

SELECTION FROM *GRACE*

GABRIEL MARCEL

[We are happy to include this short selection from Marcel's play *La Grâce* (*Grace*), which was written in 1910–11, and published together with *La Palais de sable* (*The Sandcastle*) in 1913, under the title *Le Seuil invisible* (*The Invisible Threshold*). *Grace* explores, through the character of Gerard, the theme of the nature of religious conversion and what it entails. Gerard's conversion allows for two different and irreconcilable interpretations. The first is the interpretation of the scientific materialist; the second regards Gerard's illness not as a cause but as an occasion to exercise the subject's creative freedom. The play raises the question of grace: the role that God may play in the choice of faith. In this short selection (the first four scenes of Act Five), the change that has occurred in Gerard, and its cause, is the subject of discussion, in addition to its effect on those around him, including his distressed wife Frances and the more skeptical Oliver. These themes are developed in the play, as various interpretations are explored; they are also treated with even more sophistication in *The Sandcastle*. Both plays have been translated into English by Maria Traub and will be published next Spring by St. Augustine's Press.—Editor]

ACT FIVE

In Paris, at the home of the Launoys, same décor as in the second act. A day in Spring; it is five o'clock.

Scene One

Gerard; then Oliver

As the curtain goes up, Gerard is alone; he is seated in an armchair and is looking at a photograph. Tea has been served; the side table has not yet been cleared. The door opens, Gerard precipitously places the photograph back on the table.

GERARD: Hello, Oliver. Are you back from the station?

OLIVER: Yes, but it's necessary that I speak to Frances, where is she?

GERARD: In her room, with her mother and Miss Raymond. I think that she is trying on a hat. Sit down and let's chat awhile (*he gives Oliver an affectionate look*).

OLIVER: (*pulling out his watch*) Yes, I have the time. Do you know that I find you very changed? You have regained some color, you no longer have drawn features; even your voice is no longer the same.

GERARD: (*with emotion*) Is it true?

OLIVER: And this change must have been very rapid; because the letter written by mum the evening of her arrival in Montana was radiating discouragement. Since then it's been less than two months.

GERARD: Only six weeks.

OLIVER: And how do you feel today?

GERARD: Around the middle of the day, I am really good. It seemed at the last check-up that my heart gave the doctor some concern, but it should be nothing.

OLIVER: You no longer have a temperature, even in the evening?

GERARD: No, not for fifteen days.

OLIVER: I only regret that you didn't stay there several weeks more, for it is surely the effect of the stay that is showing now.

GERARD: We were not able to stay longer; the thaw was approaching; and then you have no idea of the dreariness of this country. Never this life of light that I love so much, and of which she has such great need.

OLIVER: (*surprised*) Frances?

GERARD: She was suffering from that sinister nature out there.

OLIVER: I thought however that the sunshine of the mountain tops. . .

GERARD: No, no; it's in the south only that the light is joyful and revives. The south!. . .There I will recover completely.

OLIVER: Gerard, I am so happy to see you finally aspire to health; this is for me the best of symptoms, this momentum toward recovery. In the past, while admiring your serenity, I used to suffer to see you so resigned. . .You smile strangely: why?

GERARD: Let's not speak of past times. . . I am happy that you are beside me, Oliver. You will come to see us there, isn't that right? On vacation?

OLIVER: Yes, I will do my best in order to come be with you.

GERARD: I look at you with all my soul. . .Who knows? If destiny wished that I might not see you again!. . .What sweetness and what faith in your eyes!

OLIVER: Alas! You know it, I don't have any faith. That I don't have your certainties? Mum spoke to me of that missionary that you met out there.

GERARD: An admirable man. You would have liked him. He told me many a profound thing, and you saw his life behind each one of his words (*a silence*). That is so far away already!

OLIVER: Gerard, I would like to believe and I cannot. If I am going to come see you, will you allow me to tell you my doubts?

GERARD: I am not among those who know how to answer. . .Don't turn your anxious face to me (with trouble); others are more worthy than I of your confidence and your respect.

OLIVER: No, no.

GERARD: My soul is less pure than you think (*a silence; he looks at Oliver*). Do you know that you have changed as well? (*in a half-voice*) Tell me, is there nothing new in your life?. . .

OLIVER: (*to divert the conversation*) Say, this photograph of you? It wasn't here before.

GERARD: (*with embarrassment*) Your mother has lost the old one; I will give her this one shortly (*a silence; Oliver goes to the window and looks out*). Come close to me. I am not able yet to speak so strongly. (*Oliver moves closer.*) Well, you don't want to tell me about yourself?

OLIVER: It's just that there is nothing to say.

GERARD: You are at the age when it seems as though there is nothing happening; and yet it's when all is stirring?

OLIVER: My work takes practically all of my time.

GERARD: Ah?

OLIVER: It should not be of interest to you.

GERARD: Why?

OLIVER: It seems as though you live so far removed from all of that!

GERARD: (*with emotion*) No man can remain in the eternal.

OLIVER: You didn't speak like that before.

GERARD: It's true. Back then I didn't foresee. . .

OLIVER: What do you mean?

GERARD: Better that you don't understand (*a silence*). Oliver, are you chaste?

OLIVER: (*blushing, in a half-voice*) You well know it.

GERARD: I love you thus.

OLIVER: I don't understand the emotion that is in your heart. In the past. . .

GERARD: Yes, in the past. . .

Scene Two

The same characters; Frances, Antoinette, Mrs. Thouret

FRANCES: (*to Oliver*) Hello, I didn't know that you were here, Oliver. Well! The tickets?

OLIVER: There are no longer seats left on the express train on Saturday; but there are some on Sunday's train. I wanted to consult you before reserving.

FRANCES: I guess we will have to resign ourselves to a day's delay then.

MRS. THOURET: You are not a day away.

OLIVER: I'll go right now to reserve the seats.

FRANCES: First have a cup of tea; I'm sure that Gerard didn't think to offer you something. And then you're coming to dinner, don't forget. Antoinette will not be with us because the annoying individual to whom she is about to give her hand. . .

ANTOINETTE: I'm telling you, please don't mind. . .

OLIVER: Let it be: you're delighted that we're picking on him in front of you.

ANTOINETTE: My feelings are not your concern.

MRS. THOURET: Your fiancé delights me; we chatted the entire evening, the day before yesterday.

ANTOINETTE: If you spoke to him about investments, it doesn't surprise me.

MRS. THOURET: I think he has very reasonable ideas about life; he has a sense of the responsibilities that weigh on a young household.

ANTOINETTE: (*fearfully*) To that point!

MRS. THOURET: He's not one of those who throw themselves into marriage without reflection, and let themselves go to a marital counselor.

FRANCES: We know that Antoinette is making a marriage of expedience. We do not need to remind her about it again.

MRS. THOURET: Marriages of reason. . .

FRANCES: Mother, are you going to repeat that they are the only ones which succeed?

ANTOINETTE: What! You condescend to take part in such disrespectful discussion? I am not at all grateful for your participation; for if you are predicting divorce for me at the end of six months.
..

MRS. THOURET: It's dreadful that there are divorces now!

GERARD: (*to Antoinette*) For me to be able to predict divorce for you, it would first be necessary for me to see that your marriage existed.

ANTOINETTE: And why doesn't it exist? Is it for lack of ecclesiastical benediction?

GERARD: What my mother-in-law calls a 'marriage of reason' (all rationale and no emotion) is not a marriage for me.

ANTOINETTE: (*with a threatening gesture*) You're not going to talk to us about the mystical union of souls!

GERARD: (*with sadness*) No, I will not oppose you with the example of those who do not even want to be praised by our profane mouths (*Oliver raises his head and looks at him sadly*). The carnal desire of two creatures who are burning to belong to one another is still perhaps a justification.

ANTOINETTE: (*to Frances*) Well then, Frances, your husband is becoming more human, it seems.

FRANCES: (*whose discomfort is visible*) I didn't notice.

GERARD: (*to Antoinette*) Make no mistake about the meaning of my words. There is no carnal love which is not obscured by the shadow of another love, which is not saddened by the regret of a lost paradise.

ANTOINETTE: I recognize the old you again.

FRANCES: Let it go. . .

ANTOINETTE: No, continue, it's interesting!

OLIVER: Don't you see he is ailing?

MRS. THOURET: Gerard, take care of yourself!

GERARD: But there remains hidden in the depths of the most troubled desire, the premonition of a transfiguration. . . It would be too awful if for the one who has awakened in the world, there were no promise of deliverance.

ANTOINETTE: You are becoming prophetic again. What about me then, since I'm making a reasonable marriage. . .*(jokingly)* it's very sad, you know. If I had suspected the revelation that awaited me here, I would not have come.

MRS. THOURET: So let it go my child. I don't understand what Gerard is talking about. . .But, I can guarantee you that marriages like yours are often those which turn out the best.

ANTOINETTE: Dear Madam, you give me courage. . .*(to the others)*. You see, Mrs. Thouret is very hopeful.

GERARD: Why should you not be what people call happy?

ANTOINETTE: My marriage is already pretty good. I will try to be content with that.

GERARD: But when I think of all that you will not know!

OLIVER: *(laughing)* You don't know anything about it. There are happy matches.

ANTOINETTE: Go on.

OLIVER: Did I shock you?

ANTOINETTE: You wouldn't!. . .Well, perhaps I am going to astound you: it would bother me a great deal to cheat on my husband.

MRS. THOURET: Well, do tell now! What kind of ideas are these?

GERARD: All of that doesn't matter. The man that you marry without love, can he claim your fidelity?

ANTOINETTE: You do well, you mystics when you get involved.

FRANCES: See here, Gerard!

MRS. THOURET: *(in a half-voice)* You know that he is transformed.

FRANCES: *(to herself)* Transformed!

MRS. THOURET: For more than six months I haven't seen him so well.

FRANCES: *(who no longer conceals her anguish)* Really!

MRS. THOURET: For me it's only a question of patience.

FRANCES: *(feeling the weight of Oliver looking at her)* Gerard! Why don't you go out a little with Oliver? You would even be able to sit down in the Luxembourg Gardens. The weather is very mild tonight.

OLIVER: (*pulling out his watch*) Indeed, perhaps it's better that I get going. The office could be closed.

GERARD: I'll accompany you (*they go out together*).

MRS. THOURET: Me too, I'm going to put on my hat. I have bridge at six o'clock with your uncle Anatole, and he doesn't allow us to be late.

She goes out.

Scene Three

Frances, Antoinette

ANTOINETTE: Your husband has entertained me a lot.

FRANCES: Oh?

ANTOINETTE: Yes, I think he's softened his opinions.

FRANCES: (*awkwardly*) I never argue with him.

ANTOINETTE: And then he becomes romantic. . .it's funny how you are all romantic; you put capital letters on passion, on love; I'm not speaking of your mother, of course.

FRANCES: Yes, mama. . .

ANTOINETTE: It looks as though something's bothering you.

FRANCES: Absolutely nothing.

ANTOINETTE: We've hardly seen each other during your stay. I was sorry that you were not free yesterday afternoon.

FRANCES: (*briskly*) Gerard needed me; I was unable to leave him.

ANTOINETTE: Physically, he is transformed.

FRANCES: Yes.

ANTOINETTE: Perhaps this explains. . .

FRANCES: It may.

ANTOINETTE: You understood me immediately.

FRANCES: It wasn't difficult.

ANTOINETTE: (*after looking at her*) You are hiding something from me aren't you?

FRANCES: (*with impatience*) How many times will it be necessary to repeat that nothing is bothering me!

ANTOINETTE: You are nervous.

FRANCES: I am tired. I had to extend myself heavily out there. And one only feels the fatigue afterward. (*Mrs. Thouret enters.*)

MRS. THOURET: I am ready. Are you accompanying me, Antoinette?

ANTOINETTE: I will stay just a few more minutes with Frances.

MRS. THOURET: (*to her daughter*) Perhaps I'll come by a little tomorrow towards five o'clock.

FRANCES: (*briskly*) No, I'll be on Vivienne Street, at the dressmaker's.

MRS. THOURET: Really, I thought she had moved.

FRANCES: Yes, that's right, I meant to say on Boulevard Malesherbes. Come instead for dinner.

MRS. THOURET: Fine. Bye bye. (*She goes out.*)

ANTOINETTE: Your mother looks good, the altitude did her some good. By the way, in Montana, you saw again your former idol, (*ironically*) the professor Du Ryer?

FRANCES: Yes. I saw him very little. His wife is a simpleton. I don't understand how one marries someone like that.

ANTOINETTE: In other words, the professor Du Ryer has fallen in your esteem.

Scene Four

The same characters; Charles Morin

CHARLES: (*after having shaken hands with Antoinette and Frances*) I knew you were passing through Paris, and I had to come for news of Mr. Launoy.

FRANCES: My husband is better, significantly better. But we are leaving again in three days.

CHARLES: I am glad to hear. . .

FRANCES: And the Giotto of the Arena? It's moving ahead, your book?

CHARLES: How did you know?

FRANCES: Were you keeping it a secret?

CHARLES: Ah! I've got it. That excellent Mr. Du Ryer told you. . .Mr. Du Ryer is he doing well?

FRANCES: I suppose so.

CHARLES: Fine! So much the better.

ANTOINETTE: He's still the bane of your existence?

CHARLES: But I don't wish him any harm, I'm asking you to believe it. Besides, I've only met him on two occasions, one of them here.

FRANCES: You were unbearable that day; I remember your exit on the subject of Saint Paul.

ANTOINETTE: Seriously, you think he is quite dangerous, this poor Mr. Du Ryer?

CHARLES: On no account. His doctrines will always find an antidote in common sense.

ANTOINETTE: What? You, you are extolling common sense?

CHARLES: Common sense is a passerine bird, but a very harmless passerine bird. How will you ever persuade her that there is necessarily an alternative between the visceral explanations of Mr. Du Ryer, and the most transcendent mysticism?

ANTOINETTE: I don't understand, you know.

CHARLES: God exists or He does not exist; it's very simple. But the effort of humanity, since one has been able to reason, has been to escape this dilemma: it believes it has succeeded—at the price of such contradictions! And all your pedantry will change nothing about it.

FRANCES: Do not hope to block us by your fictional dilemmas. Destinies meet and divide like waters; I do not believe in a common source from which they emanate. The scientist is free to call necessity the chance events that lead him. As for me. . .

CHARLES: (*to Frances*) You have come a long way. But you came back to the wisdom of men; only what you call chance, they call freedom.

ANTOINETTE: Basically all this is only a matter of words.

FRANCES: (*to Charles*) What good is it to argue? You will not convince me any more than you are convinced yourself.

CHARLES: Then you take me for a vulgar sophist?

FRANCES: For a lover of paradoxes at least.

CHARLES: But it is absolutely false; I guarantee you that the other day at the Brera, or yesterday, while I was listening to the 'Enchantment of Good Friday'. . .

FRANCES: Yes, this is quite right.

ANTOINETTE: In any case, the things God wills, if they exist, are not those things which get certified. We therefore do not need to worry about them.

FRANCES: *(listening)* I think I hear my husband. I beg your pardon. . . .*(She goes to the door.)*
Gerard!

CHARLES: *(to Gerard, who enters)* I am happy to hear how well you are doing *(he shakes his hand)*. I'm sorry that I cannot stay.

FRANCES: You're leaving already?

CHARLES: I must, a meeting. . .

FRANCES: *(to Antoinette, who gets up)* You too, you are leaving us? Stay a little longer.

ANTOINETTE: No, it is late. When will I see you again? *(She leaves with Charles and Frances.)*

[From: *The Invisible Threshold: Two Plays by Gabriel Marcel*, translated by Maria Traub, edited by Brendan Sweetman, Maria Traub and Geoffrey Karabin (St Augustine's Press, 2018), forthcoming.]