

# **My Love Of thee year 2000**

A Novel of love and Philosophy

by Georges Réveillac

# 7-The Cost of the War

The Hundred Years War, our war: it would have lasted just the same about fifteen years and it was still lasting on, if the death of an infant hadn't brutally put an end to it. Of course, to detach ourselves from our ego inflated like a big stuffed belly, it took some vicious backwards kicking. But not that torture!...

In spite of everything, I hope in your indulgence for the « absurdities » that we have done. Could we avoid them, or at least part of them? In what concerns us, the question is unwelcome: it is too late! Luckily, you are there, dear reader, and since you did us the pleasure to accompany us up till here, you can finally render yourself useful. No. not by calling SAMU: our health is good, thanks.

That strong sorrow which from time to time haunted us, which, in the middle of a successful party makes us emit a sob, that blasted and holy sorrow which will accompany us till the last day is simply the reminder of a message from the other world which I must transmit to you: before taking the responsibility of having a child, be assured that your love is the type which authorises the continuation of life. Like this, you will perhaps have the chance to have children healthy in body and soul, beautiful children at the same time happy and impatient to continue the conquests of man. And living! Oh Good God!...

Yes, I have invited you to the wedding and here I am leading you to the cemetery. You will abandon me there because you refuse to think about death, isn't it so? « It is too sad! You'd say in all ways, we cannot do anything about it ». So, you will die. As far as we are concerned, my Love and I, after our daughter's death, we did not have the right to die: because there are three of us.

Yes, you have well understood: we two are three persons. Just a little bit of patience still, and you will understand everything. »

Very simply, at the bottom of our common distress, there appeared to us quite a feeble light at the beginning, but strong. Having followed it, here is what we saw: that road so fragile and so dear, broken by death and by our mistake, it was possible to extend it so that it would not have been in vain. Not only we could, but we had to. So, we took a triple commitment.

The first consists in keeping the promise made to our dear Estelle.

The other two came with the concern to surpass the form to get to that sacred promise.

How can existence transcend death?
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*The one orders us to relate that story to you without looking for our misplaced vanity, that to release our theory of the « Struggle for Existence » which Estelle liked so much. If it will happen that it is more of a fairy tale, so she can perhaps offer us all the hope to discover and to open up some promising pathways, other than those of eternity, at least some enduring gardens: perspectives of a more certain future than the thick contemporary fog which hides our horizon.*

*The third commitment imposes on us the association of the memories of Estelle to all the important events of our lives; in such a way that the best part of her should continue to live. And therefore why would one refuse to invite the dead ones to the banquet of the living? If, like us*

*two, my Jeanne and I, you don't believe in heaven, neither in the resurrection of the souls, much less in that of the bodies, which best way do you know so that he who must not die continues to live? Besides, that carries a name which you know well now: it is THE EXISTENCE, which can extend itself indefinitely even if life has ceased. So?...*

Allow me to insist, since you don't seem convinced. No, there are not three place settings at our table, since we are two. No, we do not believe in ghosts. No, we never had the idea to communicate with the dead by means of an intermediary of one who calls himself medium. No, you have understood it, we are materialists: we have the conviction that it is matter which has given birth to thought. Like a computer, our body is made of matter and, in the same way the electronic intelligence dies with its material support, our soul is extinguished when life abandons the body which has generated it and nourished it. And don't make me say that the computers have a soul, so much so that they will not start to sigh, to suffer, to love and to experience orgasm. But then a totally new story would start.

So! Since the soul dies at the same time as the body, how can we, who are no witches, how can we hope to keep alive that of our deceased little girl?... We cannot manage, evidently! If we have that pretension of reviving the dead ones, our place will not be any longer amongst you, but in an asylum for mad people.

« - So?... So? You would shout at me. – Some more patience still, if you please: I am coming to it. »

Effectively, at first, in order not to face the unacceptable which would have caused us despairing wailing, our thought bent, choosing not to see what appeared to us as the destruction of the world.

If it had been enough to vomit that, so that she would cease existing, our Estelle would come back from the inexistent place where the evil tongued considered her lost: a tomb! Do you realise that? She would have been there as usual, without us having noticed her arrival. The shine of her red hair would have attracted our look. With her hand, she would have spread the rotten stray lock of hair and she would have called us with her sweet eyes sometimes surprised, questioningly, smiling and worried. Life would have been simply normal, the way it should be, and the terrifying moments which I related to you would have found their only nature acceptable : that of a frightening nightmare as ephemeral as a text written with chalk on the class board, bitter reminder that a strong ray of sunshine will cancel easily.

But that death and that tomb of delirium occupied too well their place in reality.

However, they could not come into our conscience. Every time that those burning facts started to impose themselves, our soul, disgusted, chased them away. So our look turned away from reality and we entered the region of the mad.

How far did we go in that way? For how long? I cannot tell you because our memories of that period are really too vague. It seemed that, both of us have continued to act in all respects as if our gentle Estelle, our little living fairy was always by our side. We have done her bed, prepared her breakfast, put her place setting, we have talked to her, we have even gone, it seems, as far as taking her to school and return to look for her, sometimes one, sometimes the other, as usual. And, often following what they told us, when the bothered teachers managed to stammer « - Estelle? No, I have not seen her... », we answered: « - Ah well. She has already gone home. »

It seemed also that in certain evenings, before going to sleep in our true bedroom out of reality, we had a conversation which must resemble this.

« - Jeanne, are you asleep?

- You see well that I am not.

- It seems to me that Estelle did not come to kiss us. In any case, I do not remember it.
- But since it is us who did it! Come on Georges, are you losing your wits?
- Oh yes, I remember it. She was dragging on to delay the moment of sleep, and we had to help her a little. I narrated a story to her and she fell asleep. But from where is that drop coming? Jeanne, are you crying?
- Definitely, you are completely mad. Stop irritating me! My eye hurts me, quite simple. »

There you are and you no longer believe me! You wear me out, my dear friend... Ah well, you are right, because you must believe me.

Which must be the role of truth in art?
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*Haven't I already spoken of that essential faculty which for us was chosen by Mômmanh: the power to make appear quite well the horrible as well as the beautiful, a power which manifests itself in the dream as in artistic creation. You have not forgotten the beautiful face of a sensible manner which we desire and the horrible, which we fear. To avoid the horror and reach beauty : this lives in the state of dreams even for such a long time that the artist does not show us the means to make a reality out of it. These means are some elements chosen in our universe which will serve to materialise the dream, the bricks to construct the house. So, if you want them, the painting becomes a project, the dream becomes reality.*

*It is because I constructed that story with real bricks as far as one can do so. If I get to the point that I lie to you, it is « to laugh » and I will not fail to let you know it.*

So?... You do not believe that two mad people can be closed in a common delirium, even if they have been husband and wife for a long time, are their existences closely tangled up?... Oh well, it is however true! And this is how it happened.

Unbearable for me, the catastrophe which had just happened lay hidden, buried in a thick fog of unreality. From that enormous cotton tampon sometimes came out a lightening hand which came out to dig my flesh: a pale face on which the lid of a coffin fell down. Had I yelled? In any case, the lightening hand stopped tapping my flesh and she retreated. During that flash of lucidity, I had had the time to think: « Jeanne cannot bear such a pain. Perhaps she will die of it. As long as she will carry that open wound, I must let her believe that everything is like before. Down there, I found it reasonable, even I, to send the unbearable event in the den, at the very bottom of the cotton fog.

Surely, I often happened to call death. Myself, I would have been delivered, and the world would have well continued its way without me. Wasn't I right? Then, a sweet voice I knew so well came back to murmur in my ear:

« You're not a coward aren't you, dad? Will you tell me?

- But no, my dear, I am not a coward. Why do you say that? I am very, very tired: that is all.

- Tired, my foot! You let us fall down, yes. Courage, dad! Go there dad! Go there dad!...

- I am all right, Estelle my dear. But do not say anymore that I am a coward. »

So, since my little girl had opened her ways to immortality, and since she needed me to continue them, I sent throughout my whole body the will to live and I set off again for the assault of suffering.

Later on, Jeanne told me that she lived her torments like me, and like me, she had judged well not to impose the unbearable suffering on me. It is like this that both of us wandered in similar labyrinths on the verge of madness, neither dead nor alive, misled, for those who loved us, in that refuge which we had imagined : a false world, where the claws of reality only reach rarely to hollow out away as far as our violent soul. Perhaps then, slowly, slowly... the latter could succeed to heal up the gaping wound.

It was not necessary, however, that that virtual labyrinth became a trap where our roads ended uselessly. We had to find the strength to open our eyes on the vision of our Estelle who was decomposing herself in the cold ground of the cemetery. Only after, having accepted the unacceptable, we can turn our eyes towards the living and dedicate to them our strengths. But we risk letting ourselves be taken in like this on the verge of madness. Our guardian angel had taken charge of the memory of Estelle, and he kept an eye on us. Moreover, weren't there the two of us?...

However, despite all the efforts given by Denise, Gaston, Pablo, Thomas, and in spite of all that our boys, the family and the friends did not refrain from undertaking to get us out of that isolating bubble where we risked being mummified, the madness was prolonging itself in a worrying manner.

It was a dream which pulled us out of that rut. Roughly at the same time, each one of us received a message from his guardian angel. Here is what Jeanne's was about.

Estelle in person came back to visit her in a dream. A great pain overwhelmed her. She told her only: « - Like this, you have forgotten your promise... Do you therefore want me to die a second time? Farewell mum. » So, she vanished in the light and Jeanne never ever saw her again.

To suffer again the look of that terrible messenger? Never!... Then we found the will to push back the sweet madness where we had looked for refuge. We let the promise made to our little daughter come out from the darkness where we had hidden it.

But where, so young and so naïve, could she find such a deep wisdom?

On her death bed, she had told us:

- « - Stop lying to me, both of you. I no longer have the time. Me, I know well that I would leave before the end of that night. I am cold. Nothing else but cold. Everything black! Everything cold! I am afraid! Leave me, ugly beast. I don't want to! Go away! Oh! How I hate death! Dad, Mum!... You love me very much, don't you?... Don't you? ...
- Let us see Estelle! Where are you searching for those terrifying black ideas? The doctors will cure you...
- Oh no!... No more now! You must not lie to me now! No, nasty beast, you will not carry me away because I am stronger than you. So, dear Dad, adorable Mum, listen to me well... Listen!
- We are listening, Estelle dear.
- Dad, did you say that the living carry the life of the dead? It is quite like a relay race.
- Yes, but.
- Be quiet. He who refuses to pass the stick dies twice: is that good?
- But...
- Besides, I don't care. I want to pass the stick. Help me.
- But...
- Listen well.
- When I would have left, don't cry for me for a long time, and don't call me especially because I will not come anymore ever, never... The dead are truly completely dead; besides, you know well since it is you who said it to me.
- Oh no! No! Estelle dear...
- If you please! Hurry up. Do you hear who is approaching? Oh no, I beg of you,

listen well!

- We listen to you...

- Primarily, I want you to give everything! Everything! All my things to some children: you only have to start from my good friends; my violin will be for Geraldine: she plays well, you know.

- It is understood. Your brothers and also your great friend Geraldine will help us to do the division. I agree. What else?

- So watch out, be careful! Be careful!...

And above all! Above all! I want you to have another baby. Do you understand well? A boy or a girl, it is the same, but it is necessary to have a baby. If you please Mum! If you please Dad! It is necessary. It is necessary!... So, is it promised?...

- I can never replace you, my dear Estelle, never...

- Myself no longer. We can never love another child in your place...

- But no! But no! Not in my place dear Dad, adorable Mother! Why are you silly? Not in my place!... If you please! Promise me... »

On the spot, we have not truly understood the necessity of her demand. But we could not refuse her anything and, both of us, we have promised, with quite solemn seriousness. However she was not at all satisfied. And we felt well that death had already taken her by the throat, and was on the verge of strangling her. Luckily, it seemed to us that our little good girl had managed to loosen up the horrible embrace. But at what price those efforts! Come on! It was necessary to understand what she wanted. And quickly!

« - My dear Estelle, explain again.

- Liars! Terrible liars! It is not necessary to promise that! You promise, but you have not understood anything. It is however well that you have understood me!... I am no longer a child: I see everything. So, listen!... »

Why is it necessary that the student surpasses the teacher?
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In fact, it happens that the child understands better than the teacher. And that is good! The teacher's thought is often hindered by some old practices acquired in his infancy, so that nothing prevents the virgin thought of the infant to assimilate integrally the news given. As for our part, in what concerns the means of which we dispose to send our existence beyond death, we have learned in our youth to look for principally the individual survivor, whether it is by an entry ticket to heaven, or resurrection of the body, or still, by the conquest of the posthumous glory.

Much more lately, when those means lost all their reliability in my eyes, the meanders of my anguished thought, I had exhumed Mômmanh and I presented her to all my family. In spite of my will not to make a belief out of it - Above all!... - Estelle had nested it in her heart as her good fairy. Very soon she talked to Mômmanh like other children have a conversation with the « Virgin Mary » and the « Little Jesus » and Jeanne blamed me for having accomplished the work of a false guru on my own children.

It was, as you know, quite contrary to my intentions but, now, I understand that in our times when faith does not find any more branches to cling to, a child gave in to the temptation. In his soul impatient to blossom, the theory has become a fairy story. And then, she changed into a belief. Luckily, when Estelle was on the verge of

*leaving us, her juvenile faith did not prevent her from making some choices completely rational and generous.*

*If Estelle had lived, she would not have been prevented from probably becoming the apostle of a new ideology inspired by my theory of the «Struggle for Existence». This would have made me happy and however I would never have followed my dear young daughter in that way.*

*That would have rejoiced me because we needed an ideology and that would have pleased me, even more because it would have been open, therefore liable to perfection. The setting up of footbridges between our two worlds would have been facilitated: that of research and that of action.*

*But I could not follow my little dear in that way because the ideology and the scientific research do not tally with each other. The apostle prevents one from calling into question the pillars of its faith, be it in the name of scientific truth. The researcher does not put up with the fact that some taboos can hinder its researches be it in the name of the sacred principles. Therefore, it is good that each one remains free to act in his domain.*

And here is where the enchainment of ideas leads. Can you tell me where we had arrived? Ah! There we are: the student has surpassed his teacher.

Estelle had clearly understood the necessity of human freedom, as well as all its implications. When we die, the coming generations will do what they want of our memory, because they are free and it's a lucky thing. Therefore, it is useless to demand that they continue our personal memory, that they practice our values that they continue what we had started. They are free and they will not do it unless they judge it worthwhile.

In order to encourage them in spite of everything, to continue our job, I see only one way: leave them as heritage of beautiful and good things, those which will contribute to establish the existence, that of Mômmanh and even that of our derisory ego contained within its limits. Let us leave them some champagne, the Taj Mahal, « freedom-equality-fraternity », the Theory of Relativity...rather than ruins and debts. And let us trust them for the aptitude to appreciate the beautiful, the good and what is well: we have no choice.

Now, it is time to find Estelle again.

« - Dad, Mum, it is necessary to understand before promising.

- We are listening.

- The child who will be coming, my little brother or little sister, it is important to tell him everything, but only when he is grown up...

- So! He will understand that he is replacing you...

- Oh! It is so difficult to explain: it is quite true that he will replace me, and it is true also that he does not replace me. He is free! He is free. Free! Do you understand well?

- Not so well, no.

- It is like you and I. Dad, Mum, you have given me life...

- And we have taken it...

- Listen to me, if you please, mum. You tell my child that he is replacing me.

Well!... He has to do everything like me: but he cannot, you know well. He cannot be me: it is like a straight jacket. So, he is unhappy, my child. Perhaps he will become mad. No! No! I want him to be free, my « baby ».

Estelle feared that, by the intervention of the child who was to be born, we would only try to realise what would be at the same time impossible and bad: to resuscitate our dear little girl, escaping like this from the unbearable sorrow. The poor child who is replacing her has to torture his being to incarnate the person of Estelle and has to commit himself to play that role throughout his whole life. Without going as far as that, there is a good number of children who are not loved for themselves, but above all for what their parents want them to become: a soldier like dad, or the brilliant lawyer that he would have liked to be, or the engineer which mum would have become if she hadn't been compelled to stop her studies... These children whom one has forced to fit into a role made for another, they have felt themselves in spite of everything, a little loved. And even if they still retain a strong and old sense of regret, they will be able to forgive. However, it is true that their existence is spoiled.

Selfishness being the best divided of all the virtues, there exists a plethora of adults, of good parents, who waste like this their precious lives which Mômmanh has entrusted to them and they are numerous in believing that they act like this for the good of their children. So, one more time, was I surprised that our little girl could guess what adults could not see in the mature thought? Very often it happens that the cause of life has been well forbidden by our young champion. The black monster which rushed to swallow a feeble child, a delicate flower hardly opened up in the form of a promise of immortality, the nothingness black and frozen had to wait well and see its prey drawing out between his claws.

*(Before continuing, I owe you a confession. I have never had a girl. I have never had the opportunity to observe a nine year old daughter. Whatever concerns Estelle's death is a creation of my thought, with all the risks of error which that entails. In the hope of doing it as true as possible, I went to look for some information in the works of « psy » of a sound reputation, Ginette Raimbault. Ginette Raimbault has observed and accompanied some sick children at the end of their life in a hospital. I have consulted her book « The child and death » as well as the conference which she did about the subject at the University of Tous les Savoirs in 2000.*

*Her fears confirm what I suppose. The illness and its series of sufferings compel the child to die before his age. As regards that, Ginette Raimbault speaks of wisdom. Those who are no longer babies will discover that they are going to die. While the people surrounding them do everything to hide the truth, they have to struggle alone to face the test of their imminent death.*

*Of all the words reported, I will only quote these. A five year old child has said: « I know quite well that I am going to die. But one must not say it, because mum, who already goes to the cemetery twice weekly, would be there all the time and she would look more after my father. ».*

*Ginette Raimbault said as well: « ..it is not unusual, that the young lonely adolescents, see associated, in the same way as the adult, the lucidity of the absence of a future and the desire of a creation which would be a gift to the world they are about to leave. »)*

- « - It is a promise, Estelle my dear, we will not tell him that he replaces you.
- Not so much when he is young, but when he grows up: yes.
- Explain to us, my dear.
- When he will grow up, my boy – or my girl - you will tell him that his first mother was a little girl... rather gentle...and who was called Estelle. You will tell him everything. Perhaps he will love me a little. But only if he likes it!... When he has the feeling that he is going to do a great stupidity, and he will no longer have the courage,... so... perhaps although he will say : « Ah no ! I cannot do that to my little young mum Estelle. » So there!... That is when I will be happy, I!... »

How does the field of existence cover all the past and all the future.
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***Since man follows his conquest of eternal existence not only in the future, what Estelle tried so hard, but also in the past when, for example he looks for some models among the heroes of history. With them, in the same manner as with a line of noble ancestors, he forms an existential chain which came from the past and plunges in the***

*future: it is like this that he stretches his existence in time.*

*If he betrays a hero of the past, he breaks the existential chain before it plunges in the future. He carries a heavy responsibility as regards some ancestors: the period of their existence risks stopping. He has not taken away life from them because they are already dead. He has perhaps done worse: to cut them back from their existence in the span of time.*

*If his existence does not offer to its descendants anything which they judge worthy to be continued, he risks depriving them of an existence in the past, of the roots, as one says.*

« - I see, dear Estelle. It is a promise.

- You also, dad?

- I am close by. I am going to reflect, and I will understand everything. It is a promise, dear Estelle.

- Sacred father, you are always reflecting. It is necessary to bring up my baby well so that he becomes great, great, very great like Victor Hugo, or Madame Déluide.

Do you see? Mum? »

(Madame Déluide is a neighbour, a retired farmer at whose house Estelle loved to go attracted not only by her numerous little kids, but above all by the warm and creative personality of the old lady.)

« - Yes my precious treasure. I have understood. Rest, now.

- Dad?
- I am beginning to see, Estelle, it's coming. Your mother and I will discuss and will reflect until everything is clear.
- So, could it be that your promise is good? But no!... Oh! No, no, no!...»

A mask of anxiety appeared on her waxen face.

- «- Don't be afraid, dear Estelle, dad and mum are there.
- You love me too much, too much!...
- Yes, my darling, it's never too much.
- My baby will hate us. It will do him good if you don't love him. So, he will be evil. Ah but stop!... Stop loving me that way!... »

In truth, without wanting it, she exaggerated a lot: I could hardly see anything but a child nourished by hatred who gives to the whole universe the evil with which one had welcomed him. In reply to his surges of love, those which awakened him up to life, his vile parents, brought him nothing but evil. Now, it is through his parents that the little man discovers the world: no? So, since he sees nothing but evil, he has no other choice but to bury his useless love in the deepest part of his being and to dedicate to that world which he believes desperately bad all the hatred that he owes it.

No: it is not that type of monster we risk giving birth to.

Nevertheless, Estelle's fears had solid foundations. It was necessary for us to love that child for himself, and we were not ready for it. Now, you know well that you can't command love. So, how can you make a feeble promise in those conditions? And one had to act quickly.

Hurry!...

- « You are right, Estelle. We will bring forth that child only after having accepted your...
- Death. Say it, don't be afraid. Come on!...

- We will have that child when we would have accepted your death.
- Dad, mum, I love you. »

Our Estelle seemed exhausted. A frozen shroud fell on her. No! No !... Not already!... It is not fair!... Her eyes were closed. Was she breathing? Neither Jeanne nor I dared to check it. Then her breathing became again perceptible. On that magnificent promise of life still not completely disowned, on that face so dear, so shiny, whose beauty was not yet frozen for eternity, on her white waxen face, a touch of red rushed again to her cheekbones.

« And if life were to come back?

- Poor mad one! Let us let her rest. »

We stayed for a long time motionless and silent, allowing the branding iron to impress itself on our disfigured souls the last portrait of our girl. Ordinarily, the memory does not keep, the funeral masks, of their beloved dead ones, doubtlessly, because it does not bring much to the living, if that is not the severe warning: « Don't forget that you will die. Don't forget that each one must die. » We prefer to keep the memories of those who illustrate our life with shadows and lights, exemplary moments where the late lamented will make us laugh, surprise us, and at the same time frighten us.

But, it happened that our Estelle was surprised by a death which was not announced when her life was bubbling in the effervescence of her blossoming. Since she did not want to accept her defeat, it was necessary to mobilise all her hidden strengths and to use them to throw an arch above the abyss of death. Like this, the last moments of our good child were exemplary. Like this the face which had been only until then a juvenile sketch, beautiful with rich promises, found itself transfigured by a generous beauty, triumphant, and implacable. Like this, that beautiful face of triumphant youth – Yes! Triumphant... -, that beautiful face is still engraved for ever in our memories.

There flowed a certain amount of time which I would not know how to define with precision, since, for us, the time in question had stopped. Then Estelle opened her eyes and, again, she spoke.

« Where is Mistinguette? I want to play. »

Mistinguette was still a frivolous and carefree young lady, a young cat which our daughter had adopted. When we had placed her four legged friend on the bed, Estelle wanted to caress her, but her hands did not move accordingly. I approached the beautiful animal to her face, and Jeanne took her hands to put them on the sweet fur. Mistinguette, our distant cousin, started to purr while our child talked to her.

« You are still playing in the willow, isn't it so?... Will teach me to climb, tell me?... But you must not eat the little birds. Do you understand? You know, dad and mum are going to have a baby for me... Yes, it's true!... She will be called Jeanne... And my baby boy, he will be called Jacques... You also will have kittens... »

No word, no sound, no breath came out again from her lips. And you made a fucking mess of my peace, Good God! Leave me alone!... But leave me alone!... Out of my sight, or I will massacre you, dirty one.

Yes, it is at that moment that we sank into madness, Jeanne and I. We remained there for some weeks, until the moment when our guardian angel, in a dream, sent us her messenger: Estelle in person.

I thank you, dear friend, for understanding our sorrow, but it is not that which will bring her back to us. Stop crying and listen to her message. No, I am not trying to make you believe that our children must be our teachers: that will be as stupid as to want the downstream river to flow towards its source. However it can happen, here and there, that a little boy or a little girl gives a lesson to an adult. That was the case.

Therefore, one morning, during breakfast, while madness still held a grip on us, Jeanne said to me:

« - So remove that third place setting! You know very well that nobody is going to sit there.

- But?...

- I had a dream last night. She came to see me.

- Wait then! Even I: she spoke to me.

- You as well, her « adorable father »? Of course! So?... Are you going to decide?

It is high time not to think about yourself, myself, about our misfortune of which we are survivors. It is about time to pull ourselves out of it. And what did she tell you?

- For a long time, she did not pronounce a word... Without making any noise or the slightest movement, she went forward along the streets of Fûtaie, and I followed her without being able to touch her or speak to her. Having arrived in front of her school, she suddenly turned and she spoke. But I did not hear anything. Then she started walking again. A strange mist, like black sprayed ink, invaded little by little the space, dissolving everything. I could still distinguish very vaguely, what remained visible of Estelle, taking what should have been the street of our house. And, rapidly, everything melted in a black thickness of ink.

Only, then, I have heard the words which she had pronounced. She said, in her sweet voice...

- Please!... what did she say ?

- « Why do you let me die a second time? »

- Oh!... And so, how did you understand that message?

- We have to keep our promise. We must have another baby.

- Have another baby! For you it's very easy... Oh! Sorry! What am I thinking of? It is not the time to let myself go. What did your dream say?

- It was another dream, but the message was the same.

- You know, at my age, the risks of having a handicapped baby have increased. What shall we do if we have a downs baby?

- Even if the risks have increased, they remain minimal. We start taking risks when we come to this world, and we cease after our death...

- All the wisdom of the world consists in choosing the best of the risks: I know! And if you must fall along the way, it is not serious, because some others will continue the way! I know! I know! After some time, I have learned the lesson

well, dear Teacher. But that folly touches us too much so that I will not be satisfied with the dull grey theoretical statements, by way of a guarantee.

- Georges, if, after having carried the baby for nine months, I delivered a downs baby, what shall we do?
  - We will keep him, evidently. Why do you ask me that question?
  - You know me. You know well that at a certain period of time, I will not be any longer able to bear him: you know very well, that in those moments, I will be odious... So?
  - I will help you to overcome the hurdle, as I have learned to. Those horrible and stupid battles which we had led against each other will have been useful just the same. Well... If we had a downs baby and if, in spite of all our efforts, there are some moments when you cannot bear it any longer, we will trust him to some reliable people for short periods, enough time for us to go on a beautiful trip.
  - There are lots of people who trust even their dogs my dear to a kennel, for the duration of the holidays.
  - And so? In all respects, it is not to a dog kennel that our baby will be entrusted.
  - And nothing can tell us that it will be a downs baby. It's good: I am ready... And then no! There is still something which I do not understand.
  - What?
  - I am not sure if I have understood well what Estelle is asking of us.
  - She is asking us to succeed with a new baby what we have not damned done with her.
  - I am not such a fool, just the same!... It's the rest which seems confusing.
  - You have certainly understood the essential. And then, faced with danger, there are two of us now.
  - If we manage to stop that damned war.
  - Jeanne, my dear, I don't want to be the head of the family.
  - My dear Georges, it is a big sacrifice! Oh well, me too, I renounce to the stripes of a leader. You can put them away definitely in the loft, with the bad memories.
  - Why not directly in the dustbin?

- Because one deserves to remember such a waste.
- If we keep that commitment, I believe that the most difficult part will be over.  
In the meantime, we have to invent the conjugal democracy.
- It is not so easy. With one vote against one, how can one establish a majority?  
Not by weight, I hope! Neither by seniority!
- Others have practiced it before us, the couple's republic. With Estelle's help  
and our will, we shall manage.
- Will you help me when I let myself be carried away by my demon? Will you  
help me, tell me my dear Georges?
- Yes, my dear, and you will pay me back with my own coin when my personal  
demon will grasp me by the head.

- Like this, we will be like two monkeys delousing each other mutually... »

While taking up that discussion, day after day, we arrived at the third commitment of which I spoke to you at the beginning of the chapter: keep the promise made to Estelle, associate her memory to all the important events of our life, relate to you honestly the story.

We have had that child: a boy, a third son, Jacques. In his fifteenth year, at the age when one calls into question seriously the familiar roles to choose himself and decide what to do with his own life, there's a storm beneath the skull and in the surroundings of the youth which one calls « crisis of adolescence ». Right in the thick of that difficult period so, we spoke to him of his other mother not like the others. Now, he knows well Estelle. He cherishes her memory and, above all, he was grateful to her for making him a particular being. Not only we are not jealous of that attachment but, on the contrary, that pleases us. Having said that, he has preferred to call her « godmother » rather than « big sister » or « mum ».

It is like this that the survivors of the shipwreck take back to the sea for a new world loaded with promises. But this is another story. Let us come back to the « Hundred Years War », at the right moment where we had left him, just when the first skirmishes were about to start.