher" in order to succeed. In doing so, one cheats himself, others, and God, and one finally learns, as did Goetz, that, in the end, the only one who suffers is the one who cheats. Both Goetz and the characters in Château en Suède have what they consider good reasons for wanting to cheat; however, while Goetz does so in order to give added meaning to his life, Sagan's characters do so as a retaliation against "ennui," indifferent to the results.

Sébastien continues to try to frighten Frédéric. He points out that Hugo is a very strong man who has a violent temper and a jealous nature. Frédéric replies by insinuating that perhaps Sébastien has a more than brotherly interest in his sister. Nothing, however, can insult Sébastien, for he does not care; his only interest now is the game that he and Éléonore are playing with Frédéric.

It is inevitable that Ophélie talk to Frédéric; it is only a matter of time. She tries to warn him that his life may be in danger, but he thinks that she has been affected by the old-fashioned costumes they are all wearing. Then she tells him about what Hugo has done to her. His first reaction is that she must really be insane, but as her story begins to unfold, he listens attentively. At last she offers him the final proof, the pictures of her marriage to Hugo. What has happened is both repugnant and pleasant to Frédéric.

The situation is cruel and grotesque to the point of incredibility. If it were true, as it seems to be, then Éléonore is not Hugo's wife and is free to leave with Frédéric; this thought comforts him somewhat. Ophélie warns him to say nothing because he would be in real danger if he were to speak

ACT III

Sébastien and Éléonore are very happy to see how well their game is working. Hugo is very suspicious of Frédéric, who, in turn, is becoming frightened. The brother and sister find this very amusing; they think nothing of playing with human lives. In fact, Sébastien says:

> C'est le moment que je préfère quand la peur commence, que tu les provoques, qu'ils ont honte, qu'Hugo les regarde fixement. . . . (pages 89-90)

Suddenly Frédéric announces that he knows all about the bigamy and that Éléonore can leave with him. Unknown to any of them, Hugo is on the balcony outside the room and overhears the whole conversation. Sébastien and Éléonore try to persuade Frédéric to forget such nonsense. But he believes that if he promises not to reveal the bigamy, Hugo will let him leave with Éléonore. They warn him that Hugo will kill him, and finally Éléonore secures his promise to say nothing to Hugo.

Immediately Hugo rushes to tell his sister, Agathe, that their secret is out. At first, she seems to agree with Frédéric's plan to leave with Éléonore and to tell no one. This only makes Hugo more furious, for he is determined that no one is going to steal his wife. He says that Frédéric must be silenced. Agathe's response is that the only sure silence is that of death. This inspires Hugo and he

and Agathe leave to discuss it when they hear Sébastien and Éléonore arriving.

Éléonore is sure that Frédéric will not disobey her and mention the bigamy to Hugo. The only person left to be silenced is Ophélie. This is to be Sébastien's task. He is to make love to Ophélie to keep her occupied and to make sure that she does not talk to Frédéric or Hugo.

Simultaneously, Agathe is busily executing the plan that she and Hugo have concocted in order to save the reputation of the Falsen family. In a very funny episode, she informs Gunther of his part in the plan. Agathe has always insisted on the most formal relations with her servants, never allowing them to address her in the second person. As a result, Gunther, who is extremely stupid, addresses her in the third person as she wishes, but calls her "elle" instead of "Mademoiselle," and Agathe says to him:

> Gunther, quand je vous ai dit mille fois que vous deviez m'appliquer la troisième personne du singulier, cela voulait dire "Mademoiselle." Pas "elle." (pages 106-107)

In this scene, Sagan shows her talents for comedy. Agathe tells Gunther that she has something very important to say to him:

> Gunther
> Qu'elle parle.
>
> Agathe
> Qu'elle parle.
> (Ils se taisent tous les deux, l'air mou.)
>
> Agathe, (agacée)
> Elle, c'est moi! Tu comprends, Gunther. Que c'est agaçant, cette manie chez toi! On est toujours trois.(pages 107-108)

Later, when Agathe tells Gunther that he must go into the basement with Hugo, he wonders:

Gunther
Qu'est-ce qu'elle va dire?

Agathe
Puisque je te le demande . . .

Gunther
Je ne parlais pas d'elle, je parlais de ma femme.

Agathe
Allons bon! nous voilà quatre! (pages 108-109)

Ophélie finds a phonograph in the attic and brings it downstairs where she, Sébastien, Éléonore, and Frédéric begin to dance. Just then Agathe enters the roon and is horrified by what she observes. She leaves when she sees that they have no intention of discarding this strange "invention." The four enjoy themselves immensely, and Sébastien continues drinking heavily and by this time is drunk. He already feels jealous of Frédéric and takes a great deal of pleasure in trying to insult the young man. He finally succeeds when he replies to Frédéric's question: "Êtes-vous si amoureux de votre soeur?" He says:

> Je l'ai été. Et elle aussi. Nous allions partout ensemble: Paris, Stockholm, Londres. Nous formions un beau couple d'ailleurs, plutôt scandaleux. Tu te souviens, Éléonore? À nos amours . . . (page 113)

Éléonore tells Frédéric, who is horrified, that Sébastien is drunk, and she threatens to hit her brother if he does not stop. He continues, however, and they begin to fight. They stop only after Agathe comes in and sends Frédéric down to the basement to see Hugo, who wants to talk to him. During the fight, Agathe has been kicked, and Sébastien, in asking if she is all right, makes an observation which certainly could apply to any of these characters:

Agathe
Je souffre dans ma dignité, oui.

Sébastien
Tant mieux, c'est bien ce qu'il y a de moins douloureux.
(page 116)

Just then Frédéric comes running in, white with fear. He has just seen Hugo murder Gunther in the basement! They are all shocked and frightened; only Agathe takes the news calmly. They bring Gunther's body upstairs and take it to his wife. Frédéric continues to say that he does not fear Hugo, but he seems less and less sure.

ACT IV

Éléonore is beginning to enjoy the situation more now that Frédéric is showing definite signs of fright. Every time a door opens he jumps. Sébastien encourages this nervousness, often slipping up on him and laying his hand on his shoulder, never failing to cause Frédéric to jump. Whispering, Sébastien says in warning:

. . .Je marche sur la pointe des pieds, je chuchote, je respire à peine . . . Tous les animaux font ça, avant l'orage. (page 124)

It is true that Frédéric is no longer comfortable in what he calls "ce château où tout le monde se cherche" and to which Sébastien answers: "tout le monde se trouve. . . ." Ophélie now pretends that she does not remember having ever talked to Frédéric about her marriage to Hugo, and Éléonore seems bent on making Hugo catch Frédéric making love to her. When Hugo asks Frédéric to come and look at his tractor, Éléonore warns him that this is probably a trap to kill him and the poor Frédéric does not know what to do. Sébastien and Éléonore are enjoying themselves immensely;

one can easily see where their loyalties lie when she says to him: "Mon cher Sébastien, je n'aime que toi." But Sébastien is also afraid of Hugo, for the latter's sudden rage and murder of his old and faithful servant appear extremely unreasonable. Only Éléonore has no fear, for she has successfully fooled Hugo, who is sure that she has never been unfaithful to him.

One evening, when everyone is gathered close to the fire, Ophélie begins to question them about names for children. Suddenly Agathe notices that Ophélie is knitting and asks her why. Within a few minutes, she makes the announcement that she is going to have a baby and that the father is Sébastien. Sébastien, who has expected this announcement, has jumped on top of a cupboard, out of Hugo's reach. From his perch, he tries to reason with Hugo, but to no avail. Finally, Hugo and Agathe leave to discuss the situation, and Sébastien comes down, saying to Ophélie that from now on the two of them will be running around together like ghosts in the corridors, just as Ophélie used to do alone. Frédéric is so shocked by this new development that, were it not for Éléonore whom he wishes to save, he would leave immediately. He tries to convince Éléonore to leave with him, but she answers that the reason she left Paris where "on apprend l'ennui et la comédie," was to avoid the attempts of men to understand her.

Sébastien and Ophélie remain hidden in the halls, coming out only at night. The only good thing about this new arrangement is that they can at last wear twentieth century clothing. One night Frédéric and Éléonore enter the room where Sébastien and Ophélie are eating. The two "ghosts" quickly hide behind the draperies, and Frédéric starts complaining to Éléonore that someone has been searching his baggage. Suddenly the lights go out. Frédéric leaps

on top of the cupboard formerly occupied by Sébastien. When the lights come on again, Hugo is there, with a gun. He questions his wife and cousin briefly, then pulls back the draperies and uncovers Sébastien and Ophélie. While Éléonore and Frédéric beg him to be reasonable, he locks Ophélie and Sébastien in an iron cupboard. He then leaves, warning Frédéric that he, too, is becoming a nuisance. Both Éléonore and Frédéric are horrified. Now, Frédéric is determined that he must leave and try to get help, for Ophélie and Sébastien will not be able to live very long in the cupboard. Éléonore promises that she will leave with him when he returns with aid, and he hurries away. As soon as he is gone, a very jolly Hugo returns and opens the cupboard, setting Sébastien and Ophélie free. At the same moment, Gunther, very much alive, passes the door carrying a pannier full of wood. Finally, they understand when Hugo says:

> Il n'y a que moi à avoir de la tête ici. Il est parti et bien parti. (page 164)

Some time later, they are all sitting in the room together when Agathe receives a letter that a cousin is coming to visit them very soon. The play ends, as it began, with Éléonore asking: "Et comment est-il, cet Eric Ettingen?"

Just as in Dans un mois, dans un an, a complete circle has been made, but the characters have accomplished nothing; only time has passed. They will always remain the same: empty, searching, and filled with "ennui."

CHAPTER VII

LES VIOLONS PARFOIS

(1962)

In her second attempt in the theatre, Sagan falls short of the success attained by Château en Suède. The two plays, however, are closely related. The relationships between the characters are essentially the same in both, and the plot varies only slightly. The characters in Les violons parfois could, in fact, be those of Château en Suède, ten years later.

Augusta and her brother are wealthy, respected citizens of Poitiers. For five years Charlotte has lived with the brother as his legal mistress. With her is her cousin (and former lover), Antoine, who follows her about much as Sébastien followed Eléonore in Château en Suède. Now Charlotte's lover is dead and they discover that he has left them nothing. All his land and money have been left to a young nephew, Léopold. Only Augusta has received an inheritance, a house which she does not want because it is too far from Poitiers. Charlotte and Antoine are beside themselves, for they feel cheated. Charlotte is determined to get some of the money, and they sit back to await the arrival of Léopold. As they know nothing of the young man, they inquire about the town, but all they can discover is that he is not very well educated and that he has a reputation for being strange. Charlotte has already decided that she will seduce him if necessary, even though she is fifteen years older than he. Charlotte loves only money, and she will obviously do anything for it. While they are discussing Léopold, Celie, their servant, comes in and announces a beggar at the door. When Charlotte asks her why she is so sure that he wants charity and she

answers "il est si aimable . . .," Charlotte is sure that it is Léopold. He enters, shy and badly dressed, but it is Léopold, who knows nothing of his inheritance. He has just read of his uncle's death in the newspaper.

Charlotte quickly informs him that he has inherited a fortune, but all he says is, "C'est très gentil." The sum appears very large, and Léopold is surprised that his uncle even remembered him, though the money itself is unimpressive. One of the women in town has been writing to him and has told him of the liaison between his uncle and Charlotte, but he has paid no attention to the gossip. It is quickly evident to Charlotte that Léopold is an extremely naive young man, without ambition, and completely indifferent to material comforts. He has come from Nantes to Poitiers on foot, and he has no desire to stay, much less to be in charge of the huge house and all the lands that his uncle has left him. He wishes to give it to Charlotte, who obviously wants it, but this is impossible because of the terms of the will. Léopold does not dislike money; he simply does not wish to assume the responsibility for so much property. Since he cannot legally rid himself of his inheritance, he asks Charlotte to manage it for him. After only a slight hesitation, she accepts and insists that the necessary legal papers be signed right away. Léopold is only too anxious to oblige, for he is very happy to be relieved of any responsibility. His complete faith in Charlotte unnerves her somewhat. Soon, however, Antoine and Charlotte are planning how to spend their money, and how Charlotte will make the fortune grow even larger. Léopold is to stay with them for some time, and he is awed by the elegance of the mansion in which he will live.

In the final analysis, it is Charlotte who takes care of the property for Léopold. Antoine is very glad to be able to help her spend the money, but he takes no interest in managing the affairs. Like Sébastien, he says of himself, "Je suis un parasite . . . ." Soon after relinquishing the management of his affairs to Charlotte, Léopold leaves, becomes sick, and returns to them to recuperate. They are very anxious to please him, but they do not wish him to take this luxury for granted; they still fear that he may want to manage his affairs for himself, as this little conversation shows:

Charlotte
Vous êtes ici chez vous.

Léopold
Voyez-vous, curieusement, c'est l'effet que ça me fait.

Antoine
Ah, ah, c'est déjà autre chose, ça. (page 50)

Celie was so good to him while he was sick that Léopold promised to give her a house. When he tells Charlotte about this, she is horrified. She tells him that it is impossible, that he cannot afford such an extravagance. She becomes furious when he expresses doubt. Finally, convinced that he cannot give the house to Celie, Léopold decides that he will go to work so that he will be able to give her something. This further horrifies both Antoine and Charlotte, for they know what the people of Poitiers would say if Léopold, who is actually very rich, went to work. Finally, Charlotte agrees to sell some cows so that Léopold can buy a house for Celie. Charlotte begs him to consult her in the future before promising gifts to people, for he will be ruined if he continues to give away

his fortune. Then:

Léopold
Comment voulez-vous que je me ruine. Je n'ai pas d'argent.

Charlotte
Trois cents millions.

Léopold
Je n'ai pas le sentiment de les avoir, c'est comme si je ne les avais pas.

Antoine
Il y a du vrai dans ce qu'il dit là. (page 55)

Near the house there are outdoor concerts in the summertime. Léopold likes the music very much, especially the violins. Charlotte, however, finds it more a nuisance than a pleasure. While they are listening, Antoine lights a very strong cigar. Charlotte asks him to extinguish it, but he refuses because it is very expensive. Suddenly, Léopold grabs the cigar and throws it out the window, an action which surprises him as much as it does Antoine and Charlotte. Antoine becomes furious and leaves, warning Charlotte that "les violons parfois font des ravages." Léopold is immediately sorry for his action, but Charlotte tells him not to excuse himself so much. He stares at her, making her very uncomfortable, and she starts talking to him. Léopold lacks all sense of responsibility; indeed, he expresses a desire to be twelve years old, for "on ne me demandait rien." He suffers from "ennui" without even realizing it, for he says that he cannot tell which people are boring and which are not. But this is because he is so bored that he scarcely pays any attention to what goes on around him. He is happy in the mansion in Poitiers because no one asks anything of him or expects anything of him. He shows his own uselessness when he complains to Charlotte that he does not like being an adult:

> On me demande de faire des choses, d'avoir un métier, d'être amoureux, d'avoir des idées, de lire les journaux . . . (page 62)

He wishes to be relieved of every responsibility, even that of thinking. He enjoys the way Charlotte orders him around, and he obeys her without question. He has placed his life in her hands, and the idea is very comforting to him.

While Antoine and Charlotte enjoy their new-found luxury, they let Léopold do odd jobs and help Celie in the kitchen. Their friend, Vinclair, spends a great deal of time with them, and one evening they are all talking when Léopold, whom they had thought to be asleep, enters. He is looking for someone to talk to him; they offer him a drink and ask him to join them. The talk begins on the subject of God, and we see some of the reasons behind Léopold's disillusionment.

> Antoine
> . . . Vous ne croyez pas en Dieu, Léopold?
>
> Léopold
> J'y croyais. Et puis j'ai été, enfin j'ai fait la guerre, vous savez. Alors, j'ai vu des choses impossibles. Tant qu'on croit en l'homme, vous savez, on peut croire en Dieu, mais si on n'y croit plus . . . si on voit une bête à sa place occupée à en faire souffrir d'autres . . .
>
> Antoine
> Vous ne croyez plus en l'homme?
>
> Léopold
> Je les aime bien mais je n'ai plus confiance, non. Pas pour moi, je ne risque rien, mais . . .
>
> Charlotte
> Pourquoi ne risquez-vous rien?
>
> Léopold
> Parce que.

Charlotte
Vous pouvez être trompé, trahi, volé, ridiculisé . . .

Léopold
Mais non . . .

Charlotte (en colère)
Pourquoi? Hein, pourquoi?

Léopold (doucement)
Parce que je ne demande rien. (pages 70-71)

His complete indifference infuriates Charlotte. They make him drink more, and soon they begin to ask him about his love affairs, which he admits have been very few. Then Charlotte asks him if he has a mistress currently. When he replies that he does not, she asks him if he misses love, and he admits that he does. She then tells him that she will be his mistress if he will try to win her. At first he does not believe her, then finally he sends the others out of the room. Antoine is angry and does not want to leave, but Charlotte insists. Then, while she tells him that he is only useful to her, Charlotte allows Léopold to become her lover.

ACT II

Antoine is very jealous of Léopold, but he tries to hide it. He does not mind Charlotte's having a lover, but before she has always chosen someone who could be useful to both of them. Now, he fails to see what possible good Léopold could do them. Léopold thinks that he can help Charlotte to be more content; he sees her every day and asks nothing more. This shocks Antoine, who sees that Léopold has no feeling whatsoever. He can see no reason for this liaison and would like to see it terminated. Augusta enters, then, to tell them that the town's drunk is downstairs, threatening to tell

Léopold the truth about his situation (which he has never really understood) if Charlotte does not give him some money. This makes her very angry, and she tells Augusta to send him away. He, however, hastens to tell Léopold. This does not frighten Charlotte, for she is sure of Léopold; in fact, she alone sees in him more than just a naïve fool:

> Tu ne comprends pas: il est bon. En écoutant parler Vauxier, en l'écoutant le ridiculiser, j'ai compris sa force. Il a cette bonté, ce flux énorme, cette puissance, Antoine. Il ne saurait rien faire contre qui que ce soit. Il sera bon pour Vauxier, pour toi, pour moi, pour Augusta, pour Celie. Il est peut-être bête, peut-être niais, mais il est bon. Et ce terme est plus lourd que tous les autres, bien qu'il soit ridiculisé, usé, abaissé. "Bon comme du bon pain, bonne bête." Non seulement nous ne pouvons rien lui faire, mais il ne voudra rien nous faire. (pages 101-102)

When Léopold enters, Charlotte asks him if he has talked to Vauxier. He has, but what he has heard has not affected him in any way. He does not want to be responsible for the money and property; he knows that Charlotte deserves something for living with his uncle for five years and he is very happy just having a room in the house, knowing that Charlotte is near him. He wants to make love to Charlotte, but he has no desire to take Antoine's place, for he knows that Antoine is Charlotte's cousin and lover of long standing. Then Charlotte decides that Léopold must profit from his position, even though he refuses. She makes him sit in a chair that has always been considered as Antoine's, and she refuses to allow Antoine to order him around. As a result of this new order of things, Antoine is very exasperated. He thinks that Léopold should either take his money and send them away or stay in the place they assigned to him at first, that of a general handy-man.

Léopold is very uncomfortable in his new role, and he tries to explain to Charlotte that it is unnecessary. He was happy as things were, and he does not like to see her hurt Antoine. As he talks, Charlotte becomes more gentle, a little sad, and she tells him that he shows all the symptoms of something that he will never know:

> Léopold (les yeux fermés)
> . . . Qu'est-ce que je ne connaîtrai jamais?
>
> Charlotte (doucement)
> Un sentiment affreux, égoiste, démesuré. L'envie de posséder quelqu'un complètement, de l'empêcher de penser à autre chose qu'à vous, de respirer sans vous, une sorte de cannibalisme épouvantable quand vous le voyez, une impression de mourir s'il ne vient pas. La possibilité de faire n'importe quoi d'ignoble en son nom.
>
> Léopold
> J'espère bien ne pas le connaître.
>
> Charlotte (distraite)
> En général on appelle ça l'amour, pourtant. (page 117)

Her description of love would have well suited Alan in Les merveilleux nuages.

Antoine travels to Paris, and when he returns he tells Charlotte that he has found an apartment that they both admired before coming to Poitiers. He asks her to leave someone else to manage Léopold's property and to return to Paris with him. But Charlotte refuses; she is happy in Poitiers. Then Antoine understands just how far she has allowed herself to be led in her own game. He tries to warn her, but she pays no attention to him. He resolves to give her a little time, for he knows that they have been together too long to separate now. Antoine is well-educated, intelligent, but he has given up everything to follow Charlotte, who thinks very little of intelligence. He has allowed himself to become

stale in this mansion in Poitiers, and now even Charlotte no longer loves him. Yet, he cannot live without her.

That evening, Léopold tells Charlotte that he has considered their situation, and he asks her to marry him, for ", ça régulariserait la situation." She is astonished, but refuses him "parce que tu ne m'aimes pas, mon chéri." She surprises herself with this response, for she has always thought so little of love and so much of money.

At dinner, Antoine and Léopold almost get into a fight because Léopold thinks that Antoine has insulted Charlotte. When she manages to separate them, Antoine announces that he and Charlotte are leaving Poitiers to return to Paris. Léopold is shocked by the announcement, but he tries to understand and asks if he may visit Charlotte in Paris. She wants him to insist that she stay, but Léopold has never tried to prevent anyone from doing something he wanted to do, so finally Charlotte states that she is not going to Paris with Antoine. Antoine insists; he has offered his mistress to Léopold for three months, but now he wants her to return to Paris with him. He tells Léopold that Charlotte does not love him, just his money. This makes Léopold very angry, and he responds in almost the same words used once by Josée in Les merveilleux nuages when she was trying to defend Alan: "Personne n'a le droit de dire un mot sur quelqu'un. . . ." Antoine tries to make fun of the young man, but he is stopped by Augusta just as he is laughing at Léopold's lack of education and intelligence: "L'intelligence sans bonté est une arme bien dangereuse."

Antoine tries vainly to persuade Charlotte to abandon the foolish idea of staying in Poitiers and to go back to Paris with him. But she scarcely hears him. She knows that Léopold does not love her, that he never will, that he is incapable of loving her, and that

one day he will no longer even want her. Yet he seems so happy now, he asks for so little, she cannot imagine leaving him. Antoine feels completely lost. Without Charlotte he has nothing:

> Charlotte! Je n'ai plus rien. Je n'ai plus envie de rien. Je ne suis plus jeune, je déteste les gens: à force de les tromper, ils m'exaspèrent. C'est la dernière fois que je te le dis: je n'ai jamais aimé que toi, j'ai besoin de toi, tu dois me suivre. (pages 149-150)

Charlotte continues to refuse. She even tells him that Léopold has asked her to marry him. When Antoine laughs, she adds that she has accepted. Nothing that Antoine says can change her decision; she loves Léopold. When Antoine asks Léopold if he will lend his new wife to her old lover sometimes, Léopold replies that nothing really belongs to him, that Charlotte will always be free to do as she wishes. This said, Antoine decides that he will stay, for he knows that he will not be the only unhappy one. The announcement is made. Léopold is happy, and Charlotte realizes that she will regret her decision. But, there is nothing to do for she is in love at last. She has fallen into her own trap. The play ends on this note, with everyone laughing except the prospective bride. One cannot help thinking of Josée, in Dans un mois, dans un an: "Un jour, sans doute, elle se tromperait comme lui, et comme lui elle jouerait au bonheur avec un faux partenaire."

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The greatest single characteristic of the novels and plays of Françoise Sagan is the theme of "ennui" which dominates each work. From this "ennui" proceed all the other elements which make up her philosophy. "Ennui," in Sagan's works, is not just a simple boredom; it is a total indifference to life, to others, to all emotions. It is born from a lack of goal, which leads to a fruitless, pleasure-seeking life. She herself says:

> Mes personnages n'ont ni but, ni idéal, soit. Mais pourquoi en auraient-ils un? On s'efforce d'oublier la bombe atomique, mais elle existe. Autour de nous, le monde craque de tous les côtés. Il va s'écrouler. Ce serait amusant qu'il craque, mais encore faudrait-il des gens capables d'en recoller les morceaux. [1]

As a product of her age, she reflects the restless "fureur de vivre" which is characteristic of the youth of a troubled world which may explode in war any day. Because they have no goals, Sagan's characters suffer from "ennui," and this same "ennui" prevents their achievement of any degree of success. Thus, they are caught in a never-ending circle; they spend their lives trying to escape from boredom, and the fruitlessness of their search leaves them even more bored than before.

Sagan's characters, then, live in a sterile world which is covered by "ennui." Nothing really counts; the only important thing is to escape boredom, through pleasure or even through pain. Life is meaningless and its characters are unreal. Man has no purpose on earth, he has no interest in those around him, he needs no one, and as a result he respects nothing, not even himself.

His indifference extends even to his own life. Sagan asks, "Pourquoi sommes-nous nés, que faisons-nous sur terre, où allons-nous?"[2] She is unable to answer these questions. The answers are perhaps what her characters are seeking—and never find, for they are too weak to do more than try to hide their "ennui" in an aimless pursuit of pleasure. They have no idea of life or existence. As Sébastien said in Château en Suède, "Si j'avais la moindre petite idée de ce que peut signifier mon existence?"[3] If the ideal man according to existentialist philosophy is perfectly engaged in life, Sagan's characters are the antitheses of this ideal. They are no longer even looking for a form of "engagement"; they have renounced their freedom of choice. They live each day as though it were their last, and they allow life to lead them about. Responsibility frightens them, and they always follow the course of least resistance; they prefer to make no choices, not even for themselves. They are, as Dominique said of herself, always chosen. They become victims of circumstance; they are powerless to change their own destinies. Thus Cécile does not have the courage to put an end to the diabolical plot she concocted as a retaliation against Anne's severity. She allows herself to destroy another person through her own inertia. Even then she tries to shift the responsibility from her own shoulders by saying that if Anne had asked her, she would have revealed the whole plot to her, and it would have been ended. This demonstrates her complete indifference to human life; that which has no value is very easy to destroy. In the same way, Dominique was able to hurt Françoise, Roger could continue to wound the one person who really loved him, and Josée could deceive an innocent girl who thought of her as a friend. Their indifference to others and their preoccupation with finding an escape from their "ennui"

render these characters extremely egoistical. They use others to satisfy their own pleasures; the attachments they form are for purely selfish reasons.

Since the only object in life is to escape boredom, time becomes an important element. Things which are meaningless become boring after a short time; one does not wish to see the same play over and over again; it loses its charm and becomes tiring. The only things which last are those which are real, which have depth and meaning. But for a superficial character interested only in himself, life is nothing more than a comedy and nothing is real. He searches for amusement, but due to his inability to give meaning to life -- or amusement -- he is quickly bored and must constantly seek a different form of distraction. Thus, Sagan's characters are preoccupied with the question of time: not the passage of time, but time as a period of duration. They see an end to everything, just as for them death is an end, an annihilation of existence. Indeed, the end which they never fail to visualize is a kind of death in itself. God is dead, life is a punishment imposed on man, all sentiments have been sterilized by "ennui." One does not love, one does not hate; one simulates these emotions. And in simulating them, they become more violent, more <u>real</u>, than the true emotions which they replace. Béatrice in <u>Dans un mois, dans un an</u> is the personification of this phenomenon. But, as with all simulations, they cannot last and must constantly be replaced. Diderot said that actors who are totally lacking in sensibility can best represent this on the stage, for they never forget that it is only an imitation and of a relatively short duration.[4] Thus Sagan's characters are obsessed with a "fureur de vivre," for they must make the most of every passion lest it escape them and leave them

with nothing but boredom. They know that noghting will last very long, that "dans un mois, dans un an" they will have forgotten even the name of a present lover or mistress. Love is really dead, and in its place there are only desire and pleasure, which they pursue ceaselessly. But the desire has no basis; it is purely physical; and when there is no longer desire, there is no longer pleasure. For them, this is when "love" dies; they do not know that it is already dead, that what they seek is so superficial that boredom is inevitable. They mistake desire for love, pleasure for happiness; they never look beneath the surface of a relationship to find a deeper and more lasting meaning. As Sagan stated in Dans un mois, dans un an:

> Ils ne sauraient jamais, vraiment, être heureux et ils le savaient déjà. Et, obscurément, ils savaient aussi que ça ne faisait rien. Mais rien.[5]

Like the actor who exaggerates the emotions he represents on stage, her characters feel compelled to exaggerate the sentiments which they simulate in order that they appear more real. This taste for live, this quest for life, becomes a need for them. They can lose their "ennui" only by rushing at life at a breakneck speed, but this unnatural pace soon tires them, and they are once again bored. It is a never-ending circle, the continuation of which drains them of any desire to seek the real, the true. As Dominique said, "Vivre, au fond, c'était s'arranger pour être le plus content possible."[6]

Because all emotions are of short duration, Sagan's characters are always searching for new pleasures. Their periods of false happiness offer only brief respites in a search which they know is futile, but which they must continue in their losing battle against "ennui." They push forward, fulfil a superficial desire, enjoy a

moment of pleasure which they willingly call happiness, then fall back into boredom, begin the search, advance, and so the circle continues. Sagan likens this restless search to the rhythm of the sea, an important element in her works. The sea is real, it represents life, freedom; it, in combination with the sun, can momentarily destroy "ennui." The sun dulls the senses, takes away the awareness of boredom; and the sea stimulates, breathes life into characters who are otherwise devoid of depth and feeling. Sagan expresses this in the person of Cécile in Bonjour tristesse:

> Dès l'aube j'étais dans l'eau, une eau fraîche, transparente où je m'enfouissais, où je m'épuisais en des mouvements désordonnés pour me laver de toutes les ombres, de toutes les poussières de Paris.[7]

Dominique also found that she could forget herself under the hot Mediterranean sun, and Josée wished to find a deserted beach where she might escape from her boredom. Indeed, the sun and the sea are the only positive influences in Sagan's works. Preoccupied with thoughts of time and death, her characters find consolation in a timeless sea. They also find a reflection of the rhythm of their lives in the ceaseless efforts of the waves to advance onto the shore.

Because Sagan's message is always the same, her characters change little from book to book. The plot also continues in much the same manner. Indeed, Sagan said, "On écrit et on récrit toujours le même livre."[8] She has found the characters and the milieu through which she can best depict the absurdity of existence; they are in evidence throughout her works. They show us that life has no meaning, and that if it does, they are not aware of it; nothing lasts, neither emotion, nor happiness, nor pain.

These short, pessimistic books are written in a clear, almost classic style. Even those who do not approve of the themes must

admire a seemingly effortless talent. Émile Deschamps has said that style is "cette qualité sans laquelle les ouvrages sont comme s'ils n'étaient pas."[9] Perhaps it is because of this talent for style that Françoise Sagan's works have found so much favor among the critics.

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[1] Gérard Gohier and Jean Martier, Bonjour Françoise! (Paris: Éditions du Grand Damier, 1957), pp. 151-152.

[2] Ibid., p. 151.

[3] Françoise Sagan, Château en Suède (Paris: René Julliard, 1960), p. 72.

[4] Denis Diderot, "Paradoxe sur le comédien," Oeuvres Esthétiques (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1959), p. 306.

[5] Françoise Sagan, Dans Un Mois, Dans Un An (Paris: René Julliard, 1957), p. 157.

[6] Françoise Sagan, Un Certain Sourire (Paris: René Julliard, 1956), p. 21.

[7] Françoise Sagan, Bonjour Tristesse (Paris: René Julliard, 1954), p. 15.

[8] Gohier, op. cit., p. 153.

[9] Émile Deschamps, La Préface des Études Françaises et Étrangères (Paris: Les Presses Françaises, 1923), p. 57.

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