The Arabian Nights

The French title for this famous work is *Les Mille et Une Nuits (A Thousand and One Nights)*. This, of course, makes it fit even better to Marcel’s fear that he may not be as fortunate as Sheherazade, who stays her execution night after night thanks to her gifts as a story teller. “If I worked, it would be only at night. But I should need many night, a hundred perhaps, or even a thousand. And I should live in the anxiety of not knowing whether the master of my destiny might not prove less indulgent than the Sultan Shahriyar, whether in the morning, when I broke off my story, he would consent to a further reprieve and permit me to resume my narrative the following evening.” —*Time Regained* 6: 524

Jeanne Pouquet as the model for Gilberte:

In *Proustiana*, we talked about Jeanne’s daughter, Simone de Caillavet as the model for Mlle de Saint-Loup. This seems especially appropriate since Simone’s mother was one of the two primary models for Gilberte. In his letter, Proust hinted to Jeanne that there were traces, in the novel he was writing, of his infatuation with Simone’s mother when she was Jeanne Pouquet, mingled with elements of his earlier crush on Marie de Bénardaky. If ever [Gaston] Calmette finds the time to publish an article of mine . . . and which is a recollection of a childhood love—not my love for you, it was *before* that—you will nonetheless find amalgamated with it something of the emotional turmoil I felt when I wondered whether you’d be at the tennis court. But what’s the use of recalling things about which you took the absurd and unkind decision never to have noticed! —Marcel Proust, *Selected Letters 1910-1917*, 3: 74-75

Proust also gave to Marcel the futile attempts he made trying to obtain the photograph of Jeanne with him at the Neuilly tennis court:

But since I never hoped to obtain an actual fragment of [Gilberte’s] plaits, if at least I had been able to have a photograph of them, how far more precious than one of a sheet of flowers drawn by Leonardo! To acquire one, I stooped to servilities with friends of the Swanns and even with photographers, which not only failed to procure for me what
I wanted, but tied me for life to a number of extremely boring people. —*Within a Budding Grove* 2: 103-04

Here is another line from a letter to Jeanne Pouquet that indicates Proust fascination with Simone de Caillavet:

My memory and my imagination offer me from time to time stereoscopic sessions of your daughter’s smile and gramophone records of her voice. I’ve given these pastimes a rather old-fashioned title, “The Pleasures of Solitude.” —Marcel Proust, *Selected Letters 1910-1917*, 3: 79