

**THE SECRET OF
NARCISSE:
A ROMANCE**

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The Secret of Narcisse: A Romance by Edmund Gosse

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EDMUND GOSSE

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A Romance

BY
EDMUND GOSSE

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"ON VIOL AND FLUTE," ETC.

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THE SECRET OF NARCISSE.

I.

It was Monday before Pentecost in the year 1548. There had been rain and wind, but the gusts had fallen, and it was a yellow soundless afternoon that was now drawing to a close. From the whitewashed steps at their doorway, women and children of four generations could see, down the steep and tortuous street, the vineyard opposite the town, the long, smooth, round hill-side, as brown as a bear-skin in the warm flood of sunlight. All these Mercillats were talking

at once—all, except the silent extremities of the family—the bald and toothless grandmother, bowed upon her staff, and the baby, wrapped up and stiffly set, like an image, along the arm of its young mother, Lucie. One other member of the group said but little, Rosalie Mercillat, of whom her father, the gunsmith, was heard to swear, a little too frequently and too loudly, that she was the prettiest maid in Bar-le-Duc, or, for that matter, in the whole Duchy of the Barrois. Handsome she was, with dark blue eyes beneath her masses of black hair; large of limb, but tall and graceful, carrying an even flow of healthy blood under the creamy palor of her complexion. For Rosalie the loud discussion of market prices, of the reproof given by the curé to the daughter of their neighbor, the flesher, of the propriety of