GUY DE MAUPASSANT

ORIGINAL SHORT STORIES – VOLUME 07

Guy de Maupassant
Original Short Stories – Volume 07

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Содержание

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THE FALSE GEMS

Monsieur Lantin had met the young girl at a reception at the house of the second head of his department, and had fallen head over heels in love with her.

She was the daughter of a provincial tax collector, who had been dead several years. She and her mother came to live in Paris, where the latter, who made the acquaintance of some of the families in her neighborhood, hoped to find a husband for her daughter.

They had very moderate means, and were honorable, gentle, and quiet.

The young girl was a perfect type of the virtuous woman in whose hands every sensible young man dreams of one day intrusting his happiness. Her simple beauty had the charm of angelic modesty, and the imperceptible smile which constantly hovered about the lips seemed to be the reflection of a pure and lovely soul. Her praises resounded on every side. People never tired of repeating: “Happy the man who wins her love! He could

not find a better wife."

Monsieur Lantin, then chief clerk in the Department of the Interior, enjoyed a snug little salary of three thousand five hundred francs, and he proposed to this model young girl, and was accepted.

He was unspeakably happy with her. She governed his household with such clever economy that they seemed to live in luxury. She lavished the most delicate attentions on her husband, coaxed and fondled him; and so great was her charm that six years after their marriage, Monsieur Lantin discovered that he loved his wife even more than during the first days of their honeymoon.

He found fault with only two of her tastes: Her love for the theatre, and her taste for imitation jewelry. Her friends (the wives of some petty officials) frequently procured for her a box at the theatre, often for the first representations of the new plays; and her husband was obliged to accompany her, whether he wished it or not, to these entertainments which bored him excessively after his day's work at the office.

After a time, Monsieur Lantin begged his wife to request some lady of her acquaintance to accompany her, and to bring her home after the theatre. She opposed this arrangement, at first; but, after much persuasion, finally consented, to the infinite delight of her husband.

Now, with her love for the theatre, came also the desire for ornaments. Her costumes remained as before, simple, in good

taste, and always modest; but she soon began to adorn her ears with huge rhinestones, which glittered and sparkled like real diamonds. Around her neck she wore strings of false pearls, on her arms bracelets of imitation gold, and combs set with glass jewels.

Her husband frequently remonstrated with her, saying:

"My dear, as you cannot afford to buy real jewelry, you ought to appear adorned with your beauty and modesty alone, which are the rarest ornaments of your sex."

But she would smile sweetly, and say:

"What can I do? I am so fond of jewelry. It is my only weakness. We cannot change our nature."

Then she would wind the pearl necklace round her fingers, make the facets of the crystal gems sparkle, and say:

"Look! are they not lovely? One would swear they were real."

Monsieur Lantin would then answer, smilingly:

"You have bohemian tastes, my dear."

Sometimes, of an evening, when they were enjoying a tete-a-tote by the fireside, she would place on the tea table the morocco leather box containing the "trash," as Monsieur Lantin called it. She would examine the false gems with a passionate attention, as though they imparted some deep and secret joy; and she often persisted in passing a necklace around her husband's neck, and, laughing heartily, would exclaim: "How droll you look!" Then she would throw herself into his arms, and kiss him affectionately.

One evening, in winter, she had been to the opera, and returned home chilled through and through. The next morning she coughed, and eight days later she died of inflammation of the lungs.

Monsieur Lantin's despair was so great that his hair became white in one month. He wept unceasingly; his heart was broken as he remembered her smile, her voice, every charm of his dead wife.

Time did not assuage his grief. Often, during office hours, while his colleagues were discussing the topics of the day, his eyes would suddenly fill with tears, and he would give vent to his grief in heartrending sobs. Everything in his wife's room remained as it was during her lifetime; all her furniture, even her clothing, being left as it was on the day of her death. Here he was wont to seclude himself daily and think of her who had been his treasure-the joy of his existence.

But life soon became a struggle. His income, which, in the hands of his wife, covered all household expenses, was now no longer sufficient for his own immediate wants; and he wondered how she could have managed to buy such excellent wine and the rare delicacies which he could no longer procure with his modest resources.

He incurred some debts, and was soon reduced to absolute poverty. One morning, finding himself without a cent in his pocket, he resolved to sell something, and immediately the thought occurred to him of disposing of his wife's paste jewels,

for he cherished in his heart a sort of rancor against these "deceptions," which had always irritated him in the past. The very sight of them spoiled, somewhat, the memory of his lost darling.

To the last days of her life she had continued to make purchases, bringing home new gems almost every evening, and he turned them over some time before finally deciding to sell the heavy necklace, which she seemed to prefer, and which, he thought, ought to be worth about six or seven francs; for it was of very fine workmanship, though only imitation.

He put it in his pocket, and started out in search of what seemed a reliable jeweler's shop. At length he found one, and went in, feeling a little ashamed to expose his misery, and also to offer such a worthless article for sale.

"Sir," said he to the merchant, "I would like to know what this is worth."

The man took the necklace, examined it, called his clerk, and made some remarks in an undertone; he then put the ornament back on the counter, and looked at it from a distance to judge of the effect.

Monsieur Lantin, annoyed at all these ceremonies, was on the point of saying: "Oh! I know well 'enough it is not worth anything," when the jeweler said: "Sir, that necklace is worth from twelve to fifteen thousand francs; but I could not buy it, unless you can tell me exactly where it came from."

The widower opened his eyes wide and remained gaping, not

comprehending the merchant's meaning. Finally he stammered: "You say – are you sure?" The other replied, drily: "You can try elsewhere and see if any one will offer you more. I consider it worth fifteen thousand at the most. Come back; here, if you cannot do better."

Monsieur Lantin, beside himself with astonishment, took up the necklace and left the store. He wished time for reflection.

Once outside, he felt inclined to laugh, and said to himself: "The fool! Oh, the fool! Had I only taken him at his word! That jeweler cannot distinguish real diamonds from the imitation article."

A few minutes after, he entered another store, in the Rue de la Paix. As soon as the proprietor glanced at the necklace, he cried out:

"Ah, parbleu! I know it well; it was bought here."

Monsieur Lantin, greatly disturbed, asked:

"How much is it worth?"

"Well, I sold it for twenty thousand francs. I am willing to take it back for eighteen thousand, when you inform me, according to our legal formality, how it came to be in your possession."

This time, Monsieur Lantin was dumfounded. He replied:

"But – but – examine it well. Until this moment I was under the impression that it was imitation."

The jeweler asked:

"What is your name, sir?"

"Lantin – I am in the employ of the Minister of the Interior.

I live at number sixteen Rue des Martyrs."

The merchant looked through his books, found the entry, and said: "That necklace was sent to Madame Lantin's address, sixteen Rue des Martyrs, July 20, 1876."

The two men looked into each other's eyes – the widower speechless with astonishment; the jeweler scenting a thief. The latter broke the silence.

"Will you leave this necklace here for twenty-four hours?" said he; "I will give you a receipt."

Monsieur Lantin answered hastily: "Yes, certainly." Then, putting the ticket in his pocket, he left the store.

He wandered aimlessly through the streets, his mind in a state of dreadful confusion. He tried to reason, to understand. His wife could not afford to purchase such a costly ornament. Certainly not.

But, then, it must have been a present! – a present! – a present, from whom? Why was it given her?

He stopped, and remained standing in the middle of the street. A horrible doubt entered his mind – She? Then, all the other jewels must have been presents, too! The earth seemed to tremble beneath him – the tree before him to be falling; he threw up his arms, and fell to the ground, unconscious. He recovered his senses in a pharmacy, into which the passers-by had borne him. He asked to be taken home, and, when he reached the house, he shut himself up in his room, and wept until nightfall. Finally, overcome with fatigue, he went to bed and fell into a heavy sleep.

The sun awoke him next morning, and he began to dress slowly to go to the office. It was hard to work after such shocks. He sent a letter to his employer, requesting to be excused. Then he remembered that he had to return to the jeweler's. He did not like the idea; but he could not leave the necklace with that man. He dressed and went out.

It was a lovely day; a clear, blue sky smiled on the busy city below. Men of leisure were strolling about with their hands in their pockets.

Monsieur Lantin, observing them, said to himself: "The rich, indeed, are happy. With money it is possible to forget even the deepest sorrow. One can go where one pleases, and in travel find that distraction which is the surest cure for grief. Oh if I were only rich!"

He perceived that he was hungry, but his pocket was empty. He again remembered the necklace. Eighteen thousand francs! Eighteen thousand francs! What a sum!

He soon arrived in the Rue de la Paix, opposite the jeweler's. Eighteen thousand francs! Twenty times he resolved to go in, but shame kept him back. He was hungry, however – very hungry – and not a cent in his pocket. He decided quickly, ran across the street, in order not to have time for reflection, and rushed into the store.

The proprietor immediately came forward, and politely offered him a chair; the clerks glanced at him knowingly.

"I have made inquiries, Monsieur Lantin," said the jeweler,

"and if you are still resolved to dispose of the gems, I am ready to pay you the price I offered."

"Certainly, sir," stammered Monsieur Lantin.

Whereupon the proprietor took from a drawer eighteen large bills, counted, and handed them to Monsieur Lantin, who signed a receipt; and, with trembling hand, put the money into his pocket.

As he was about to leave the store, he turned toward the merchant, who still wore the same knowing smile, and lowering his eyes, said:

"I have – I have other gems, which came from the same source. Will you buy them, also?"

The merchant bowed: "Certainly, sir."

Monsieur Lantin said gravely: "I will bring them to you." An hour later, he returned with the gems.

The large diamond earrings were worth twenty thousand francs; the bracelets, thirty-five thousand; the rings, sixteen thousand; a set of emeralds and sapphires, fourteen thousand; a gold chain with solitaire pendant, forty thousand – making the sum of one hundred and forty-three thousand francs.

The jeweler remarked, jokingly:

"There was a person who invested all her savings in precious stones."

Monsieur Lantin replied, seriously:

"It is only another way of investing one's money."

That day he lunched at Voisin's, and drank wine worth twenty

francs a bottle. Then he hired a carriage and made a tour of the Bois. He gazed at the various turnouts with a kind of disdain, and could hardly refrain from crying out to the occupants:

"I, too, am rich! – I am worth two hundred thousand francs."

Suddenly he thought of his employer. He drove up to the bureau, and entered gaily, saying:

"Sir, I have come to resign my position. I have just inherited three hundred thousand francs."

He shook hands with his former colleagues, and confided to them some of his projects for the future; he then went off to dine at the Cafe Anglais.

He seated himself beside a gentleman of aristocratic bearing; and, during the meal, informed the latter confidentially that he had just inherited a fortune of four hundred thousand francs.

For the first time in his life, he was not bored at the theatre, and spent the remainder of the night in a gay frolic.

Six months afterward, he married again. His second wife was a very virtuous woman; but had a violent temper. She caused him much sorrow.

FASCINATION

I can tell you neither the name of the country, nor the name of the man. It was a long, long way from here on a fertile and burning shore. We had been walking since the morning along the coast, with the blue sea bathed in sunlight on one side of us, and the shore covered with crops on the other. Flowers were growing quite close to the waves, those light, gentle, lulling waves. It was very warm, a soft warmth permeated with the odor of the rich, damp, fertile soil. One fancied one was inhaling germs.

I had been told, that evening, that I should meet with hospitality at the house of a Frenchman who lived in an orange grove at the end of a promontory. Who was he? I did not know. He had come there one morning ten years before, and had bought land which he planted with vines and sowed with grain. He had worked, this man, with passionate energy, with fury. Then as he went on from month to month, year to year, enlarging his boundaries, cultivating incessantly the strong virgin soil, he accumulated a fortune by his indefatigable labor.

But he kept on working, they said. Rising at daybreak, he would remain in the fields till evening, superintending everything without ceasing, tormented by one fixed idea, the insatiable desire for money, which nothing can quiet, nothing satisfy. He now appeared to be very rich. The sun was setting as I reached his house. It was situated as described, at the end of a promontory in

the midst of a grove of orange trees. It was a large square house, quite plain, and overlooked the sea. As I approached, a man wearing a long beard appeared in the doorway. Having greeted him, I asked if he would give me shelter for the night. He held out his hand and said, smiling:

"Come in, monsieur, consider yourself at home."

He led me into a room, and put a man servant at my disposal with the perfect ease and familiar graciousness of a man-of-the-world. Then he left me saying:

"We will dine as soon as you are ready to come downstairs."

We took dinner, sitting opposite each other, on a terrace facing the sea. I began to talk about this rich, distant, unknown land. He smiled, as he replied carelessly:

"Yes, this country is beautiful. But no country satisfies one when they are far from the one they love."

"You regret France?"

"I regret Paris."

"Why do you not go back?"

"Oh, I will return there."

And gradually we began to talk of French society, of the boulevards, and things Parisian. He asked me questions that showed he knew all about these things, mentioned names, all the familiar names in vaudeville known on the sidewalks.

"Whom does one see at Tortoni's now?

"Always the same crowd, except those who died." I looked at him attentively, haunted by a vague recollection. I certainly

had seen that head somewhere. But where? And when? He seemed tired, although he was vigorous; and sad, although he was determined. His long, fair beard fell on his chest. He was somewhat bald and had heavy eyebrows and a thick mustache.

The sun was sinking into the sea, turning the vapor from the earth into a fiery mist. The orange blossoms exhaled their powerful, delicious fragrance. He seemed to see nothing besides me, and gazing steadfastly he appeared to discover in the depths of my mind the far-away, beloved and well-known image of the wide, shady pavement leading from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot.

"Do you know Boutrelle?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Has he changed much?"

"Yes, his hair is quite white."

"And La Ridamie?"

"The same as ever."

"And the women? Tell me about the women. Let's see. Do you know Suzanne Verner?"

"Yes, very much. But that is over."

"Ah! And Sophie Astier?"

"Dead."

"Poor girl. Did you – did you know – "

But he ceased abruptly: And then, in a changed voice, his face suddenly turning pale, he continued:

"No, it is best that I should not speak of that any more, it

breaks my heart."

Then, as if to change the current of his thoughts he rose.

"Would you like to go in?" he said.

"Yes, I think so."

And he preceded me into the house. The downstairs rooms were enormous, bare and mournful, and had a deserted look. Plates and glasses were scattered on the tables, left there by the dark-skinned servants who wandered incessantly about this spacious dwelling.

Two rifles were banging from two nails, on the wall; and in the corners of the rooms were spades, fishing poles, dried palm leaves, every imaginable thing set down at random when people came home in the evening and ready to hand when they went out at any time, or went to work.

My host smiled as he said:

"This is the dwelling, or rather the kennel, of an exile, but my own room is cleaner. Let us go there."

As I entered I thought I was in a second-hand store, it was so full of things of all descriptions, strange things of various kinds that one felt must be souvenirs. On the walls were two pretty paintings by well-known artists, draperies, weapons, swords and pistols, and exactly in the middle, on the principal panel, a square of white satin in a gold frame.

Somewhat surprised, I approached to look at it, and perceived a hairpin fastened in the centre of the glossy satin. My host placed his hand on my shoulder.

"That," said he, "is the only thing that I look at here, and the only thing that I have seen for ten years. M. Prudhomme said: 'This sword is the most memorable day of my life.' I can say: 'This hairpin is all my life.'"

I sought for some commonplace remark, and ended by saying:

"You have suffered on account of some woman?"

He replied abruptly:

"Say, rather, that I am suffering like a wretch."

"But come out on my balcony. A name rose to my lips just now which I dared not utter; for if you had said 'Dead' as you did of Sophie Astier, I should have fired a bullet into my brain, this very day."

We had gone out on the wide balcony from whence we could see two gulfs, one to the right and the other to the left, enclosed by high gray mountains. It was just twilight and the reflection of the sunset still lingered in the sky.

He continued:

"Is Jeanne de Limours still alive?"

His eyes were fastened on mine and were full of a trembling anxiety. I smiled.

"Parbleu – she is prettier than ever."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes."

He hesitated and then said:

"Very well?"

"No."

He took my hand.

"Tell me about her," he said.

"Why, I have nothing to tell. She is one of the most charming women, or, rather, girls, and the most admired in Paris. She leads a delightful existence and lives like a princess, that is all."

"I love her," he murmured in a tone in which he might have said "I am going to die." Then suddenly he continued:

"Ah! For three years we lived in a state of terror and delight. I almost killed her five or six times. She tried to pierce my eyes with that hairpin that you saw just now. Look, do you see that little white spot beneath my left eye? We loved each other. How can I explain that infatuation? You would not understand it."

"There must be a simple form of love, the result of the mutual impulse of two hearts and two souls. But there is also assuredly an atrocious form, that tortures one cruelly, the result of the occult blending of two unlike personalities who detest each other at the same time that they adore one another."

"In three years this woman had ruined me. I had four million francs which she squandered in her calm manner, quietly, eat them up with a gentle smile that seemed to fall from her eyes on to her lips."

"You know her? There is something irresistible about her. What is it? I do not know. Is it those gray eyes whose glance penetrates you like a gimlet and remains there like the point of an arrow? It is more likely the gentle, indifferent and fascinating smile that she wears like a mask. Her slow grace pervades you

little by little; exhales from her like a perfume, from her slim figure that scarcely sways as she passes you, for she seems to glide rather than walk; from her pretty voice with its slight drawl that would seem to be the music of her smile; from her gestures, also, which are never exaggerated, but always appropriate, and intoxicate your vision with their harmony. For three years she was the only being that existed for me on the earth! How I suffered; for she deceived me as she deceived everyone! Why? For no reason; just for the pleasure of deceiving. And when I found it out, when I treated her as a common girl and a beggar, she said quietly: 'Are we married?'

"Since I have been here I have thought so much about her that at last I understand her. She is Manon Lescaut come back to life. It is Manon, who could not love without deceiving; Marion for whom love, amusement, money, are all one."

He was silent. After a few minutes he resumed:

"When I had spent my last sou on her she said simply:

"'You understand, my dear boy, that I cannot live on air and weather. I love you very much, better than anyone, but I must live. Poverty and I could not keep house together."

"And if I should tell you what a horrible life I led with her! When I looked at her I would just as soon have killed her as kissed her. When I looked at her… I felt a furious desire to open my arms to embrace and strangle her. She had, back of her eyes, something false and intangible that made me execrate her; and that was, perhaps, the reason I loved her so well. The eternal

feminine, the odious and seductive feminine, was stronger in her than in any other woman. She was full of it, overcharged, as with a venomous and intoxicating fluid. She was a woman to a greater extent than any one has ever been."

"And when I went out with her she would look at all men in such a manner that she seemed to offer herself to each in a single glance. This exasperated me, and still it attached me to her all the more. This creature in just walking along the street belonged to everyone, in spite of me, in spite of herself, by the very fact of her nature, although she had a modest, gentle carriage. Do you understand?

"And what torture! At the theatre, at the restaurant she seemed to belong to others under my very eyes. And as soon as I left her she did belong to others.

"It is now ten years since I saw her and I love her better than ever."

Night spread over the earth. A strong perfume of orange blossoms pervaded the air. I said:

"Will you see her again?"

"Parbleu! I now have here, in land and money, seven to eight thousand francs. When I reach a million I shall sell out and go away. I shall have enough to live on with her for a year – one whole year. And then, good-bye, my life will be finished."

"But after that?" I asked.

"After that, I do not know. That will be all, I may possibly ask her to take me as a valet de chambre."

YVETTE SAMORIS

"The Comtesse Samoris."

"That lady in black over there?"

"The very one. She's wearing mourning for her daughter, whom she killed."

"You don't mean that seriously? How did she die?"

"Oh! it is a very simple story, without any crime in it, any violence."

"Then what really happened?"

"Almost nothing. Many courtesans are born to be virtuous women, they say; and many women called virtuous are born to be courtesans – is that not so? Now, Madame Samoris, who was born a courtesan, had a daughter born a virtuous woman, that's all."

"I don't quite understand you."

"I'll – explain what I mean. The comtesse is nothing but a common, ordinary parvenue originating no one knows where. A Hungarian or Wallachian countess or I know not what. She appeared one winter in apartments she had taken in the Champs Elysees, that quarter for adventurers and adventuresses, and opened her drawing-room to the first comer or to any one that

turned up.

"I went there. Why? you will say. I really can't tell you. I went there, as every one goes to such places because the women are facile and the men are dishonest. You know that set composed of filibusters with varied decorations, all noble, all titled, all unknown at the embassies, with the exception of those who are spies. All talk of their honor without the slightest occasion for doing so, boast of their ancestors, tell you about their lives, braggarts, liars, sharpers, as dangerous as the false cards they have up their sleeves, as delusive as their names – in short, the aristocracy of the bagnio.

"I adore these people. They are interesting to study, interesting to know, amusing to understand, often clever, never commonplace like public functionaries. Their wives are always pretty, with a slight flavor of foreign roguery, with the mystery of their existence, half of it perhaps spent in a house of correction. They have, as a rule, magnificent eyes and incredible hair. I adore them also.

"Madame Samoris is the type of these adventuresses, elegant, mature and still beautiful. Charming feline creatures, you feel that they are vicious to the marrow of their bones. You find them very amusing when you visit them; they give card parties; they have dances and suppers; in short, they offer you all the pleasures of social life.

"And she had a daughter – a tall, fine-looking girl, always ready for amusement, always full of laughter and reckless gaiety

– a true adventuress' daughter – but, at the same time, an innocent, unsophisticated, artless girl, who saw nothing, knew nothing, understood nothing of all the things that happened in her father's house.

"The girl was simply a puzzle to me. She was a mystery. She lived amid those infamous surroundings with a quiet, tranquil ease that was either terribly criminal or else the result of innocence. She sprang from the filth of that class like a beautiful flower fed on corruption."

"How do you know about them?"

"How do I know? That's the funniest part of the business! One morning there was a ring at my door, and my valet came up to tell me that M. Joseph Bonenthal wanted to speak to me. I said directly:

"'And who is this gentleman?' My valet replied: 'I don't know, monsieur; perhaps 'tis some one that wants employment.' And so it was. The man wanted me to take him as a servant. I asked him where he had been last. He answered: 'With the Comtesse Samoris.' 'Ah!' said I, 'but my house is not a bit like hers.' 'I know that well, monsieur,' he said, 'and that's the very reason I want to take service with monsieur. I've had enough of these people: a man may stay a little while with them, but he won't remain long with them.' I required an additional man servant at the time and so I took him.

"A month later Mademoiselle Yvette Samoris died mysteriously, and here are all the details of her death I could

gather from Joseph, who got them from his sweetheart, the comtesse's chambermaid.

"It was a ball night, and two newly arrived guests were chatting behind a door. Mademoiselle Yvette, who had just been dancing, leaned against this door to get a little air.

"They did not see her approaching, but she heard what they were saying. And this was what they said:

"'But who is the father of the girl?'

"'A Russian, it appears; Count Rouvaloff. He never comes near the mother now.'

"'And who is the reigning prince to-day?'

"'That English prince standing near the window; Madame Samoris adores him. But her adoration of any one never lasts longer than a month or six weeks. Nevertheless, as you see, she has a large circle of admirers. All are called – and nearly all are chosen. That kind of thing costs a good deal, but – hang it, what can you expect?'

"'And where did she get this name of Samoris?'

"'From the only man perhaps that she ever loved – a Jewish banker from Berlin who goes by the name of Samuel Morris.'

"'Good. Thanks. Now that I know what kind of woman she is and have seen her, I'm off!'

"What a shock this was to the mind of a young girl endowed with all the instincts of a virtuous woman! What despair overwhelmed that simple soul! What mental tortures quenched her unbounded gaiety, her delightful laughter, her exultant

satisfaction with life! What a conflict took place in that youthful heart up to the moment when the last guest had left! Those were things that Joseph could not tell me. But, the same night, Yvette abruptly entered her mother's room just as the comtesse was getting into bed, sent out the lady's maid, who was close to the door, and, standing erect and pale and with great staring eyes, she said:

"'Mamma, listen to what I heard a little while ago during the ball.'

"And she repeated word for word the conversation just as I told it to you.

"The comtesse was so stunned that she did not know what to say in reply at first. When she recovered her self-possession she denied everything and called God to witness that there was no truth in the story.

"The young girl went away, distracted but not convinced. And she began to watch her mother.

"I remember distinctly the strange alteration that then took place in her. She became grave and melancholy. She would fix on us her great earnest eyes as if she wanted to read what was at the bottom of our hearts. We did not know what to think of her and used to imagine that she was looking out for a husband.

"One evening she overheard her mother talking to her admirer and later saw them together, and her doubts were confirmed. She was heartbroken, and after telling her mother what she had seen, she said coldly, like a man of business laying down the terms of

an agreement:

"'Here is what I have determined to do, mamma: We will both go away to some little town, or rather into the country. We will live there quietly as well as we can. Your jewelry alone may be called a fortune. If you wish to marry some honest man, so much the better; still better will it be if I can find one. If you don't consent to do this, I will kill myself.'

"This time the comtesse ordered her daughter to go to bed and never to speak again in this manner, so unbecoming in the mouth of a child toward her mother.

"Yvette's answer to this was: 'I give you a month to reflect. If, at the end of that month, we have not changed our way of living, I will kill myself, since there is no other honorable issue left to my life.'

"And she left the room.

"At the end of a month the Comtesse Samoris had resumed her usual entertainments, as though nothing had occurred. One day, under the pretext that she had a bad toothache, Yvette purchased a few drops of chloroform from a neighboring chemist. The next day she purchased more, and every time she went out she managed to procure small doses of the narcotic. She filled a bottle with it.

"One morning she was found in bed, lifeless and already quite cold, with a cotton mask soaked in chloroform over her face.

"Her coffin was covered with flowers, the church was hung in white. There was a large crowd at the funeral ceremony.

"Ah! well, if I had known – but you never can know – I would have married that girl, for she was infernally pretty."

"And what became of the mother?"

"Oh! she shed a lot of tears over it. She has only begun to receive visits again for the past week."

"And what explanation is given of the girl's death?"

"Oh! they pretended that it was an accident caused by a new stove, the mechanism of which got out of order. As a good many such accidents have occurred, the thing seemed probable enough."

A VENDETTA

The widow of Paolo Saverini lived alone with her son in a poor little house on the outskirts of Bonifacio. The town, built on an outjutting part of the mountain, in places even overhanging the sea, looks across the straits, full of sandbanks, towards the southernmost coast of Sardinia. Beneath it, on the other side and almost surrounding it, is a cleft in the cliff like an immense corridor which serves as a harbor, and along it the little Italian and Sardinian fishing boats come by a circuitous route between precipitous cliffs as far as the first houses, and every two weeks the old, wheezy steamer which makes the trip to Ajaccio.

On the white mountain the houses, massed together, makes an even whiter spot. They look like the nests of wild birds, clinging to this peak, overlooking this terrible passage, where vessels rarely venture. The wind, which blows uninterruptedly, has swept bare the forbidding coast; it drives through the narrow straits and lays waste both sides. The pale streaks of foam, clinging to the black rocks, whose countless peaks rise up out of the water, look like bits of rag floating and drifting on the surface of the sea.

The house of widow Saverini, clinging to the very edge of the precipice, looks out, through its three windows, over this wild and desolate picture.

She lived there alone, with her son Antonia and their dog "Semillante," a big, thin beast, with a long rough coat, of the

sheep-dog breed. The young man took her with him when out hunting.

One night, after some kind of a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacherously stabbed by Nicolas Ravolati, who escaped the same evening to Sardinia.

When the old mother received the body of her child, which the neighbors had brought back to her, she did not cry, but she stayed there for a long time motionless, watching him. Then, stretching her wrinkled hand over the body, she promised him a vendetta. She did not wish anybody near her, and she shut herself up beside the body with the dog, which howled continuously, standing at the foot of the bed, her head stretched towards her master and her tail between her legs. She did not move any more than did the mother, who, now leaning over the body with a blank stare, was weeping silently and watching it.

The young man, lying on his back, dressed in his jacket of coarse cloth, torn at the chest, seemed to be asleep. But he had blood all over him; on his shirt, which had been torn off in order to administer the first aid; on his vest, on his trousers, on his face, on his hands. Clots of blood had hardened in his beard and in his hair.

His old mother began to talk to him. At the sound of this voice the dog quieted down.

"Never fear, my boy, my little baby, you shall be avenged. Sleep, sleep; you shall be avenged. Do you hear? It's your mother's promise! And she always keeps her word, your mother

does, you know she does."

Slowly she leaned over him, pressing her cold lips to his dead ones.

Then Semillante began to howl again with a long, monotonous, penetrating, horrible howl.

The two of them, the woman and the dog, remained there until morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried the next day and soon his name ceased to be mentioned in Bonifacio.

He had neither brothers nor cousins. No man was there to carry on the vendetta. His mother, the old woman, alone pondered over it.

On the other side of the straits she saw, from morning until night, a little white speck on the coast. It was the little Sardinian village Longosardo, where Corsican criminals take refuge when they are too closely pursued. They compose almost the entire population of this hamlet, opposite their native island, awaiting the time to return, to go back to the "maquis." She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had sought refuge in this village.

All alone, all day long, seated at her window, she was looking over there and thinking of revenge. How could she do anything without help – she, an invalid and so near death? But she had promised, she had sworn on the body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What could she do? She no longer slept at night; she had neither rest nor peace of mind; she thought persistently. The dog, dozing at her feet, would sometimes lift her head and

howl. Since her master's death she often howled thus, as though she were calling him, as though her beast's soul, inconsolable too, had also retained a recollection that nothing could wipe out.

One night, as Semillante began to howl, the mother suddenly got hold of an idea, a savage, vindictive, fierce idea. She thought it over until morning. Then, having arisen at daybreak she went to church. She prayed, prostrate on the floor, begging the Lord to help her, to support her, to give to her poor, broken-down body the strength which she needed in order to avenge her son.

She returned home. In her yard she had an old barrel, which acted as a cistern. She turned it over, emptied it, made it fast to the ground with sticks and stones. Then she chained Semillante to this improvised kennel and went into the house.

She walked ceaselessly now, her eyes always fixed on the distant coast of Sardinia. He was over there, the murderer.

All day and all night the dog howled. In the morning the old woman brought her some water in a bowl, but nothing more; no soup, no bread.

Another day went by. Semillante, exhausted, was sleeping. The following day her eyes were shining, her hair on end and she was pulling wildly at her chain.

All this day the old woman gave her nothing to eat. The beast, furious, was barking hoarsely. Another night went by.

Then, at daybreak, Mother Saverini asked a neighbor for some straw. She took the old rags which had formerly been worn by her husband and stuffed them so as to make them look like a

human body.

Having planted a stick in the ground, in front of Semillante's kennel, she tied to it this dummy, which seemed to be standing up. Then she made a head out of some old rags.

The dog, surprised, was watching this straw man, and was quiet, although famished. Then the old woman went to the store and bought a piece of black sausage. When she got home she started a fire in the yard, near the kennel, and cooked the sausage. Semillante, frantic, was jumping about, frothing at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the food, the odor of which went right to her stomach.

Then the mother made of the smoking sausage a necktie for the dummy. She tied it very tight around the neck with string, and when she had finished she untied the dog.

With one leap the beast jumped at the dummy's throat, and with her paws on its shoulders she began to tear at it. She would fall back with a piece of food in her mouth, then would jump again, sinking her fangs into the string, and snatching few pieces of meat she would fall back again and once more spring forward. She was tearing up the face with her teeth and the whole neck was in tatters.

The old woman, motionless and silent, was watching eagerly. Then she chained the beast up again, made her fast for two more days and began this strange performance again.

For three months she accustomed her to this battle, to this meal conquered by a fight. She no longer chained her up, but just

pointed to the dummy.

She had taught her to tear him up and to devour him without even leaving any traces in her throat.

Then, as a reward, she would give her a piece of sausage.

As soon as she saw the man, Semillante would begin to tremble. Then she would look up to her mistress, who, lifting her finger, would cry, "Go!" in a shrill tone.

When she thought that the proper time had come, the widow went to confession and, one Sunday morning she partook of communion with an ecstatic fervor. Then, putting on men's clothes and looking like an old tramp, she struck a bargain with a Sardinian fisherman who carried her and her dog to the other side of the straits.

In a bag she had a large piece of sausage. Semillante had had nothing to eat for two days. The old woman kept letting her smell the food and whetting her appetite.

They got to Longosardo. The Corsican woman walked with a limp. She went to a baker's shop and asked for Nicolas Ravolati. He had taken up his old trade, that of carpenter. He was working alone at the back of his store.

The old woman opened the door and called:

"Hallo, Nicolas!"

He turned around. Then releasing her dog, she cried:

"Go, go! Eat him up! eat him up!"

The maddened animal sprang for his throat. The man stretched out his arms, clasped the dog and rolled to the ground.

For a few seconds he squirmed, beating the ground with his feet. Then he stopped moving, while Semillante dug her fangs into his throat and tore it to ribbons. Two neighbors, seated before their door, remembered perfectly having seen an old beggar come out with a thin, black dog which was eating something that its master was giving him.

At nightfall the old woman was at home again. She slept well that night.

MY TWENTY-FIVE DAYS

I had just taken possession of my room in the hotel, a narrow den between two papered partitions, through which I could hear every sound made by my neighbors; and I was beginning to arrange my clothes and linen in the wardrobe with a long mirror, when I opened the drawer which is in this piece of furniture. I immediately noticed a roll of paper. Having opened it, I spread it out before me, and read this title:

My Twenty-five Days.

It was the diary of a guest at the watering place, of the last occupant of my room, and had been forgotten at the moment of departure.

These notes may be of some interest to sensible and healthy persons who never leave their own homes. It is for their benefit that I transcribe them without altering a letter.

"CHATEL-GUYON, July 15th

"At the first glance it is not lively, this country. However, I am going to spend twenty-five days here, to have my liver and stomach treated, and to get thin. The twenty-five days of any one taking the baths are very like the twenty-eight days of the reserves; they are all devoted to fatigue duty, severe fatigue duty.

To-day I have done nothing as yet; I have been getting settled. I have made the acquaintance of the locality and of the doctor. Chatel-Guyon consists of a stream in which flows yellow water, in the midst of several hillocks on which are a casino, some houses, and some stone crosses. On the bank of the stream, at the end of the valley, may be seen a square building surrounded by a little garden; this is the bathing establishment. Sad people wander around this building – the invalids. A great silence reigns in the walks shaded by trees, for this is not a pleasure resort, but a true health resort; one takes care of one's health as a business, and one gets well, so it seems.

"Those who know affirm, even, that the mineral springs perform true miracles here. However, no votive offering is hung around the cashier's office.

"From time to time a gentleman or a lady comes over to a kiosk with a slate roof, which shelters a woman of smiling and gentle aspect, and a spring boiling in a basin of cement: Not a word is exchanged between the invalid and the female custodian of the healing water. She hands the newcomer a little glass in which air bubbles sparkle in the transparent liquid. The guest drinks and goes off with a grave step to resume his interrupted walk beneath the trees.

"No noise in the little park, no breath of air in the leaves; no voice passes through this silence. One ought to write at the entrance to this district: 'No one laughs here; they take care of their health.'

"The people who chat resemble mutes who merely open their mouths to simulate sounds, so afraid are they that their voices might escape.

"In the hotel, the same silence. It is a big hotel, where you dine solemnly with people of good position, who have nothing to say to each other. Their manners bespeak good breeding, and their faces reflect the conviction of a superiority of which it might be difficult for some to give actual proofs.

"At two o'clock I made my way up to the Casino, a little wooden but perched on a hillock, which one reaches by a goat path. But the view from that height is admirable. Chatel-Guyon is situated in a very narrow valley, exactly between the plain and the mountain. I perceive, at the left, the first great billows of the mountains of Auvergne, covered with woods, and here and there big gray patches, hard masses of lava, for we are at the foot of the extinct volcanoes. At the right, through the narrow cut of the valley, I discover a plain, infinite as the sea, steeped in a bluish fog which lets one only dimly discern the villages, the towns, the yellow fields of ripe grain, and the green squares of meadowland shaded with apple trees. It is the Limagne, an immense level, always enveloped in a light veil of vapor.

"The night has come. And now, after having dined alone, I write these lines beside my open window. I hear, over there, in front of me, the little orchestra of the Casino, which plays airs just as a foolish bird might sing all alone in the desert.

"A dog barks at intervals. This great calm does one good.

Goodnight.

"July 16th. – Nothing new. I have taken a bath and then a shower bath. I have swallowed three glasses of water, and I have walked along the paths in the park, a quarter of an hour between each glass, then half an hour after the last. I have begun my twenty-five days.

"July 17th. – Remarked two mysterious, pretty women who are taking their baths and their meals after every one else has finished.

"July 18th. – Nothing new.

"July 19th. – Saw the two pretty women again. They have style and a little indescribable air which I like very much.

"July 20th. – Long walk in a charming wooded valley, as far as the Hermitage of Sans-Souci. This country is delightful, although sad; but so calm; so sweet, so green. One meets along the mountain roads long wagons loaded with hay, drawn by two cows at a slow pace or held back by them in going down the slopes with a great effort of their heads, which are yoked together. A man with a big black hat on his head is driving them with a slender stick, tipping them on the side or on the forehead; and often with a simple gesture, an energetic and serious gesture, he suddenly halts them when the excessive load precipitates their journey down the too rugged descents.

"The air is good to inhale in these valleys. And, if it is very warm, the dust bears with it a light odor of vanilla and of the stable, for so many cows pass over these routes that they leave

reminders everywhere. And this odor is a perfume, when it would be a stench if it came from other animals.

"July 21st. – Excursion to the valley of the Enval. It is a narrow gorge inclosed by superb rocks at the very foot of the mountain. A stream flows amid the heaped-up boulders.

"As I reached the bottom of this ravine I heard women's voices, and I soon perceived the two mysterious ladies of my hotel, who were chatting, seated on a stone.

"The occasion appeared to me a good one, and I introduced myself without hesitation. My overtures were received without embarrassment. We walked back together to the hotel. And we talked about Paris. They knew, it seemed, many people whom I knew, too. Who can they be?

"I shall see them to-morrow. There is nothing more amusing than such meetings as this.

"July 22d. – Day passed almost entirely with the two unknown ladies. They are very pretty, by Jove! – one a brunette and the other a blonde. They say they are widows. H'm?

"I offered to accompany them to Royat tomorrow, and they accepted my offer.

"Chatel-Guyon is less sad than I thought on my arrival.

"July 23d. – Day spent at Royat. Royat is a little patch of hotels at the bottom of a valley, at the gate of Clermont-Ferrand. A great many people there. A large park full of life. Superb view of the Puyde-Dome, seen at the end of a perspective of valleys.

"My fair companions are very popular, which is flattering to

me. The man who escorts a pretty woman always believes himself crowned with an aureole; with much more reason, the man who is accompanied by one on each side of him. Nothing is so pleasant as to dine in a fashionable restaurant with a female companion at whom everybody stares, and there is nothing better calculated to exalt a man in the estimation of his neighbors.

"To go to the Bois, in a trap drawn by a sorry nag, or to go out into the boulevard escorted by a plain woman, are the two most humiliating things that could happen to a sensitive heart that values the opinion of others. Of all luxuries, woman is the rarest and the most distinguished; she is the one that costs most and which we desire most; she is, therefore the one that we should seek by preference to exhibit to the jealous eyes of the world.

"To exhibit to the world a pretty woman leaning on your arm is to excite, all at once, every kind of jealousy. It is as much as to say: 'Look here! I am rich, since I possess this rare and costly object; I have taste, since I have known how to discover this pearl; perhaps, even, I am loved by her, unless I am deceived by her, which would still prove that others also consider her charming.

"But, what a disgrace it is to walk about town with an ugly woman!

"And how many humiliating things this gives people to understand!

"In the first place, they assume she must be your wife, for how could it be supposed that you would have an unattractive sweetheart? A true woman may be ungraceful; but then, her

ugliness implies a thousand disagreeable things for you. One supposes you must be a notary or a magistrate, as these two professions have a monopoly of grotesque and well-dowered spouses. Now, is this not distressing to a man? And then, it seems to proclaim to the public that you have the odious courage, and are even under a legal obligation, to caress that ridiculous face and that ill-shaped body, and that you will, without doubt, be shameless enough to make a mother of this by no means desirable being – which is the very height of the ridiculous.

"July 24th. – I never leave the side of the two unknown widows, whom I am beginning to know quite well. This country is delightful and our hotel is excellent. Good season. The treatment is doing me an immense amount of good.

"July 25th. – Drive in a landau to the lake of Tazenat. An exquisite and unexpected jaunt decided on at luncheon. We started immediately on rising from table. After a long journey through the mountains we suddenly perceived an admirable little lake, quite round, very blue, clear as glass, and situated at the bottom of an extinct crater. One side of this immense basin is barren, the other is wooded. In the midst of the trees is a small house where sleeps a good-natured, intellectual man, a sage who passes his days in this Virgilian region. He opens his dwelling for us. An idea comes into my head. I exclaim:

"'Supposing we bathe?'

"'Yes,' they said, 'but costumes.'

"'Bah! we are in the wilderness.'

“And we did bathe!

“If I were a poet, how I would describe this unforgettable vision of those lissome young forms in the transparency of the water! The high, sloping sides shut in the lake, motionless, gleaming and round, as a silver coin; the sun pours into it a flood of warm light; and along the rocks the fair forms move in the almost invisible water in which the swimmers seemed suspended. On the sand at the bottom of the lake one could see their shadows as they moved along.

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