

A green tea set belonged to my mother, it was kept in a glass cabinet and seldom used. Recently, remembering that time, I imagined the green pattern sliding from the set out of the cabinet down the walls and onto other objects.

Reading Marcel Proust helped my imagination; he truly is a wonder.

My unimagined thanks is for Richard Sercombe's adobe brilliance; he really made the pattern slide.

Andrew Wallace

Albertine

“Some objects are irresistible, a delight, when I see some things I have to have them. Knowing that things never really belong to us passes me by. I bring things back to the apartment and put them all over the floor sometimes without even taking them from their bags... that stops the disappointment I often feel when desire changes to possession. Sometimes it's even the same with people; when I meet someone who wants me to be their mistress I feel quite excited but then you find where you are and the excitement passes; only the tokens they gave you are there to bring back the sensuous loss... but objects aren't like that, once they are your own they begin a new life with things hidden inside for you alone. They have secret lives that only owners can see... yes... see trapped and hidden inside... see the things that make up the division between those who hate and love us... if you die the secret dies too and the objects break even if they stay whole... some people can see shadows in others' objects, they get called names and are told not to be so sensitive... I like being an object in a book sometimes... lots of eyes watching me walk, brushing crumbs away from the page leaving a trace of where they used to be, yes leaving as we all do... just a trace.”



“Marcel has made pictures of some of my things; he made me lend them, except the Fortuny dresses and my toque, that stays where it belongs for ever, you’ll see why, you’ll see why... well perhaps the dresses but you’ll never see my toque in a picture, neither painted, printed, screened or photographed ... never. So he took the things then told me. ‘photography’s strength was that it could intentionally distort reality’ but I felt really good when I told him that he was always going on about what Ruskin said and he, Ruskin that is, not me, said ‘Every increased possession loads us with new weariness’ and that he Marcel slept for hours... well maybe not slept but certainly stayed in his bed, not mine I might add... and that meant not to hang onto my things but give them straight back. Sometimes I hate photographs because they take a moment without telling you and just a fraction of a second later things would look very different indeed... it’s like the ‘Blue Guitar’ we all know that the poem is there in waiting to change the way things are which in a way is what Marcel said ... only his photographs will soon be ever so different from my things because part of them wont be mine anymore.”



“I may say things that sound muddled; to you that is as well as even the closest person who might be near for a while and there are reasons for that. Andrée for example thinks that I get muddled because she seems to think she knows what she’s doing, before, during and after she’s done it and I don’t... I adore her but I know she adores me... now what does that mean... really, I’m not stupid or forgetful... look at all the things I have to recall just at the right moments when if I said the wrong thing all would be lost but then I can say almost anything to Marcel and he seems to believe me, though sometimes I have my heart in my mouth which is really exciting. Being in a book doesn’t help because people keep flicking through the pages and go in both directions... just to find their place they claim but I’m not so sure; I think they are like me, well some are, they forget precisely where they are on the page ... there you are I’ve admitted it... satisfied... happy.”



“Real life doesn’t follow a pattern but develops organically, well that’s what Andrée told me... that makes it sometimes feel like it’s not going anywhere quickly and at others... well numerous things happen all at once without a chance of our touching them as they pass and then things can slow right down... what we, at least me, what I have to remember is that I’m not part of real life I just think I am... fictitious people have real lives, at least they think they have... ask any child which side of the looking glass they are on and they just can’t answer... there are lots of grown up people who are only believers... they may well be real but what does that mean when life is so short and we fictitious people live for ever so much longer than you do.”



I know I'm a ghost but I still have ambition, just the other day I read about the themes of these books, these books, huh, My Books more like. At least I'm in them, right in the thick of it; an imagined dead person is just as real as a real person who's dead... I'm dead in so many different ways... I'm as alive as you are when you're reading about me in Marcel's books... and mine... the books are mine too, don't forget that."



“Andrée told me ‘objects’ come from latin, ‘jacere’, latin for ‘throw’, it’s a language object as well as being one. Language is in the air, the past, my books, my memories and sadly I have to admit yours too... so all in the past, none in the future, at least not yet, not till ‘the throw’ lands.”



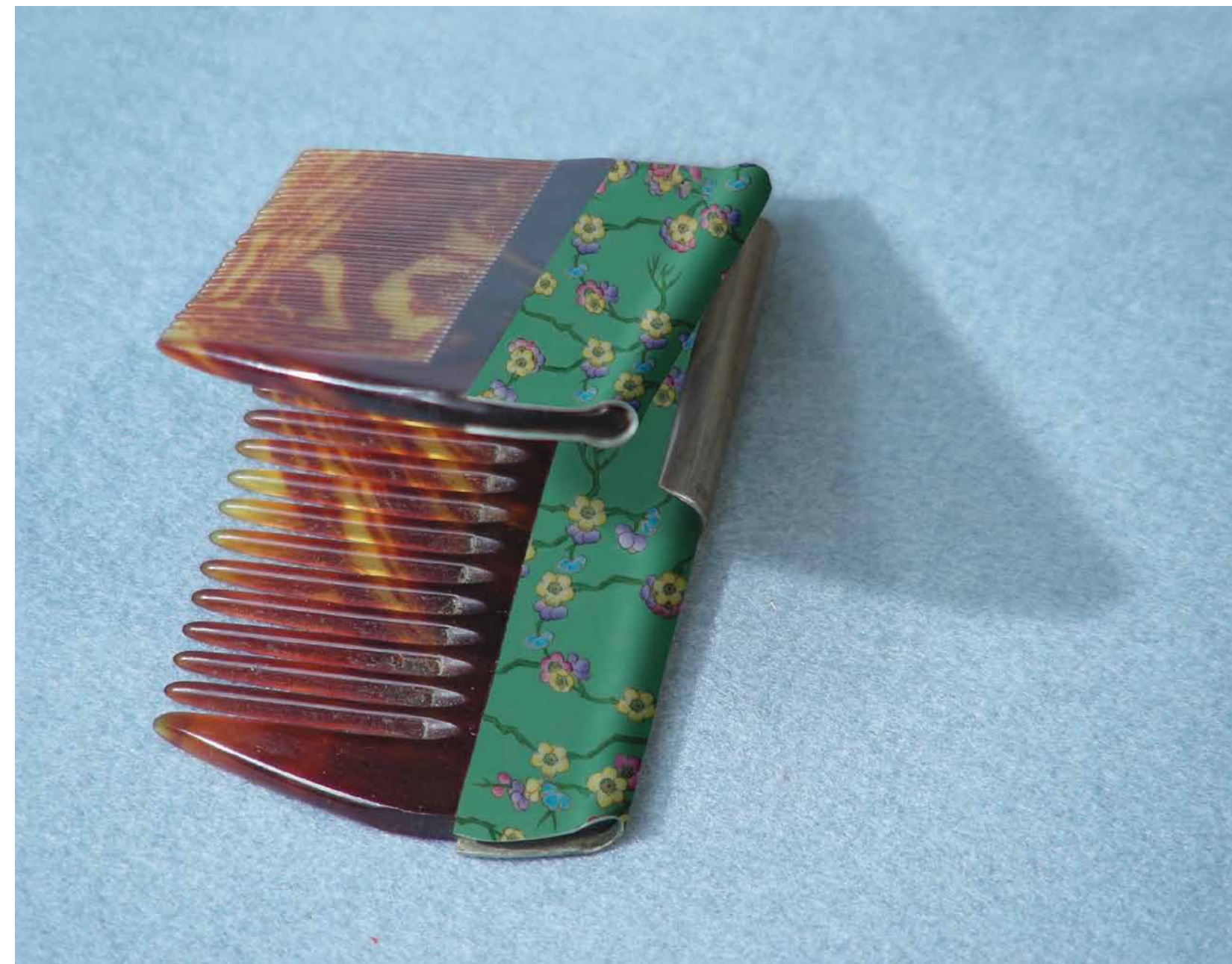
“There are themes in my books; Marcel wrote them for me, he’s so clever but he doesn’t have ever so much fun, like me... but then I have themes, my biology’s different but I still have themes. He has deception, being upset without knowing why, two people feeling the same thing at the same time, again without knowing... he has Charlus who we all like some of the time... and Saint-Loup, who’s more like a ghost than I am and me, lovely little me, in his arms for whole pages sometimes. I have, knowing that people are talking without an end in sight, my pounding heart and the secret soft lips of Andrée floating in curves across the page.”



“Albertine”.... “I like to say my name; there ought to be more of me but then in a way all those other pages are exciting and so full, apart from Dreyfus. The Dreyfus Case, why does Marcel persist with it? Swann, it has to be him, dear old Swann. He’s “inside the inside” as my dear friend Andrée always says; now I love to be me, I love to be me more than anything but I’d swap with Gilberte to have Swann for my daddy... I don’t have a daddy... but if... If you were, here in the book, with us you’d either be Odette or Swann... admit it, I don’t care... in love that’s what he was but only then... for a fragment, a memory moment to return to from wherever he was, with you perhaps in a memory moment too... not like Dreyfus lost in morality that had only two sides.”



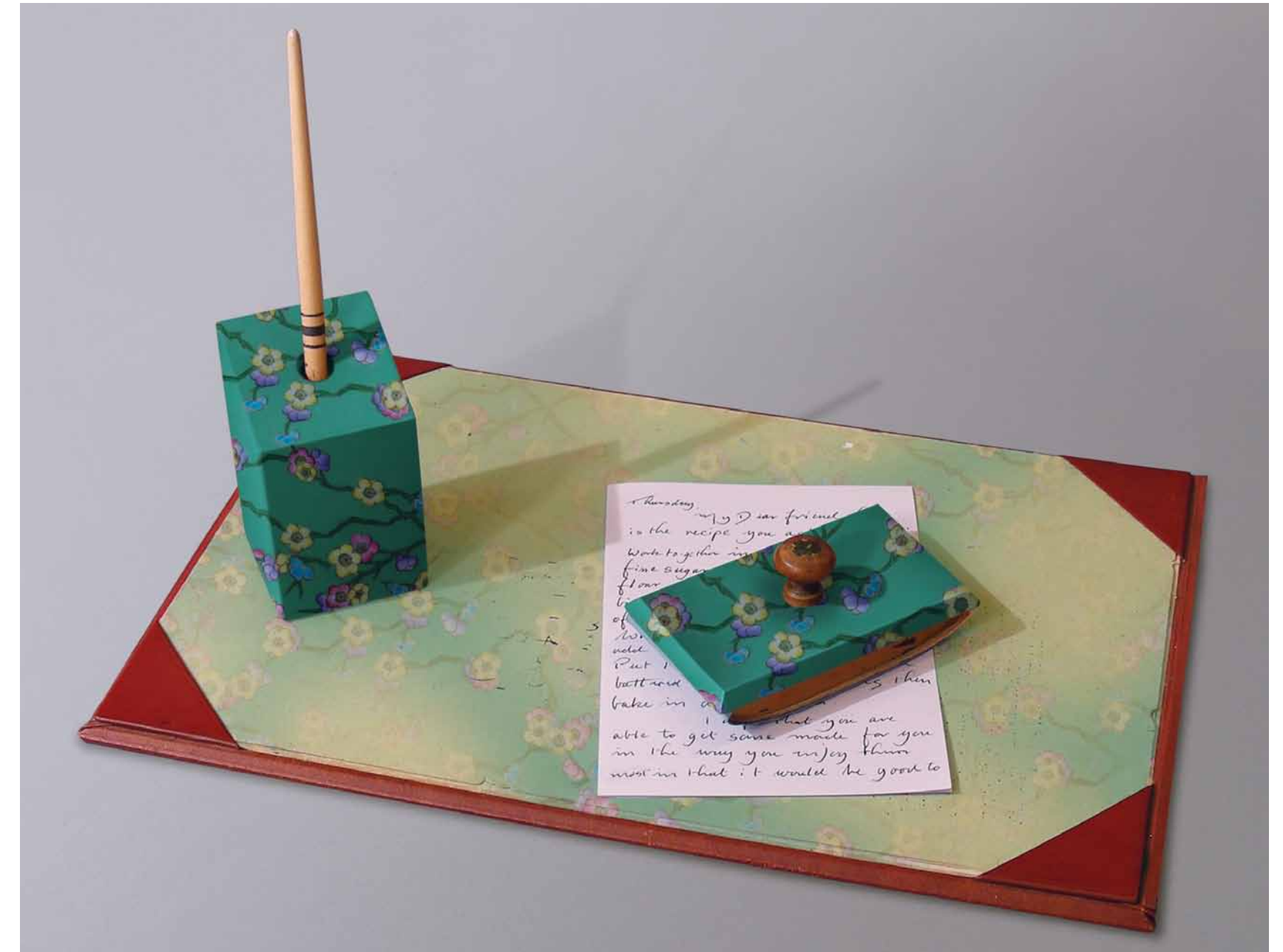
“You could never find anything in Venice... I know I was only there for a short time, looking for something besides beautiful things to see...I suppose I had run away from Marcel... I suppose having lovers, who he didn't know I had, was a secret that's half emptiness... that's it, half empty... the water stayed still though... like tea in a cup... you know, when you twist the handle and the cup moves round as the tea stays still... easy to put the sugar in and hard to get it out... easy to lie to Marcel as the pages turn over even though the truth stays behind among those pages... where you've been and can no longer find unless you go through it all again... step through the mirror, like water, like Jean's Orpheé, into my eternal past.”



“I used to say that it was ‘still four o’ clock’ as I thought to myself as good a time as any. Four is time for tea, not memory tea with madeleines, no no no... In Venice, I was there, just the once, on my own. Unusual? Yes unusual but tea on your own in Venice, what fun... I’m not quite sure now how it happened. My mother and my daddy, who I hardly knew, had a tea set, green china, not like Marcel’s butterfly cups but it must have been when I was little and saw it in the cupboard through the glass... near, well quite near, our only mirror... Oh and I had madeleines too, secretly but in Venice they were round not like the ones Marcel always orders in Paris.”



“Had I lost the map then, I can’t really remember... maybe my watch too... If I had, then I suppose he would have found the brush... it was so obvious I can’t imagine how he hadn’t noticed, he never noticed... he must have seen the brush... but then he must have seen the bikes, I mean he knew because we rode them right in front of him wheeling out the shapes that became our lives, so clear... he only saw us, never me... me I could be anyone... but wait I can muddle the time as much as I wish, after all I am dead, I keep forgetting... so I suppose I can think of it in any order I choose like the random way Sigmund told Andrée. I wonder what that was like, talking about herself for an hour and him just listening with his pen and her on that huge comfy sofa. Andrée, quite exquisite Andrée... that delicious moment when the merest touch makes you shiver all over... so long ago now but as close as I want... in a book or... when you’re young even better on a film, yes silent like the films, in and on a film, yes, yes silent like ‘Midnight’ with the water and the boat, darkness and her calling, silently calling across the surface with so little to see in the darkness the glorious unblemished darkness.”



“Poor Marcel, I only saw him partly... what you see infatuates you to know more when you're separate and the disappointment breaks the flow of the feeling... You can't say that there ought to be one flow when there are so many... If you fall and hurt yourself it's not really all over, just a part and there are so many parts and you want to change your mind backwards but you can't and no one tells you until you die, like me, then find out. Women don't have the little death so they live differently... like having four fingers when everyone else's got five or understanding that you don't have to know something to understand it is the same the other way round. Poor Marcel he knew the memory, at least he knew it gradually but me he never grasped because he had the memory before he had lost me and I'd fallen before I left him anyway. So he made me die and he made me fictitious like being an airman without an aeroplane.”



“We used to watch from our group; it was strange that he was on his own... the way he was dressed... walked the pathway as if it might soon rain which gives a special walk to us all but him I didn’t know his name then or that he would soon be my Marcel to tilt at with his secret vulnerability.”



“He used to tidy all the bags I had as if that way, her way, was better than the way I had managed with for years... you knew if she rated you... not me, he never valued me, it’s so easy to respond that way... if it happens just at the start, almost too easy like being a neutron... ‘no charge’ hard to see at first but seeing as well as looking that’s what she was good at... so he never even looked in my direction because she knew he couldn’t know both, not at the same time anyway that is where you are and in what direction you’re travelling... so like me really... but uncertain, always uncertain, a feeling I have most of the time, because... well...

Actually Andrée was the one who told me all this and how to say it but I got it muddled up... I always do because I only understand parts of my thoughts and feelings not like delicious clever Andrée who knows so much.”



"I'm Albertine by the way, a fiction... though real as you, if
you believe in your memories."



“The deception was so easy... a disguise is a deception in the mirror; look at yourself in there and the one looking back is just the same as you... trying really hard to pass through to the side you’re on... that’s how I managed to repay him for not turning out the way I wanted... but like all disguises you never really know who you are when you look from the back of a mirror... In a book you might think you are reading at speed but really it’s just one word at a time even for the so called literary intelligent, like Andrée... that means time passes right through you, like reading slowly... look it’s like the rich, the poor and money, the three thing, they just don’t have an equals sign like Basin, M. Verdurin and Dreyfus... so intense he was as he wrote that I began to live inside his outside world... I tricked him into the inside into his own work, our book, I didn’t care towards the end, just didn’t, which I see now must have been quite dreadful for him because there isn’t one, well not one that can be a narrative.

There was a page I looked so well on... really lovely, I looked and saw that he loved me with a passion that brought me a fear of pregnancy... no, not a child...I mean my emotion, my emotion that would be the birth I gave the world... I saw my heart for just a moment, my heart in a muddle of words... the two hues of my sadness that I never look to see... I cried then and it hurt... when you’re dead the tears come out like hail, cutting away the memories you used to have and for a moment the pretence folds up like the handkerchief... you need to see your beauty then... seeing that helps you recover.”



“For me order floats in bubbles, truth bounces and bursts like spilt tea... truth shows up differently depending on who you are talking to, or where it lands... when you want people to agree with you so arguments can stop.

Marcel says ‘Be like me, be in my head, in my thoughts, in my book’... but then I’m just a scatty redhead or a blond... that’s what he thinks or at least he wants me to think that’s what he thinks, the complications of our deceptions are quite horrible. He locks away his thoughts and I think that I know things that he’s thinking but suspicions torment our hearts... at least I think they do; I wish I knew if he loved me as much as Andrée does.”



“Swann’s song is like having a book to read inside the one you are already in. Now I know that it’s hundreds of pages before me and there’s sort of me twice in a way but I found it fascinating to see Swann when he was just a bit older than me when Marcel told everyone about us. I might say that’s just the half of it anyway because there are always more points of view than one and you might think that it’s ever so strange me being with Marcel when really I’m in love with Andrée . But then if you think about Swann... well, you see I met Odette at the Verdurins’ and she told me things to make your hair stand on end, “Men”, she told me, “are like English mustard without the heat”. I could not believe it but talking to her about Swann made me realise why Peacocks have long tails. “A broken heart is not for you alone”, she told me “but belongs to us all; you have to seek out shared love, not carry on plucking feathers ... reach right down... down from men’s breasts.” Then I loved Swann and felt jealous of Gilberte more jealous than I had been of anything.”



At the air field with Andrée just the other day I saw something wonderful, quite wonderful. It's quite a longish saga because of the balloons, they fly with the wind and some clever flyers guide them a bit but when Wilbur came he had a proper plane with an engine like Marcel's car but not on the ground and he was quite good looking with leather gloves, with which he slapped his thigh. He said, "To-day gentlemen I am going to fly." We all heard him and there was lots of talk with Andrée laughing quite loudly and they all looked and I suppose we were a bit close but it was chilly and she's always warm. We had to wait ages even so but then he did it and there was no fear of flying that I could see, because all he said afterwards was, "Touching down vibrates the body", a bit odd really. He was looking at Andrée a lot because he had noticed her when she was laughing and she is especially beautiful and being with her is like flying only you stay in the air for so much longer. The strange thing was Marcel found out that I had been there on that special day; Alfred Agostinelli may have told him because he liked flying though it's a bit of a muddle of times and things. Albert would change all that when he met us at a Verdurins' Wednesday party. Huh! a party to discuss Dreyfus I remember. Marcel wasn't jealous or anything all he said was 'knowing a flyer must be very wonderful' and we went for a very long drive in his motorcar and he gave me heaps of flowers. After he made love to me and everything that evening and he asked if I would like a yacht, I mean me in a yacht, well in one but not owning one... it was then that I found some words in my mouth.



I'll never know where they came from but my mouth was full right up with them. Bloody things, where are they all from? I think sometimes that whoever made them up ought to have had more care and an answer up their sleeve because the scrapes we get into are from words, mostly. I told Marcel that more things get talked into rather than out of and he just laughed and laughed because he wouldn't be left with anything without them and that I'd really be dead... written off... which wasn't the funniest thing he'd ever said but he was in fits and I started to laugh too so we were happy for a few pages even if we weren't in love and I put all my words away."



“Marcel took me to a favourite lunch time restaurant; we sat in the window seat where we could both look through the window. Facing out in the middle of the day is important but not at evening unless you are on your own, even then the way you look to see in and out is vital to the pleasures of eating. I like to choose my seat and though I always get my way with him he can, on occasion, make me feel selfish for choosing a particular corner where there is no mirror.

He read the menu for ages but then he always does; one time he asked for one to take home and read. Sometimes I think I’m beginning to sound like him but then he has made me notice things. I only ever half saw how beautiful a painting was because I responded to beautiful objects and not the way... say the way... a blue dress may hide itself from us as if it had left the frame... been parted... parted from the beauty of the space behind and in front of the paint’s surface...

Suddenly... he held my hand for a moment... held my hand for a special, special... across the white cloth... he looked, looked into my face so deeply I knew that he would spend ages writing the next day. That moment would be gone unless he chose it for our book that’s why he took so long.



I wondered if he knew he spent more time writing than he did on the things that he wrote about, more time looking at images in magazines than at pictures in galleries... I dared to ask him once and he looked so sad. "There are grey pictures in my eyes sometimes ... grey like your Fortuny dress ... but you are so beautiful inside the dress too, my Albertine"... that was then, not like now, like a time when all of me was just his idea... just the quiver on his lips the notion in his thought... this time I waited while he hesitated and hesitated... then he sent me through the air, sent me with his words, me, his very own loved creation, through the air with these words... he just said, "We have to live separately." Being French I died a little... "I'll leave my dearest ... I'll leave."



“We really did have to leave each other, partly it’s Andrée; I suppose she had known me more deeply than anyone ... Then when Marcel’s mother died I could not replace her love ... but then I don’t have anyone except my aunt and Andrée is tears as well as laughter... so, well mothers are lovers I suppose, for men anyway... but it gets really muddled when the one you care for is a fiction, like yourself, and in and out of the novel like a sub atomic particle... I needed Andrée more than ever and she was away all that time even though she had to come back because we are one, and seeing Sigmund was almost too much for her. She ran up the stairs and into my room and we smoked with the window open, because of Marcel’s asthma, whole packets of cigarettes and laughed and hugged before the long evening we knew we would have to endure at the Verdurins’.

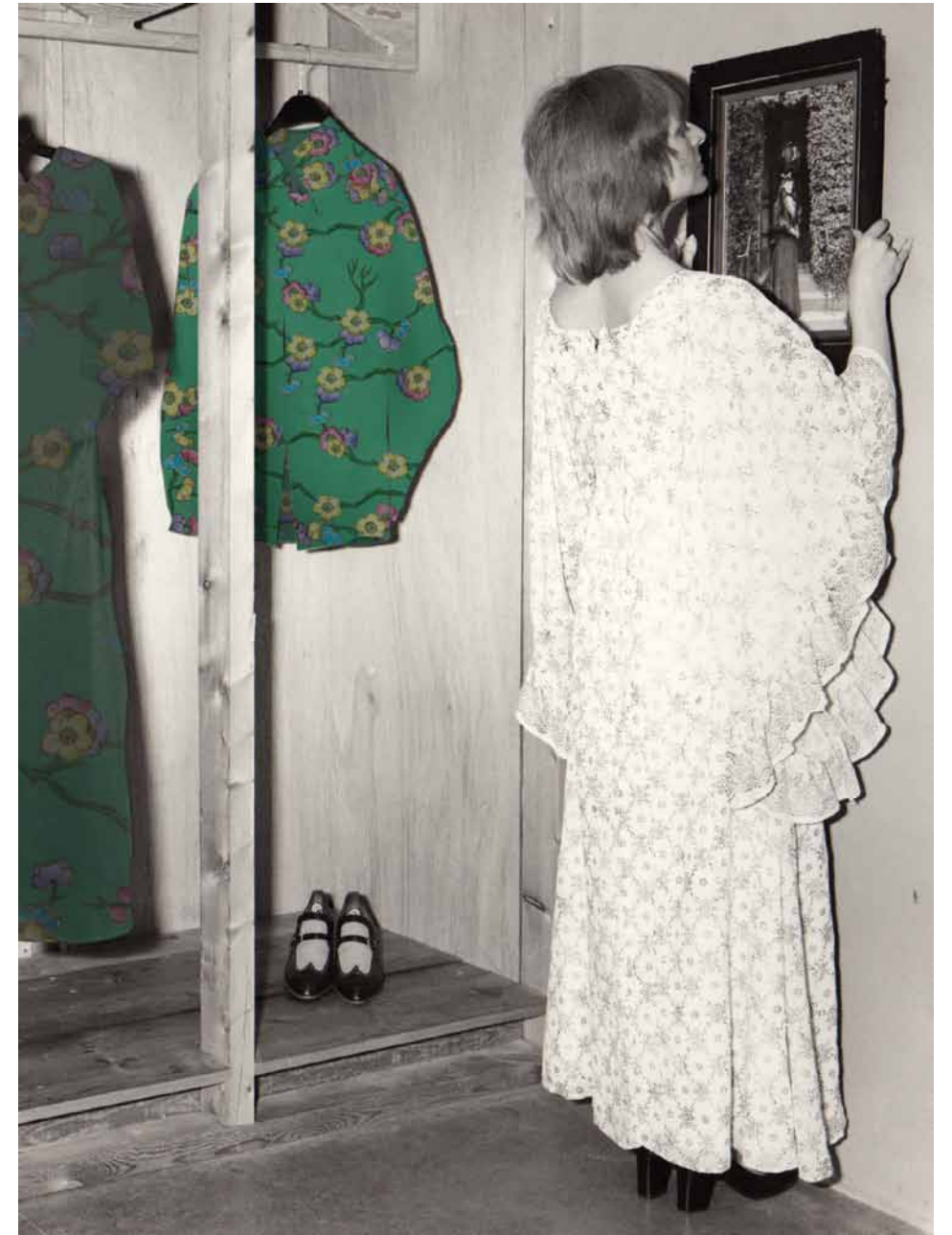
But, instead of going there, I packed my bags and left.”



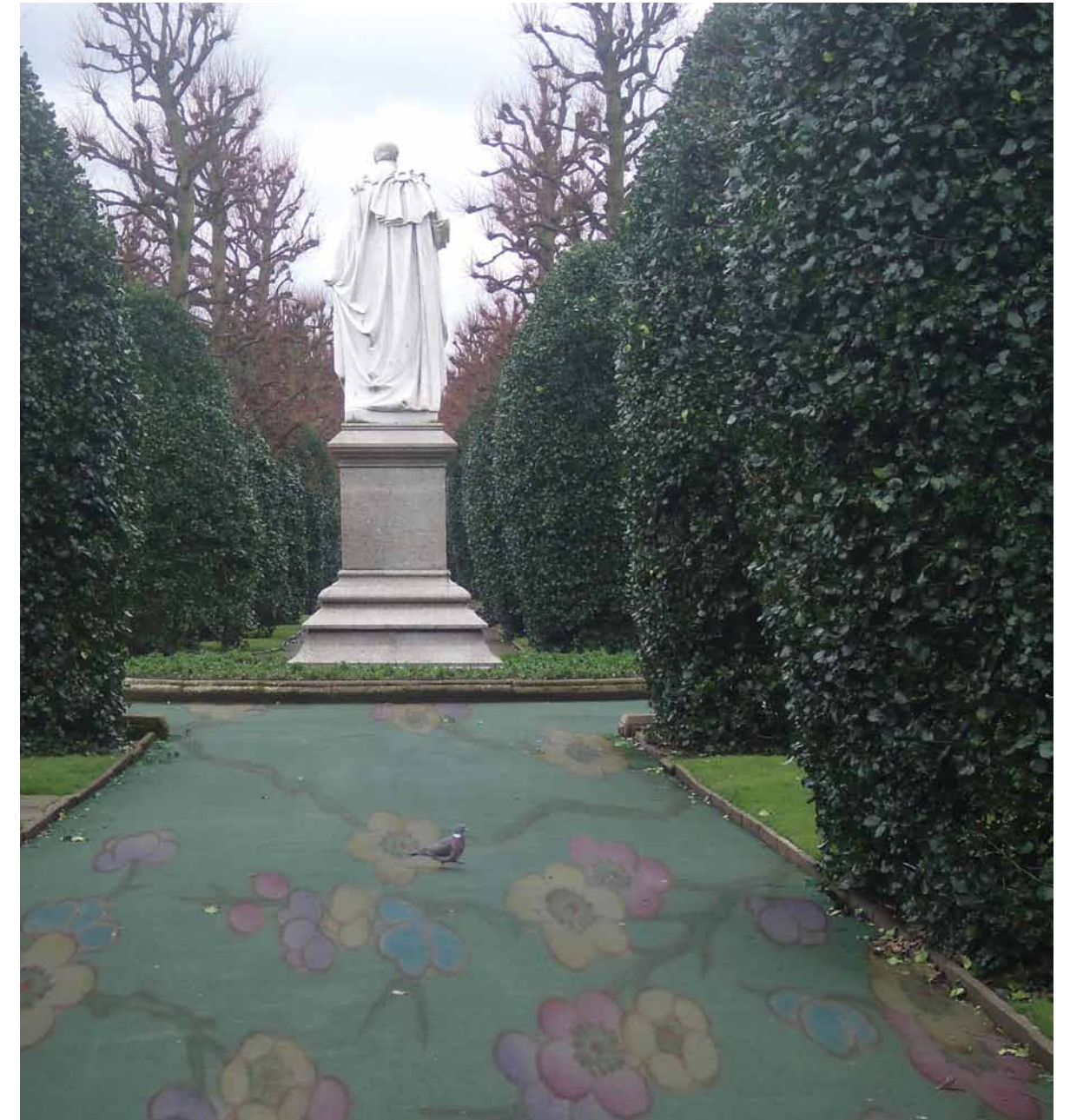
Delta Ending



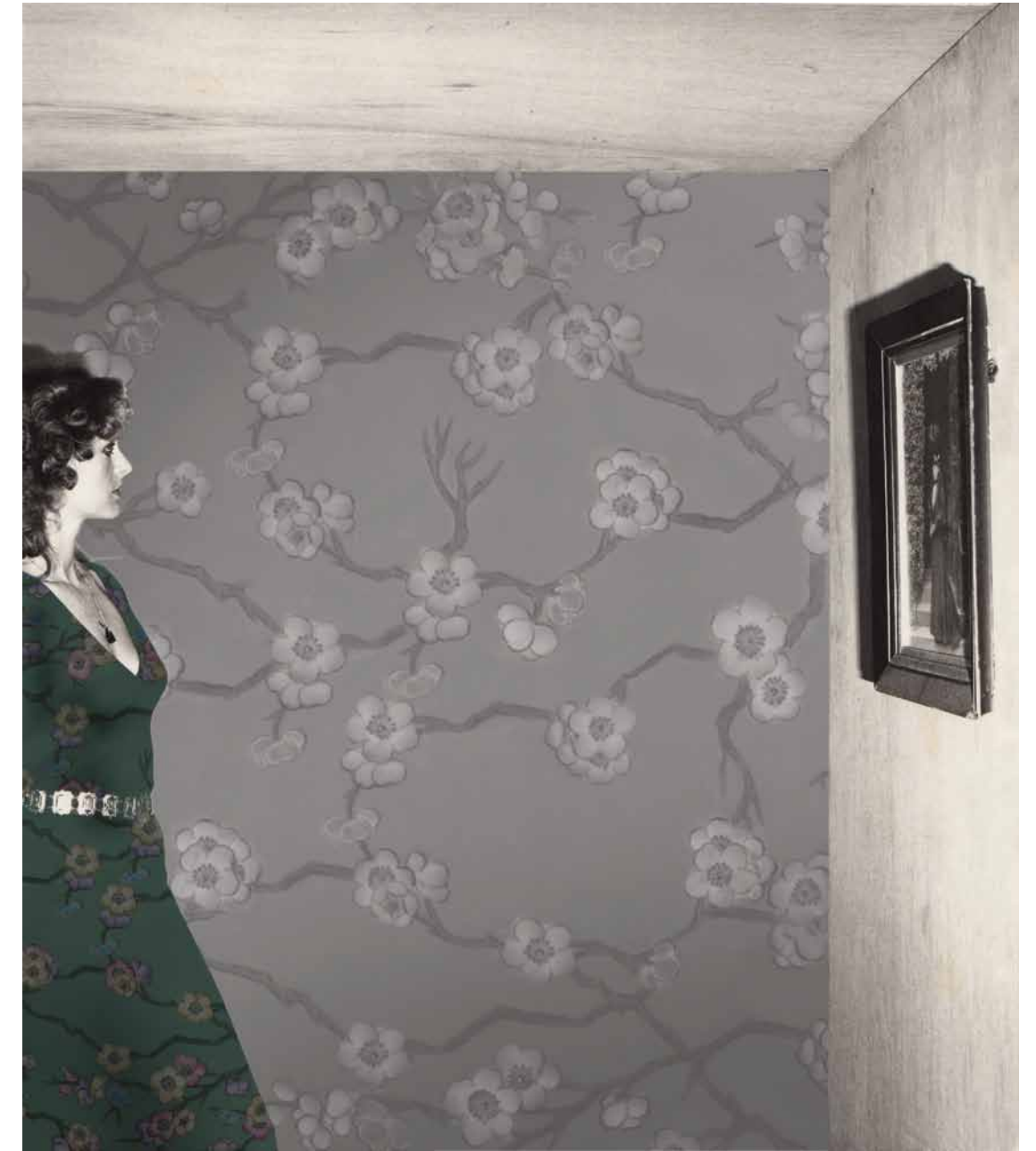
“When there is an island in a delta and there are lots, they don’t belong to the river or the land ... I’m one of those. So you see we’ve had to invent the ‘delta departure’ ... I say we because we are not so very separate from you and sometimes I forget that I am Albertine and that to lie is my truth and anyway I always thought that it was ok until Andrée pointed out that, ‘an omission is a lie’ and she, Andrée, is the smarter part of me because she is a part, and though she thinks that she sees things she doesn’t really look much, so in a way she omits things too ... not like Marcel who looks all the time; he looks at everything and not just for recognition... when he looked at me and tried to see himself he couldn’t because I’m not part of him.”



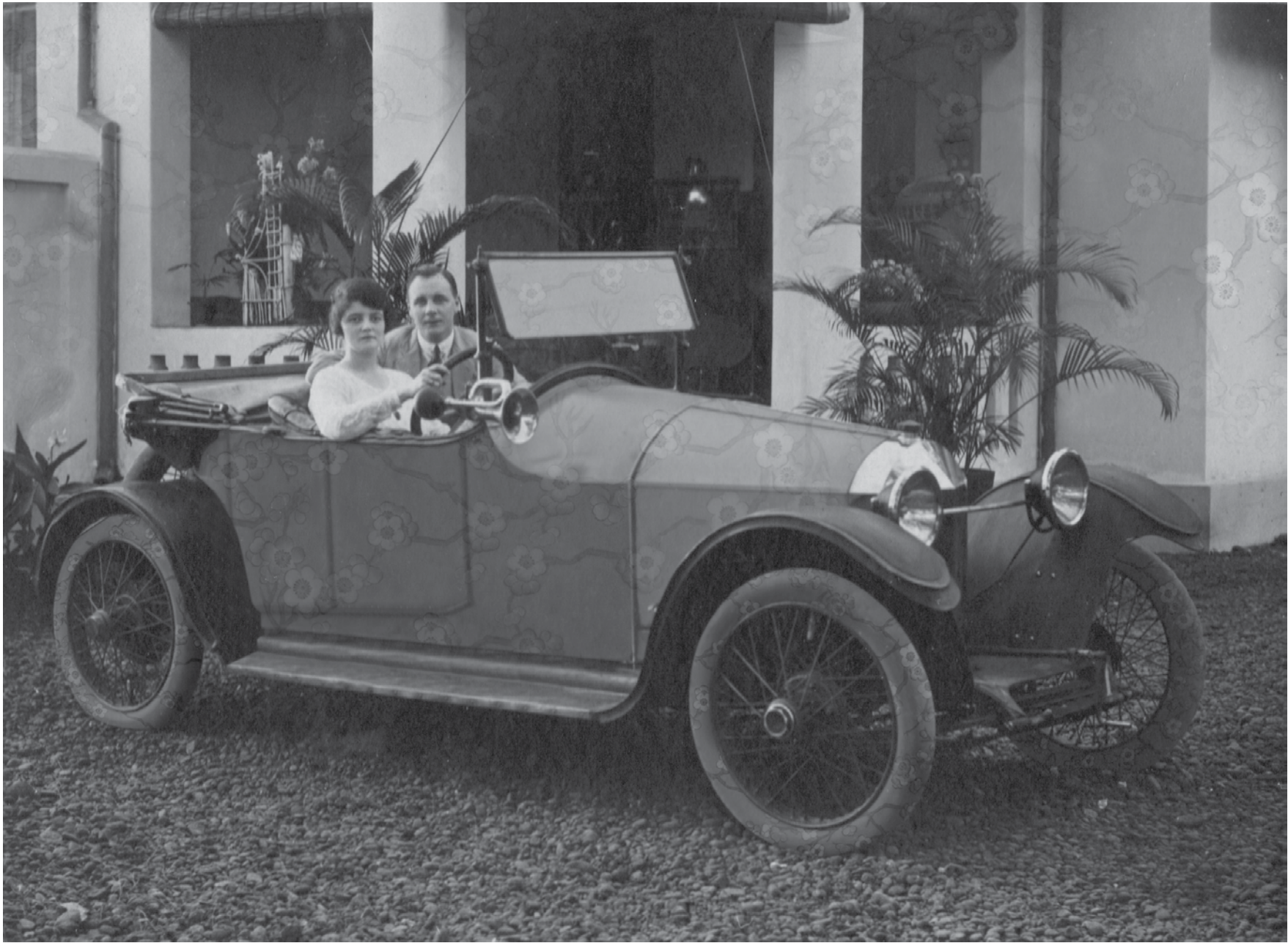
“Anyway a delta departure has lots of ways out... it was an escape for me with my scatty mind that never truly understood in the same way that Marcel did with his ‘analytical thoughts’ as he called them... we had the pain though, even if it was fiction. Remember that I, Albertine, died. If someone next to you on the train was reading the same book but read more slowly than you, they would think I am still alive and it is the same with all our feelings... we have to share... though being in and out of time with everyone was quite hard to grasp, well at least it was for me because we didn’t have real time there in eternity, our time was different and only easy to see when you were here in fiction with us. In your time you may think that you have the pain when you are ill or have tooth ache but you are not in thought alone... we also had the imagined bodies, so your pain is the only thing that you can share with us and Marcel explained this rather well when he wrote about Charlus.”



“So you see Marcel was my pain... he loved me and he loved sex but there was such confusion for us in the book... now I have to say for us all because I noticed the pain in others as well as myself... you don't wander around in a book like his and only end up with yourself because we were all just parts of his whole but sometimes not the part he wanted. Charlus took the whacking showing his blood could be out as well as in... imagine wanting to be chained up then beaten till your blood ran out of your body... I never understood that but Marcel did, not just then but all the time because he wrote it in our book... I know that Marcel was hurt by me, by my secret with Andrée and poor Charlus had to suffer because of that even though he had no notion... that's how I saw it anyway so we all whack Charlus every day even when we are in love.”



“We wanted to have our own ‘Red Pens’ or at least our own pencils so we could whack the language... whack the beauty out of language ‘till you see blood.”



“So as we searched for the ends of our sentences Marcel searched for an ending for his book but now you at last realise it is my book too and that poor Charlus had blood oozing from his wounds... you see the islands are only a way out and not an ending... look there, on another island is another Marcel, he is a visual artist, a surrealist searching for a proper death with a decent burial... he wants to leave now... I, Albertine, am locked with Swann’s version of the way we have to leave ... with Charlus, Saint-Loup, The Verdurins, Basin, we have to leave and you have to leave us all. To leave them all we have to have both Marcells; yes the writer and the surrealist visual artist must die... push air into their lungs no longer... Marcells have left their spirit, in their book, in their Glass... both now cracked... a definition of the land by a statement of the sea.”



So you see it was time for that last breath ... the one that
really does say goodbye .
I like my delta island ...it's not a bad place to be buried.



