

ГЕНРИ
ДЖЕЙМС

MADAME DE
MAUVES

Генри Джеймс

Madame De Mauves

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Henry James

Madame De Mauves

I

The view from the terrace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye is immense and famous. Paris lies spread before you in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapours and girdled with her silver Seine. Behind you is a park of stately symmetry, and behind that a forest where you may lounge through turfy avenues and light-chequered glades and quite forget that you are within half an hour of the boulevards. One afternoon, however, in mid-spring, some five years ago, a young man seated on the terrace had preferred to keep this in mind. His eyes were fixed in idle wistfulness on the mighty human hive before him. He was fond of rural things, and he had come to Saint-Germain a week before to meet the spring halfway; but though he could boast of a six months' acquaintance with the great city he never looked at it from his present vantage without a sense of curiosity still unappeased. There were moments when it seemed to him that not to be there just then was to miss some thrilling chapter of experience. And yet his winter's experience had been rather fruitless and he had closed the book almost with a yawn. Though not in the least a cynic he was what one may call a disappointed observer, and he never chose the right-hand road without beginning to suspect after an hour's wayfaring that the left would have been the better. He now had a dozen minds to go to Paris for the evening, to dine at the Cafe Brebant and repair afterwards to the Gymnase and listen to the latest exposition of the duties of the injured husband. He would probably have risen to execute this project if he had not noticed a little girl who, wandering along the terrace, had suddenly stopped short and begun to gaze at him with round-eyed frankness. For a moment he was simply amused, the child's face denoting such helpless wonderment; the next he was agreeably surprised. "Why this is my friend Maggie," he said; "I see you've not forgotten me."

Maggie, after a short parley, was induced to seal her remembrance with a kiss. Invited then to explain her appearance at Saint-Germain, she embarked on a recital in which the general, according to the infantine method, was so fatally sacrificed to the particular that Longmore looked about him for a superior source of information. He found it in Maggie's mamma, who was seated with another lady at the opposite end of the terrace; so, taking the child by the hand, he led her back to her companions.

Maggie's mamma was a young American lady, as you would immediately have perceived, with a pretty and friendly face and a great elegance of fresh finery. She greeted Longmore with amazement and joy, mentioning his name to her friend and bidding him bring a chair and sit with them. The other lady, in whom, though she was equally young and perhaps even prettier, muslins and laces and feathers were less of a feature, remained silent, stroking the hair of the little girl, whom she had drawn against her knee. She had never heard of Longmore, but she now took in that her companion had crossed the ocean with him, had met him afterwards in travelling and—having left her husband in Wall Street—was indebted to him for sundry services. Maggie's mamma turned from time to time and smiled at this lady with an air of invitation; the latter smiled back and continued gracefully to say nothing. For ten minutes, meanwhile, Longmore felt a revival of interest in his old acquaintance; then (as mild riddles are more amusing than mere commonplaces) it gave way to curiosity about her friend. His eyes wandered; her volubility shook a sort of sweetness out of the friend's silence.

The stranger was perhaps not obviously a beauty nor obviously an American, but essentially both for the really seeing eye. She was slight and fair and, though naturally pale, was delicately flushed just now, as by the effect of late agitation. What chiefly struck Longmore in her face was the union of a pair of beautifully gentle, almost languid grey eyes with a mouth that was all expression and intention. Her forehead was a trifle more expansive than belongs to classic types, and her thick brown

hair dressed out of the fashion, just then even more ugly than usual. Her throat and bust were slender, but all the more in harmony with certain rapid charming movements of the head, which she had a way of throwing back every now and then with an air of attention and a sidelong glance from her dove-like eyes. She seemed at once alert and indifferent, contemplative and restless, and Longmore very soon discovered that if she was not a brilliant beauty she was at least a most attaching one. This very impression made him magnanimous. He was certain he had interrupted a confidential conversation, and judged it discreet to withdraw, having first learned from Maggie's mamma—Mrs. Draper—that she was to take the six o'clock train back to Paris. He promised to meet her at the station.

He kept his appointment, and Mrs. Draper arrived betimes, accompanied by her friend. The latter, however, made her farewells at the door and drove away again, giving Longmore time only to raise his hat. "Who is she?" he asked with visible ardour as he brought the traveller her tickets.

"Come and see me to-morrow at the Hotel de l'Empire," she answered, "and I'll tell you all about her." The force of this offer in making him punctual at the Hotel de l'Empire Longmore doubtless never exactly measured; and it was perhaps well he was vague, for he found his friend, who was on the point of leaving Paris, so distracted by procrastinating milliners and perjured lingers that coherence had quite deserted her. "You must find Saint-Germain dreadfully dull," she nevertheless had the presence of mind to say as he was going. "Why won't you come with me to London?"

"Introduce me to Madame de Mauves," he answered, "and Saint-Germain will quite satisfy me." All he had learned was the lady's name and residence.

"Ah she, poor woman, won't make your affair a carnival. She's very unhappy," said Mrs. Draper.

Longmore's further enquiries were arrested by the arrival of a young lady with a bandbox; but he went away with the promise of a note of introduction, to be immediately dispatched to him at Saint-Germain.

He then waited a week, but the note never came, and he felt how little it was for Mrs. Draper to complain of engagements unperformed. He lounged on the terrace and walked in the forest, studied suburban street life and made a languid attempt to investigate the records of the court of the exiled Stuarts; but he spent most of his time in wondering where Madame de Mauves lived and whether she ever walked on the terrace. Sometimes, he was at last able to recognise; for one afternoon toward dusk he made her out from a distance, arrested there alone and leaning against the low wall. In his momentary hesitation to approach her there was almost a shade of trepidation, but his curiosity was not chilled by such a measure of the effect of a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. She at once recovered their connexion, on his drawing near, and showed it with the frankness of a person unprovided with a great choice of contacts. Her dress, her expression, were the same as before; her charm came out like that of fine music on a second hearing. She soon made conversation easy by asking him for news of Mrs. Draper. Longmore told her that he was daily expecting news and after a pause mentioned the promised note of introduction.

"It seems less necessary now," he said—"for me at least. But for you—I should have liked you to know the good things our friend would probably have been able to say about me."

"If it arrives at last," she answered, "you must come and see me and bring it. If it doesn't you must come without it."

Then, as she continued to linger through the thickening twilight, she explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was to arrive in the train from Paris and who often passed along the terrace on his way home. Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper had spoken of uneasy things in her life, and he found it natural to guess that this same husband was the source of them. Edified by his six months in Paris, "What else is possible," he put it, "for a sweet American girl who marries an unholy foreigner?"

But this quiet dependence on her lord's return rather shook his shrewdness, and it received a further check from the free confidence with which she turned to greet an approaching figure. Longmore distinguished in the fading light a stoutish gentleman, on the fair side of forty, in a high

grey hat, whose countenance, obscure as yet against the quarter from which it came, mainly presented to view the large outward twist of its moustache. M. de Mauves saluted his wife with punctilious gallantry and, having bowed to Longmore, asked her several questions in French. Before taking his offered arm to walk to their carriage, which was in waiting at the gate of the terrace, she introduced our hero as a friend of Mrs. Draper and also a fellow countryman, whom she hoped they might have the pleasure of seeing, as she said, chez eux. M. de Mauves responded briefly, but civilly, in fair English, and led his wife away.

Longmore watched him as he went, renewing the curl of his main facial feature—watched him with an irritation devoid of any mentionable ground. His one pretext for gnashing his teeth would have been in his apprehension that this gentleman's worst English might prove a matter to shame his own best French. For reasons involved apparently in the very structure of his being Longmore found a colloquial use of that idiom as insecure as the back of a restive horse, and was obliged to take his exercise, as he was aware, with more tension than grace. He reflected meanwhile with comfort that Madame de Mauves and he had a common tongue, and his anxiety yielded to his relief at finding on his table that evening a letter from Mrs. Draper. It enclosed a short formal missive to Madame de Mauves, but the epistle itself was copious and confidential. She had deferred writing till she reached London, where for a week, of course, she had found other amusements.

"I think it's the sight of so many women here who don't look at all like her that has reminded me by the law of contraries of my charming friend at Saint-Germain and my promise to introduce you to her," she wrote. "I believe I spoke to you of her rather blighted state, and I wondered afterwards whether I hadn't been guilty of a breach of confidence. But you would certainly have arrived at guesses of your own, and, besides, she has never told me her secrets. The only one she ever pretended to was that she's the happiest creature in the world, after assuring me of which, poor thing, she went off into tears; so that I prayed to be delivered from such happiness. It's the miserable story of an American girl born neither to submit basely nor to rebel crookedly marrying a shining sinful Frenchman who believes a woman must do one or the other of those things. The lightest of US have a ballast that they can't imagine, and the poorest a moral imagination that they don't require. She was romantic and perverse—she thought the world she had been brought up in too vulgar or at least too prosaic. To have a decent home-life isn't perhaps the greatest of adventures; but I think she wishes nowadays she hadn't gone in quite so desperately for thrills. M. de Mauves cared of course for nothing but her money, which he's spending royally on his menus plaisirs. I hope you appreciate the compliment I pay you when I recommend you to go and cheer up a lady domestically dejected. Believe me, I've given no other man a proof of this esteem; so if you were to take me in an inferior sense I would never speak to you again. Prove to this fine sore creature that our manners may have all the grace without wanting to make such selfish terms for it. She avoids society and lives quite alone, seeing no one but a horrible French sister-in-law. Do let me hear that you've made her patience a little less absent-minded. Make her WANT to forget; make her like you."

This ingenious appeal left the young man uneasy. He found himself in presence of more complications than had been in his reckoning. To call on Madame de Mauves with his present knowledge struck him as akin to fishing in troubled waters. He was of modest composition, and yet he asked himself whether an appearance of attentions from any gallant gentleman mightn't give another twist to her tangle. A flattering sense of unwonted opportunity, however—of such a possible value constituted for him as he had never before been invited to rise to—made him with the lapse of time more confident, possibly more reckless. It was too inspiring not to act upon the idea of kindling a truer light in his fair countrywoman's slow smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that even a raw representative of the social order she had not done justice to was not necessarily a mere fortuitous collocation of atoms. He immediately called on her.

II

She had been placed for her education, fourteen years before, in a Parisian convent, by a widowed mamma who was fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks in the frocks of a vigorously growing daughter. Here, besides various elegant accomplishments—the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea—she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a man of hierarchical “rank”—not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Madame la Vicomtesse, for which it seemed to her she should never greatly care, but because she had a romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration, consideration attached to the fact of birth, would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. She supposed it would be found that the state of being noble does actually enforce the famous obligation. Romances are rarely worked out in such transcendent good faith, and Euphemia’s excuse was the prime purity of her moral vision. She was essentially incorruptible, and she took this pernicious conceit to her bosom very much as if it had been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than in well-attested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and enjoyment of a chance to carry further a family chronicle begun ever so far back must be, as a consciousness, a source of the most beautiful impulses. It wasn’t therefore only that noblesse oblige, she thought, as regards yourself, but that it ensures as nothing else does in respect to your wife. She had never, at the start, spoken to a nobleman in her life, and these convictions were but a matter of extravagant theory. They were the fruit, in part, of the perusal of various Ultramontane works of fiction—the only ones admitted to the convent library—in which the hero was always a Legitimist vicomte who fought duels by the dozen but went twice a month to confession; and in part of the strong social scent of the gossip of her companions, many of them filles de haut lieu who, in the convent-garden, after Sundays at home, depicted their brothers and cousins as Prince Charmings and young Paladins. Euphemia listened and said nothing; she shrouded her visions of matrimony under a coronet in the silence that mostly surrounds all ecstatic faith. She was not of that type of young lady who is easily induced to declare that her husband must be six feet high and a little near-sighted, part his hair in the middle and have amber lights in his beard. To her companions her flights of fancy seemed short, rather, and poor and untutored; and even the fact that she was a sprig of the transatlantic democracy never sufficiently explained her apathy on social questions. She had a mental image of that son of the Crusaders who was to suffer her to adore him, but like many an artist who has produced a masterpiece of idealisation she shrank from exposing it to public criticism. It was the portrait of a gentleman rather ugly than handsome and rather poor than rich. But his ugliness was to be nobly expressive and his poverty delicately proud. She had a fortune of her own which, at the proper time, after fixing on her in eloquent silence those fine eyes that were to soften the feudal severity of his visage, he was to accept with a world of stifled protestations. One condition alone she was to make—that he should have “race” in a state as documented as it was possible to have it. On this she would stake her happiness; and it was so to happen that several accidents conspired to give convincing colour to this artless philosophy.

Inclined to long pauses and slow approaches herself, Euphemia was a great sitter at the feet of breathless volubility, and there were moments when she fairly hung upon the lips of Mademoiselle Marie de Mauves. Her intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was founded on the perception—all her own—that their differences were just the right ones. Mademoiselle de Mauves was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French—everything that Euphemia felt herself unpardonable for not being. During her Sundays en ville she had examined the world and judged it, and she imparted her impressions to our attentive heroine with an agreeable mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. She

was moreover a handsome and well-grown person, on whom Euphemia's ribbons and trinkets had a trick of looking better than on their slender proprietress. She had finally the supreme merit of being a rigorous example of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honourably mentioned by Joinville and Commynes, and a stately grandmother with a hooked nose who came up with her after the holidays from a veritable castel in Auvergne. It seemed to our own young woman that these attributes made her friend more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer. A certain aristocratic impudence Mademoiselle de Mauves abundantly possessed, and her raids among her friend's finery were quite in the spirit of her baronial ancestors in the twelfth century—a spirit regarded by Euphemia but as a large way of understanding friendship, a freedom from conformities without style, and one that would sooner or later express itself in acts of surprising magnanimity. There doubtless prevailed in the breast of Mademoiselle de Mauves herself a dimmer vision of the large securities that Euphemia envied her. She was to become later in life so accomplished a schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale might well have waked up early. The especially fine appearance made by our heroine's ribbons and trinkets as her friend wore them ministered to pleasure on both sides, and the spell was not of a nature to be menaced by the young American's general gentleness. The concluding motive of Marie's writing to her grandmamma to invite Euphemia for a three weeks' holiday to the castel in Auvergne involved, however, the subtlest considerations. Mademoiselle de Mauves indeed, at this time seventeen years of age and capable of views as wide as her wants, was as proper a figure as could possibly have been found for the foreground of a scene artfully designed; and Euphemia, whose years were of like number, asked herself if a right harmony with such a place mightn't come by humble prayer. It is a proof of the sincerity of the latter's aspirations that the castel was not a shock to her faith. It was neither a cheerful nor a luxurious abode, but it was as full of wonders as a box of old heirlooms or objects "willed." It had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty drawbridge and a court paved with crooked grass-grown slabs over which the antique coach-wheels of the lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken the echoes of the seventeenth century. Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream; she had the pleasure of seeing all the easier passages translated into truth, as the learner of a language begins with the common words. She had a taste for old servants, old anecdotes, old furniture, faded household colours and sweetly stale odours—musty treasures in which the Chateau de Mauves abounded. She made a dozen sketches in water-colours after her conventual pattern; but sentimentally, as one may say, she was for ever sketching with a freer hand.

Old Madame de Mauves had nothing severe but her nose, and she seemed to Euphemia—what indeed she had every claim to pass for—the very image and pattern of an "historical character." Belonging to a great order of things, she patronised the young stranger who was ready to sit all day at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the bon temps and quotations from the family chronicles. Madame de Mauves was a very honest old woman; she uttered her thoughts with ancient plainness. One day after pushing back Euphemia's shining locks and blinking with some tenderness from behind an immense face-a-main that acted as for the relegation of the girl herself to the glass case of a museum, she declared with an energetic shake of the head that she didn't know what to make of such a little person. And in answer to the little person's evident wonder, "I should like to advise you," she said, "but you seem to me so all of a piece that I'm afraid that if I advise you I shall spoil you. It's easy to see you're not one of us. I don't know whether you're better, but you seem to me to have been wound up by some key that isn't kept by your governess or your confessor or even your mother, but that you wear by a fine black ribbon round your own neck. Little persons in my day—when they were stupid they were very docile, but when they were clever they were very sly! You're clever enough, I imagine, and yet if I guessed all your secrets at this moment is there one I should have to frown at? I can tell you a wickeder one than any you've discovered for yourself. If you wish to live at ease in the doux pays de France don't trouble too much about the key of your conscience or even about your conscience itself—I mean your own particular one. You'll fancy it saying things it won't help your case to hear.

They'll make you sad, and when you're sad you'll grow plain, and when you're plain you'll grow bitter, and when you're bitter you'll be *peu aimable*. I was brought up to think that a woman's first duty is to be infinitely so, and the happiest women I've known have been in fact those who performed this duty faithfully. As you're not a Catholic I suppose you can't be a devotee; and if you don't take life as a fifty years' mass the only way to take it's as a game of skill. Listen to this. Not to lose at the game of life you must—I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbour won't, and not be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear—I beseech you don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbour peeping don't cry out; only very politely wait your own chance. I've had my revenge more than once in my day, but I really think the sweetest I could take, *en somme*, against the past I've known, would be to have your blest innocence profit by my experience."

This was rather bewildering advice, but Euphemia understood it too little to be either edified or frightened. She sat listening to it very much as she would have listened to the speeches of an old lady in a comedy whose diction should strikingly correspond to the form of her high-backed armchair and the fashion of her coif. Her indifference was doubly dangerous, for Madame de Mauves spoke at the instance of coming events, and her words were the result of a worry of scruples—scruples in the light of which Euphemia was on the one hand too tender a victim to be sacrificed to an ambition and the prosperity of her own house on the other too precious a heritage to be sacrificed to an hesitation. The prosperity in question had suffered repeated and grievous breaches and the menaced institution been overmuch pervaded by that cold comfort in which people are obliged to balance dinner-table allusions to feudal ancestors against the absence of side-dishes; a state of things the sorrier as the family was now mainly represented by a gentleman whose appetite was large and who justly maintained that its historic glories hadn't been established by underfed heroes.

Three days after Euphemia's arrival Richard de Mauves, coming down from Paris to pay his respects to his grandmother, treated our heroine to her first encounter with a gentleman in the flesh. On appearing he kissed his grandmother's hand with a smile which caused her to draw it away with dignity, and set Euphemia, who was standing by, to ask herself what could have happened between them. Her unanswered wonder was but the beginning of a long chain of puzzlements, but the reader is free to know that the smile of M. de Mauves was a reply to a postscript affixed by the old lady to a letter addressed to him by her granddaughter as soon as the girl had been admitted to justify the latter's promises. Mademoiselle de Mauves brought her letter to her grandmother for approval, but obtained no more than was expressed in a frigid nod. The old lady watched her with this coldness while she proceeded to seal the letter, then suddenly bade her open it again and bring her a pen.

"Your sister's flatteries are all nonsense," she wrote; "the young lady's far too good for you, *mauvais sujet* beyond redemption. If you've a particle of conscience you'll not come and disturb the repose of an angel of innocence."

The other relative of the subject of this warning, who had read these lines, made up a little face as she freshly indited the address; but she laid down her pen with a confident nod which might have denoted that by her judgement her brother was appealed to on the ground of a principle that didn't exist in him. And "if you meant what you said," the young man on his side observed to his grandmother on his first private opportunity, "it would have been simpler not to have sent the letter."

Put out of humour perhaps by this gross impugnement of her sincerity, the head of the family kept her room on pretexts during a greater part of Euphemia's stay, so that the latter's angelic innocence was left all to her grandson's mercy. It suffered no worse mischance, however, than to be prompted to intenser communion with itself. Richard de Mauves was the hero of the young girl's romance made real, and so completely accordant with this creature of her imagination that she felt afraid of him almost as she would have been of a figure in a framed picture who should have stepped down from the wall. He was now thirty-three—young enough to suggest possibilities of ardent activity and old enough to have formed opinions that a simple woman might deem it an intellectual privilege to listen to. He was perhaps a trifle handsomer than Euphemia's rather grim Quixotic ideal, but a

very few days reconciled her to his good looks as effectually they would have reconciled her to a characterised want of them. He was quiet, grave, eminently distinguished. He spoke little, but his remarks, without being sententious, had a nobleness of tone that caused them to re-echo in the young girl's ears at the end of the day. He paid her very little direct attention, but his chance words—when he only asked her if she objected to his cigarette—were accompanied by a smile of extraordinary kindness.

It happened that shortly after his arrival, riding an unruly horse which Euphemia had with shy admiration watched him mount in the castle-yard, he was thrown with a violence which, without disparaging his skill, made him for a fortnight an interesting invalid lounging in the library with a bandaged knee. To beguile his confinement the accomplished young stranger was repeatedly induced to sing for him, which she did with a small natural tremor that might have passed for the finish of vocal art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments, but he listened with unfailing attention, remembered all her melodies and would sit humming them to himself. While his imprisonment lasted indeed he passed hours in her company, making her feel not unlike some unfriended artist who has suddenly gained the opportunity to devote a fortnight to the study of a great model. Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be the “character” of M. de Mauves, and the more she looked the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in this masterpiece of nature. M. de Mauves's character indeed, whether from a sense of being so generously and intensely taken for granted, or for reasons which bid graceful defiance to analysis, had never been so much on show, even to the very casual critic lodged, as might be said, in an out-of-the-way corner of it; it seemed really to reflect the purity of Euphemia's pious opinion. There had been nothing especially to admire in the state of mind in which he left Paris—a settled resolve to marry a young person whose charms might or might not justify his sister's account of them, but who was mistress, at the worst, of a couple of hundred thousand francs a year. He had not counted out sentiment—if she pleased him so much the better; but he had left a meagre margin for it and would hardly have admitted that so excellent a match could be improved by it. He was a robust and serene sceptic, and it was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in. What his original faith had been he could hardly have told you, for as he came back to his childhood's home to mend his fortunes by pretending to fall in love he was a thoroughly perverse creature and overlaid with more corruptions than a summer day's questioning of his conscience would have put to flight. Ten years' pursuit of pleasure, which a bureau full of unpaid bills was all he had to show for, had pretty well stifled the natural lad whose violent will and generous temper might have been shaped by a different pressure to some such showing as would have justified a romantic faith. So should he have exhaled the natural fragrance of a late-blooming flower of hereditary honour. His violence indeed had been subdued and he had learned to be irreproachably polite; but he had lost the fineness of his generosity, and his politeness, which in the long run society paid for, was hardly more than a form of luxurious egotism, like his fondness for ciphered pocket-handkerchiefs, lavender gloves and other fopperies by which shopkeepers remained out of pocket. In after-years he was terribly polite to his wife. He had formed himself, as the phrase was, and the form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes had introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly concerns us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different—say from those very lavender gloves that are soiled in an evening and thrown away. To do M. de Mauves justice, he had in the course of time encountered in the feminine character such plentiful evidence of its pliant softness and fine adjustability that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game.

Euphemia, as he lay on his sofa, struck him as by no means contradictory; she simply reminded him that very young women are generally innocent and that this is on the whole the most potent source of their attraction. Her innocence moved him to perfect consideration, and it seemed to him that if he shortly became her husband it would be exposed to a danger the less. Old Madame de Mauves, who flattered herself that in this whole matter she was very laudably rigid, might almost

have taken a lesson from the delicacy he practised. For two or three weeks her grandson was well-nigh a blushing boy again. He watched from behind the Figaro, he admired and desired and held his tongue. He found himself not in the least moved to a flirtation; he had no wish to trouble the waters he proposed to transfuse into the golden cup of matrimony. Sometimes a word, a look, a gesture of Euphemia's gave him the oddest sense of being, or of seeming at least, almost bashful; for she had a way of not dropping her eyes according to the mysterious virginal mechanism, of not fluttering out of the room when she found him there alone, of treating him rather as a glorious than as a pernicious influence—a radiant frankness of demeanour in fine, despite an infinite natural reserve, which it seemed at once graceless not to be complimentary about and indelicate not to take for granted. In this way had been wrought in the young man's mind a vague unwonted resonance of soft impressions, as we may call it, which resembled the happy stir of the change from dreaming pleasantly to waking happily. His imagination was touched; he was very fond of music and he now seemed to give easy ear to some of the sweetest he had ever heard. In spite of the bore of being laid up with a lame knee he was in better humour than he had known for months; he lay smoking cigarettes and listening to the nightingales with the satisfied smile of one of his country neighbours whose big ox should have taken the prize at a fair. Every now and then, with an impatient suspicion of the resemblance, he declared himself pitifully bete; but he was under a charm that braved even the supreme penalty of seeming ridiculous. One morning he had half an hour's tete-a-tete with his grandmother's confessor, a soft-voiced old Abbe whom, for reasons of her own, Madame de Mauves had suddenly summoned and had left waiting in the drawing-room while she rearranged her curls. His reverence, going up to the old lady, assured her that M. le Comte was in a most edifying state of mind and the likeliest subject for the operation of grace. This was a theological interpretation of the count's unusual equanimity. He had always lazily wondered what priests were good for, and he now remembered, with a sense of especial obligation to the Abbe, that they were excellent for marrying people.

A day or two after this he left off his bandages and tried to walk. He made his way into the garden and hobbled successfully along one of the alleys, but in the midst of his progress was pulled up by a spasm of pain which forced him to stop and call for help. In an instant Euphemia came tripping along the path and offered him her arm with the frankest solicitude.

"Not to the house," he said, taking it; "further on, to the bosquet." This choice was prompted by her having immediately confessed that she had seen him leave the house, had feared an accident and had followed him on tiptoe.

"Why didn't you join me?" he had asked, giving her a look in which admiration was no longer disguised and yet felt itself half at the mercy of her replying that a jeune fille shouldn't be seen following a gentleman. But it drew a breath which filled its lungs for a long time afterwards when she replied simply that if she had overtaken him he might have accepted her arm out of politeness, whereas she wished to have the pleasure of seeing him walk alone.

The bosquet was covered with an odorous tangle of blossoming creepers, and a nightingale overhead was shaking out love-notes with a profusion that made the Count feel his own conduct the last word of propriety. "I've always heard that in America, when a man wishes to marry a young girl, he offers himself simply face to face and without ceremony—without parents and uncles and aunts and cousins sitting round in a circle."

"Why I believe so," said Euphemia, staring and too surprised to be alarmed.

"Very well then—suppose our arbour here to be your great sensible country. I offer you my hand a l'Ameraine. It will make me intensely happy to feel you accept it."

Whether Euphemia's acceptance was in the American manner is more than I can say; I incline to think that for fluttering grateful trustful softly-amazed young hearts there is only one manner all over the world.

That evening, in the massive turret chamber it was her happiness to inhabit, she wrote a dutiful letter to her mamma, and had just sealed it when she was sent for by Madame de Mauves. She found

this ancient lady seated in her boudoir in a lavender satin gown and with her candles all lighted as for the keeping of some fete. "Are you very happy?" the old woman demanded, making Euphemia sit down before her.

"I'm almost afraid to say so, lest I should wake myself up."

"May you never wake up, belle enfant," Madame de Mauves grandly returned. "This is the first marriage ever made in our family in this way—by a Comte de Mauves proposing to a young girl in an arbour like Jeannot and Jeannette. It has not been our way of doing things, and people may say it wants frankness. My grandson tells me he regards it—for the conditions—as the perfection of good taste. Very well. I'm a very old woman, and if your differences should ever be as marked as your agreements I shouldn't care to see them. But I should be sorry to die and think you were going to be unhappy. You can't be, my dear, beyond a certain point; because, though in this world the Lord sometimes makes light of our expectations he never altogether ignores our deserts. But you're very young and innocent and easy to dazzle. There never was a man in the world—among the saints themselves—as good as you believe my grandson. But he's a galant homme and a gentleman, and I've been talking to him to-night. To you I want to say this—that you're to forget the worldly rubbish I talked the other day about the happiness of frivolous women. It's not the kind of happiness that would suit you, ma toute-belle. Whatever befalls you, promise me this: to be, to remain, your own sincere little self only, charming in your own serious little way. The Comtesse de Mauves will be none the worse for it. Your brave little self, understand, in spite of everything—bad precepts and bad examples, bad fortune and even bad usage. Be persistently and patiently just what the good God has made you, and even one of us—and one of those who is most what we ARE—will do you justice!"

Euphemia remembered this speech in after-years, and more than once, wearily closing her eyes, she seemed to see the old woman sitting upright in her faded finery and smiling grimly like one of the Fates who sees the wheel of fortune turning up her favourite event. But at the moment it had for her simply the proper gravity of the occasion: this was the way, she supposed, in which lucky young girls were addressed on their engagement by wise old women of quality.

At her convent, to which she immediately returned, she found a letter from her mother which disconcerted her far more than the remarks of Madame de Mauves. Who were these people, Mrs. Cleve demanded, who had presumed to talk to her daughter of marriage without asking her leave? Questionable gentleness plainly; the best French people never did such things. Euphemia would return straightway to her convent, shut herself up and await her own arrival. It took Mrs. Cleve three weeks to travel from Nice to Paris, and during this time the young girl had no communication with her lover beyond accepting a bouquet of violets marked with his initials and left by a female friend. "I've not brought you up with such devoted care," she declared to her daughter at their first interview, "to marry a presumptuous and penniless Frenchman. I shall take you straight home and you'll please forget M. de Mauves."

Mrs. Cleve received that evening at her hotel a visit from this personage which softened her wrath but failed to modify her decision. He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals; and the lady, who had been a good-natured censor on her own account, felt a deep and real need to sacrifice her daughter to propriety. She belonged to that large class of Americans who make light of their native land in familiar discourse but are startled back into a sense of having blasphemed when they find Europeans taking them at their word. "I know the type, my dear," she said to her daughter with a competent nod. "He won't beat you. Sometimes you'll wish he would."

Euphemia remained solemnly silent, for the only answer she felt capable of making was that her mother's mind was too small a measure of things and her lover's type an historic, a social masterpiece that it took some mystic illumination to appreciate. A person who confounded him with the common throng of her watering-place acquaintance was not a person to argue with. It struck the girl she had simply no cause to plead; her cause was in the Lord's hands and in those of M. de Mauves.

This agent of Providence had been irritated and mortified by Mrs. Cleve's opposition, and hardly knew how to handle an adversary who failed to perceive that a member of his family gave of necessity more than he received. But he had obtained information on his return to Paris which exalted the uses of humility. Euphemia's fortune, wonderful to say, was greater than its fame, and in view of such a prize, even a member of his family could afford to take a snubbing.

The young man's tact, his deference, his urbane insistence, won a concession from Mrs. Cleve. The engagement was to be put off and her daughter was to return home, be brought out and receive the homage she was entitled to and which might well take a form representing peril to the suit of this first headlong aspirant. They were to exchange neither letters nor mementoes nor messages; but if at the end of two years Euphemia had refused offers enough to attest the permanence of her attachment he should receive an invitation to address her again. This decision was promulgated in the presence of the parties interested. The Count bore himself gallantly, looking at his young friend as if he expected some tender protestation. But she only looked at him silently in return, neither weeping nor smiling nor putting out her hand. On this they separated, and as M. de Mauves walked away he declared to himself that in spite of the confounded two years he was one of the luckiest of men—to have a fiancée who to several millions of francs added such strangely beautiful eyes.

How many offers Euphemia refused but scantily concerns us—and how the young man wore his two years away. He found he required pastimes, and as pastimes were expensive he added heavily to the list of debts to be cancelled by Euphemia's fortune. Sometimes, in the thick of what he had once called pleasure with a keener conviction than now, he put to himself the case of their failing him after all; and then he remembered that last mute assurance of her pale face and drew a long breath of such confidence as he felt in nothing else in the world save his own punctuality in an affair of honour.

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