

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

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Preface

Guy de Maupassant

Guy de Maupassant was born at the Chateau de Miromesnil, near Dieppe, on August 5th, 1850. The Maupassants were an old Lorraine family who had settled in Normandy in the middle of the Eighteenth Century. His father had married in 1846 a young lady of the rich bourgeoisie, Laure Le Poittevin. With her brother Alfred, she had been the playmate of Gustave Flaubert, the son of a Rouen surgeon, who was destined to have a directing influence on her son's life. She was a woman of no common literary accomplishments, very fond of the Classics, especially Shakespeare. Separated from her husband, she kept her two sons, Guy and his younger brother Hervé.

Until he was thirteen years old Guy lived with his mother at Etretat, in the Villa des Verguies, where between the sea and the luxuriant country, he grew very fond of nature and outdoor sports; he went fishing with the fishermen of the coast and spoke patois with the peasants. He was deeply devoted to his mother. He first entered the Seminary of Yvetot, but managed to have himself expelled on account of a peccadillo of precocious

poetry. From his early religious education he conserved a marked hostility to Religion. Then he was sent to the Rouen Lycée, where he proved a good scholar indulging in poetry and taking a prominent part in theatricals. The war of 1870 broke out soon after his graduation from College; he enlisted as a volunteer and fought gallantly. After the war, in 1871, he left Normandy and came to Paris where he spent ten years as a clerk in the Navy Department. During these ten tedious years his only recreation was canoeing on the Seine on Sundays and holidays. Gustave Flaubert took him under his protection and acted as a kind of literary guardian to him, guiding his debut in journalism and literature. At Flaubert's home he befriended the Russian novelist Tourgueneff and Emilie Zola, as well as many of the protagonists of the realistic school. He wrote considerable verse and short plays. In 1878 he was transferred to the Ministry of Public Instruction and became a contributing editor to several leading newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *le Gil Blas*, *le Gaulois* and *l'Echo de Paris*. He devoted his spare time to writing novels and short stories. In 1880 he published his first masterpiece, "*Boule de Suif*", which met with an instant and tremendous success. Flaubert characterized it as "a masterpiece that will remain."

The decade from 1880 to 1891 was the most fertile period of Maupassant's life. Made famous by his first short story, he worked methodically and produced two and sometimes four volumes annually. By a privilege of nature and his Norman origin, he combined talent and practical business sense, which

brought him affluence and wealth. In 1881 he published his first volume of short stories under the title of "La Maison Tellier"; it reached its twelfth edition in two years; in 1883 he finished his first novel "Une Vie", twenty-five thousand copies of which were sold in less than a year. Glory and Fortune smiled on him. In his novels, he concentrated all his observations scattered in his short stories. His second novel "Bel Ami", which came out in 1885, had thirty-seven editions in four months. His editor, Havard, commissioned him to write new masterpieces and, without the slightest effort, his pen produced new masterpieces of style, description, conception and penetration¹. With a natural aversion for Society, he loved retirement, solitude and meditation. He traveled extensively in Algeria, Italy, England, Britany, Sicily, Auvergne, and from each voyage he brought back a new volume. He cruised on his private yacht "Bel Ami", named after one of his earlier masterpieces. This feverish life did not prevent him from making friends among the literary celebrities of his day: Dumas fils had a paternal affection for him; at Aix-les-Bains he met Taine and fell under the spell of the philosopher-historian. Flaubert continued to act as his literary Godfather. His friendship with the Goucourts was of short duration; his frank and practical nature reacted against the ambiance of gossip, scandal, duplicity and invidious criticism that the two brothers had created around them in the guise of an Eighteenth Century style salon. He hated

¹ Note from Brett: The original uses "penertation" and "penertating" but I could not find this word anywhere so assumed it was a typographical error.

the human comedy, the social farce.

In his latter years he developed an exaggerated love for solitude, a predilection for self-preservation and still worse, a constant fear of death and mania of persecution, which ran like a black thread through all his writings and brought on gradually the final tragic catastrophe. – He became insane in 1891 and died in 1893 without having recovered his mind.

Life, movement, penetrating² observation, and hypersensitiveness, both artistic and physical, are the dominant traits of this literary phenomenon. His rise to fame was as vertiginous as his fall and decay. As a novelist he may have his equals and superiors, but as a short story-writer, with the exception of Charles Nodier and Alphonse Daudet, he had none.

The Happy Hour Library

² Note from Brett: The original uses "penetration" and "penertating" but I could not find this word anywhere so assumed it was a typographical error.

Mademoiselle Fifi

The Prussian Commander, Major Graf von Farlsberg, was finishing the reading of his mail, comfortably seated in a large tapestry armchair, with his booted feet resting on the elegant marble of the mantelpiece on which, for the last three months that he had been occupying the Chateau d'Uville, his spurs had traced two deep grooves, growing deeper every day.

A cup of coffee was steaming on an inlaid guerdon, stained with liqueur, burned by cigars, notched by the penknife of the conquering officer who, while sharpening his pencil, would stop at times and trace on the marble monograms or designs according to the fancy of his indolent dream.

After he had finished his letters and read the German newspapers, which his orderly had brought him, he rose, threw into the fire three or four enormous pieces of green wood, for these gentlemen were cutting down, little by little, the trees of the park to keep themselves warm and stepped over to the window. The rain was pouring, a regular Normandy rain which one might have thought was let loose and showered down by a furious hand, a slanting rain, thick like a curtain, forming a kind of wall with oblique stripes, a rain that lashed, splashed, deluged everything, a rain peculiar to the neighborhood of Rouen, that watering pot of France.

The Officer looked for a long while at the inundated lawn,

and yonder, the swollen Andilles, which was overflowing; and with his fingers he was drumming on the window-pane a waltz from the Rhineland, when a noise caused him to turn around; it was his second in command, Baron von Kelweingstein, holding a rank equivalent to that of Captain.

The Major was a giant, with broad shoulders, graced by a fan-shaped blond beard, flowing down his chest and forming a breast-shield. His whole tall, solemn person suggested the image of a military peacock, a peacock that would carry its tail spread on its chin. He had blue eyes, cold and gentle; a cheek bearing the scar of a sword wound inflicted during the Austrian war; and he was said to be a kind hearted man as well as a brave officer.

Short, red faced, corpulent, tightly belted, the Captain wore, cropped almost close, his red hair, the fiery filaments of which, when under the reflection of certain lights, might have given the impression as though his face had been rubbed with phosphorus. Two teeth lost in a night orgy and brawl, he did not exactly remember now, caused him to spit out indistinct words which one could not always understand. He was bald only on the top of his head, like a tonsured monk, with a crop of short, curly hair, golden and shiny, around this circle of bare flesh.

The Commander shook hands, and gulped down his cup of coffee (the sixth since that morning), while listening to the report of his subordinate about the incidents and happening in the service. Then both came back near the window and declared that theirs was not a cheerful lot. The Major, a quiet man, married and

having left his wife home, would adapt himself to anything; but the Baron Captain, accustomed to leading a fast life, a patron of low resorts, a wild chaser of disreputable women, was furious at having been confined for the last three months to the obligatory chasteness of this out of the way Post.

Presently they heard a scratching on the door; the Commander said: "Come in," and a man, one of their automaton soldiers, appeared in the aperture, announcing by his mere presence that luncheon was served.

In the dining-room they found three officers of lower rank; one lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two second-lieutenants, Fritz Scheuneberg and Markgraf Wilhelm von Eyrik, a tiny blond man, haughty and brutal with his men, harsh toward the vanquished foe, and violent like a fire-arm.

Since his arrival in France his comrade called him only Mademoiselle Fifi. This nickname was bestowed upon him on account of his coquettish style of dressing and manners, his slender waist, which looked as if it were laced in a corset, his pale face on which a nascent mustache could hardly be seen, and also on account of the habit he had acquired, in order to express his supreme contempt for persons and things, of using continually the French locution: "Fi! fi donc!" which he pronounced with a slight lisping.

The dining-room of the Chateau d'Uville was a large and regal hall, the ancient mirrors of which constellated with bullet holes, and the high Flanders tapestries, slashed with sword cuts and

hanging in shreds at certain places, told the tale of Mademoiselle Fifi's favorite occupations and pastime during his hours of idleness.

On the walls, three family portraits, a warrior wearing his armor, a Cardinal and a Chief Justice, were smoking long porcelain pipes, while in its frame, ungilt by age, a noble lady in a tight waist, was showing with an arrogant air an enormous pair of mustache crayoned with charcoal.

And the Officers' luncheon went off almost silently in this mutilated room, darkened by the shower outside, sad and depressing in its vanquished appearance, the old oak parquet floor of which had become solid like the floor of a bar room.

Having finished eating, it was time for smoking; they began to drink and, reverting to their usual topic, they spoke of their monotonous and tedious life. Bottles of cognac and liqueur passed from hand to hand, and seating back on their chairs, they were all absorbing their liqueur in repeated sips, holding at the corner of their mouths the long curved pipes ending in a meerschaum bowl, invariably daubed as if to seduce Hottentots.

As soon as their glasses were empty, they refilled them with a gesture of resigned weariness. But Mademoiselle Fifi broke his glass every instant and then a soldier brought him immediately a new one.

A mist of acrid smoke bathed, drowned them, and they seemed to sink into a somnolent and sad inebriety, in that taciturn and morose intoxication peculiar to men who have nothing to do.

But suddenly the Baron sat up. A revolt shook him; he swore: "By heavens! this cannot go on indefinitely; we must in the end invent something."

Lieutenant Otto and Second-Lieutenant Fritz, two Teutons eminently endowed with heavy and serious German faces, replied together: "What shall we invent, Captain?"

He mused for a few seconds and resumed: "What? Well, we must organize an entertainment, if the Commander will permit."

The Major took his pipe out of his mouth: "What entertainment,

Captain?" —

The Baron came nearer: "Leave it to me, Commander; I shall send Pflicht³ to Rouen, and he will bring us some women I know where to get them. A supper will be prepared here; besides we have everything, and I may venture to say we shall spend a rather pleasant evening."

Graf Farlsberg, shrugged his shoulders and smiled: "You are crazy, my friend!"

But all the officers had risen, surrounding their chief and beseeching him: "Let the Captain go, Commander; it is so sad here!"

Finally the Major yielded: "All right!" said he; and immediately the Baron sent for Pflicht. Pflicht was an old non-commissioned officer, who had never been seen smiling, but who carried out with fanatical punctuality the orders of his superiors,

³ Duty

no matter what they were.

Erect, with his impassive face, he received the Baron's instructions; then he left the room; and five minutes later a large military wagon, covered with miller's tarpaulin stretched in the shape of a dome, was being rapidly driven away under the heavy rain at the gallop of four horses.

At once an awakening thrill seemed to run through the group of officers and shook them from their lethargy; the languid poses straightened up, faces became animated and they began to talk.

Although the shower was continuing as heavy as ever, the Major affirmed that it was not so dark, and Lieutenant Otto announced positively that the weather was clearing up. Even Mademoiselle Fifi seemed unable to keep still. He rose and sat down again. His harsh and clear eye was looking for something to break; suddenly, glaring at the lady with the mustache, the young prig drew his revolver: "You shall not witness it, you!" said he, and, without leaving his seat, he aimed. Two bullets fired in rapid succession put out the eyes of the portrait.

Then he exclaimed: "Let us explode a mine!" And at once the conversation was interrupted, as if a powerful and new curiosity had taken hold of every one present.

A mine, that was his invention, his way of destroying, his favorite amusement.

When he hurriedly left his chateau, Comte Fernand d'Armoy d'Uville, the legitimate owner, had had no time to take with him nor hide away anything except the silver-plate, which he

had stowed away in a hole made in a wall. Now as he was immensely wealthy and lived in great luxury, his large salon, the door of which communicated with the dining-room, presented the appearance of a Picture Gallery before the precipitate flight of the master.

Priceless paintings and aquarelles were hanging on the walls, while on the tables, the *étagères* and the elegant cabinets, thousands of *bric à brac* and *bibelots*, *statuettes*, Dresden and Chinese vases, old ivories and Venice pottery peopled the large room with their precious and odd multitude.

Hardly any were left by this time. Not that they had been stolen; the Major, Graf Farlsberg, would not have permitted nor tolerated it; but Mademoiselle Fifi once in a while exploded a mine; and on such occasions all the officers enjoyed themselves thoroughly for five minutes.

The little Markgraf went to the salon to fetch what he needed; he brought in a tiny and graceful Chinese tea-pot of the Rose family, which he filled with gun powder, and through the neck of which he carefully introduced a long piece of tinder, lighted it and, running, carried this infernal machine into the next room.

Then he returned quickly and closed the door behind him. All the Germans stood up and waited, their faces wreathed in childlike smiles of curiosity, and as soon as the explosion shook the Chateau, they hurried in all at once.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who had been the first one to rush in, was deliriously clapping his hands in front of a terra cotta Venus,

whose head at last had been blown off; and each picked up broken pieces of China, wondering at the strange indentation of the fragments, examining the new damage done, claiming that some of the damage had been caused by previous explosions. And the Major was contemplating, with a paternal look, the large salon upset by this Neronian firework and strewn with the debris of the objects of Art. He came out first, declaring good-naturedly: "It was very successful this time!"

But such a spout of smoke had invaded the dining-room, mixing with the smoke of tobacco, that it was impossible to breathe. The Commander opened the window, and all the officers, who had come back to drink a last glass of cognac, crowded near it.

The damp air blew into the room bringing in a kind of water dust, which sprayed and powdered the beards, and a smell of inundation. They were looking at the tall trees bending under the shower, the broad valley darkened by this outflow of the black low clouds⁴, and in the distance the Church spire rising like a gray point in the pelting rain.

Since the arrival of the Germans, the Church bell had not rung. It was in fact the only resistance with which the invaders met in that neighborhood, the resistance of the bell-tower. The Curate had not refused to receive and feed Prussian soldiers; he had even, on several occasions, accepted to drink a bottle of beer or claret with the enemy Commander, who often used him as a

⁴ Note from Brett: The original uses "clouds," but I think "clouds" was intended.

benevolent intermediary. But it was useless to ask him for a single ring of his bell; he would rather have faced a firing squad. That was his way of protesting against invasion, a peaceful protest, the protest of silence, the only one, said he, that became a priest, a man of peace and not of blood. And everybody for ten miles around praised the firmness, the heroism of Father Chantavoine, who dared to affirm the public mourning and proclaim it by the obstinate mutism of his Church.

The entire village, enthusiastic about this resistance, was ready to support and back up its pastor to the bitter end, to risk anything, considering this tacit protest as a safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that in this way they deserved better of their country than Belfort or Strasbourg, that they had given just as good an example, that the name of their hamlet would remain immortal for it; and with that single exception, they refused nothing to the victorious Prussians.

The Commander and his officers laughed in private at this manifestation of inoffensive courage, and as the entire neighborhood showed themselves obliging to them and docile to their orders, they willingly tolerated the priest's silent patriotism.

Little Markgraf Wilhelm was the only one who would have liked to compel the bell to ring; he was very indignant at the political condescendence of his superior officer towards the priest; and every day he was beseeching the Commander to let him do once, just once, "Ding-dong! Ding-dong!" merely for the sake of having a little fun. And he begged for it with

feline gracefulness, the cajolery of a woman, the tenderness of voice of a beloved mistress craving for something, but the Commander did not yield, and to console himself, Mademoiselle Fifi exploded mines in the chateau d'Uville.

The five men remained there, in a group, for a few minutes, inhaling the damp air. Finally Lieutenant Fritz spoke with a thick laugh: "Decidedly, the ladies will not have fine weather for their trip."

Thereupon they separated, each going to his work, the Captain having a great deal to do to make arrangements for the dinner party.

When they met again at nightfall, they began to laugh at seeing each other dolled up coquettishly and smart like on grand review days, perfumed, pomaded and hale. The Commander's hair seemed less gray than in the morning, and the Captain had shaved, keeping only his mustache, which looked like a flame under his nose.

Notwithstanding the rain, the window was kept open and from time to time one of them went over to listen. At ten minutes past six o'clock, the Baron reported a distant rolling. They all hurried downstairs, and soon the large carriage came up with the four horses still galloping, covered with mud up to their backs, steaming and blowing.

And five women got off the carriage and stepped on the perron, five graceful girls carefully selected by a chum of the Captain, to whom Pflicht had taken a card from his officer.

They had not been reluctant to come, knowing that they would be well paid; besides, they were quite well acquainted and familiar with the Prussians, having been in intercourse with them for the past three months and making the best of men as of things. "Our business requires it," they told each other on their way, no doubt in order to ease off some secret pricking of a remnant of conscience.

And, presently, they were ushered into the dining-room. Lighted up, the dining-room looked still more lugubrious in its pitiful dilapidation, and the table covered with viands, rich china and silver plate, which had been discovered in the wall where the owner had hidden them, gave to the premises the appearance of a low tavern, where bandits are having supper after a successful raffle. The Captain, radiant, took hold of the women as of a familiar thing, appreciating them, embracing them, scenting them, estimating them at their value as instruments of pleasure; and as the three younger men wanted to take one each, he objected to it with authority, reserving to himself the privilege of making the assignments, in perfect fairness, according to rank, so as not to injure in any way the hierarchy.

Then, in order to preclude any discussion, any contest and any suspicion of partiality, he lined them up according to height, and addressing the tallest, in a tone of command: "Your name?"

She replied, raising her voice: "Pamela."

Then he announced: "Number one, by the name of Pamela, is adjudged to the Commander."

Having then kissed Blondine, the second as a mark of his claim to ownership, he offered the fat Amanda to Lieutenant Otto; Eva la Tomate to Second-Lieutenant Fritz, and the smallest of all, Rachel, a very young brunette, with black eyes like ink spots, a Jewess whose pug nose confirmed the rule that ascribes hooked noses to all her race, to the youngest officer, the frail Markgraf Wilhelm von Eyrik.

As a matter of fact they were all pretty and plump, without any distinctive character on their faces, shaped almost alike in appearance and style and complexion by the daily practice of their illicit trade and the life in common in disreputable houses.

The three young men wanted immediately to take their partners out of the room under pretext of offering them brushes and soap for washing and freshening up; but the Captain was wise enough not to allow it, claiming that they were clean enough to sit down to dinner, and for fear that those who went up might want to change their girls when they came down, and thus disturb the other couples. His experience prevailed. There were only plenty of kisses, kisses of expectancy.

Suddenly Rachel suffocated, coughing to tears and rejecting smoke through her nose. The Markgraf, feigning to kiss her, had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not get angry, did not utter a single word, but glared at her possessor with anger aroused way down at the bottom of her black eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The Commander himself seemed to be delighted; he took Pamela on his right and Blondine on his

left, and while unfolding his napkin, he declared: – "This was a charming idea of yours, Captain!"

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, polite and obsequious as if they were sitting near Society ladies, did slightly intimidate their neighbors; but Baron von Kelweingstein, let loose in his vice, was beaming; he cracked unsavory jokes, and with his crown of red hair, seemed to be on fire. He paid gallant compliments in his defective French of the Rhine, and his lewd nonsense, smacking of taverns, expectorated through the hole between his two broken teeth, reached the girls in the middle of a rapid fire of saliva.

The girls did not understand his witticisms, and their intelligence did not seem to be awakened until he sputtered obscene words, rough expressions, crippled by his accent. Then all in a chorus began to laugh as if they were demented, falling on the laps of their neighbors, repeating the words which the Baron disfigured purposely in order to make them say filthy things. They vomited at will plenty of them, intoxicated after drinking from the first bottles of wine; and relapsing into their real selves, opening the gates to their habits, they kissed mustaches on their right and those on their left, pinched arms, uttered furious screams, drank out of all the glasses, sang French couplets and bits of German songs they had learned in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves flushed and excited by the female flesh spread under their nose and within reach of their hands, lost all restraint, roaring, breaking the plates, while behind them

impassive soldiers were waiting.

The Commander only kept some restraint.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel on his knees and deliberately working himself up to a pitch of frenzy, kissed madly the ebony curls on her neck, inhaling through the thin interstice between the gown and her skin, the sweet warmth of her body and the full fragrance of her person; through the silk, he pinched her furiously making her scream, seized with a rabid ferocity and distracted by his craving for destruction. Often also holding her in his arms, squeezing her as if he wanted to mix her with himself, he pressed long kisses on the fresh lips of the Jewess and embraced her until he lost breath; but suddenly he bit her so deep that a dash of blood flowed down the chin of the young girl and ran into her waist.

Once more she looked at him, straight in the face, and washing the wound, she muttered: "You will have to pay for it!" He began to laugh, with a harsh laugh: "All right, I shall pay!" said he.

At dessert, champagne was served. The Commander rose and with the same tone as he would have taken to drink the health of the Empress Augusta, he said:

"To our ladies!" And a series of toasts were then drunk, toasts with the gallantry and manner of drunkards and troopers, mixed with obscene jokes, rendered still more brutal by their ignorance of the language.

They were rising one after the other, trying to be witty, making efforts to be funny; and the women, so intoxicated that they were

hardly able to sit up, with their vacant look, their heavy, clammy tongues, applauded vociferously each time.

The Captain, no doubt intending to lend the orgy an atmosphere of gallantry, raised once more his glass and pronounced: "To our victories over the hearts!"

Then Lieutenant Otto, a kind of bear from the Black Forest, jumped up, inflamed, saturated with drinks, and suddenly, carried away by alcoholic patriotism, he cried: "To our victories over France!"

Intoxicated as they were, the women kept silent and Rachel, shuddering with rage, retorted: "Well! I know some Frenchmen in whose presence you would not dare say such things."

But the little Markgraf, still holding her on his knees, began to laugh, having become exceedingly exhilarated by the wine: "Ah! Ah! Ah! I never met any myself. As soon as they see us, they run away."

The girl exasperated, shouted in his face: "You lie, you dirty pig!"

For a second he fixed on her his clear eyes, as he used to fix them on the paintings the canvas of which he riddled with revolver shots; then he laughed: "Oh yes! let us speak of it, you beauty! Would we be here if they were brave?" – and he became more and more excited: "We are their masters; France belongs to us!"

She sprang off his knees and fell back on her chair. He rose, held out his glass over the table and repeated: "France, the

French, their fields, their woods and their houses belong to us!"

The others, who were thoroughly intoxicated, suddenly shaken by military enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of brutes, seized their glasses and shouted vociferously: "Long live Prussia!" and emptied them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, reduced to silence and frightened. Even

Rachel kept silent, unable to reply.

Then the little Markgraf placed on the head of the Jewess his glass of Champaign, refilled, and said – "The women of France belong to us!"

She jumped up so quickly that the glass was upset and spilled the yellow wine in her black hair, as for a baptism; it fell broken to pieces on the floor. Her lips quivering, she looked defiantly at the officer; the latter kept laughing; she stammered in a voice choked with rage: "That, that is not true! you shall never have the women of France!"

He sat down to laugh at his ease and tried to imitate the Parisian accent: "That is a good one! that is a good one! And what are you doing here, you little one?"

Confused, at first, she did not answer, as she did not, in her excitement, understand fully what he said; then, as soon as the meaning of it dawned on her mind, she shouted at him indignantly and vehemently: "I, I, I am not a woman! I am a prostitute! and that is all a Prussian deserves!"

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