

THE SUMMER OF KATYA

Trevarian



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THE
SUMMER
OF
KATYA

A NOVEL



THREE
RIVERS
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For Diane

SALIES-LES-BAINS
AUGUST 1938

Every writer who has dealt with that last summer before the Great War has felt compelled to comment on the uncommon perfection of the weather: the endless days of ardent blue skies across which fair-weather clouds toiled lazily, the long lavender evening freshened by soft breezes, the early mornings of birdsong and slanting yellow sunlight. From Italy to Scotland, from Berlin to the valley of my native Basse Pyrénées, all of Europe shared an exceptional period of clear, delicious weather. It was the last thing they were to share for four terrible years—save for the mud and agony, hate and death of the war that marked the boundary between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between the Age of Grace and the Era of Efficiency.

Many who have described that summer claim to have sensed something ominous and terminal in the very excellence of the season, a last flaring up of the guttering candle, a Hellenistic burst of desperate exuberance before the death of a civilization, a final, almost hysterical, moment of laughter and joy for the young men who were to die in the trenches. I confess that my own memory of that last July, assisted to a modest degree by notes and sketches in my journal, carries no hint that I viewed the exquisite weather as an ironic jest of Fate. Perhaps I was insensitive to the omens, young as I was, filled with the juices of life, and poised eagerly on the threshold of my medical career.

These last words provoke a wry smile, as only the conventions of language allow me to describe the quarter century I have passed as a bachelor doctor in a small Basque village as a “medical career.” To be sure, the bright hardworking young man that I was had every reason to hope he was on the first step of a journey to professional success, although he might have drawn some hint of a more limited future from the humiliatingly trivial tasks he was assigned by his sponsor and patron, Doctor Hippolyte Gro-

who emphasized his assistant's subordinate position in dozens of ways, both subtle and bold, not the least effective of which was reminding patients that I was indeed a full-fledged doctor, despite my apparent youth and palpable lack of experience.

"*Doctor Montjean will attend to writing out your prescription,*" he would tell a patient with a benevolent smile. "You may have every confidence in him. Oh, the ink may still be wet on his certificate, but he is well versed in all the most modern approaches to healing, both of body and mind." This last gibe was aimed at my fascination with the then new and largely mistrusted work of Doctor Freud and his followers. Doctor Gros would pat the hand of his patient (all of whom were women of a certain age, as he specialized in the "discomforts" associated with menopause) and assure her that he was honored to have an assistant who had studied in Paris. The widened eyes and tone of awe with which he said *Paris* were designed to suggest, in broad burlesque, that a simple provincial doctor, such as he, felt obliged to be humble before a brilliant young man from the capital who had everything to recommend him—save perhaps experience, compassion, wisdom, understanding, and success.

Lest I create too unflattering a portrait of Doctor Gros, let me admit that it was kind of him to invite me to be his summer assistant, as I was fresh out of medical school, penniless, without any prospect for purchasing a practice, and burdened by a most uncomplimentary report of my year of internship at the mental institution of Passy. However, far from showing Doctor Gros the gratitude he had a right to expect, I courted his displeasure by confessing to him that I considered his area of specialization to be founded on old wives' tales, and his profitable summer clinic to be little more than a luxury resort for women with more leisure than common sense. In sharing these observations with him, I am sure he believed myself to be admirably open and honest for, with the callous assurance of youth, I often mistook insensitivity for frankness. It is little wonder that he occasionally retaliated against my callow self-confidence with thrusts at my inexperience and my peculiar absorption with the dark workings of the mind.

Indeed, one day in the clinic when I had been holding forth on the ethical parallels between withholding treatment from the sick and giving it to the healthy, he said to me, "You have no doubt wondered, Montjean, why I chose you to assist me this summer. Possibly you came to the conclusion that I was staggered by your academic accomplishments and impressed by the altruism revealed by your year of unpaid service at Passy. Well, there was some of that, to be sure. Then too, there was the fact that you were born in this part of France, and your dark Basque good looks are an asset to a clinic catering to women of a certain age and uncertain appetites. After all, having a Basque boy fiddle with their bits lends to the local color. But foremost among your qualities was your willingness to work cheap, which I admired because humility is an attractive and rare quality in a young doctor. However, little by little, I am coming to the view that what I mistook for humility was, in fact, an accurate evaluation of your worth."

And, the truth be told, I wasn't of all that much value to him, as there was not really enough work at the clinic to occupy two doctors. My principal worth was as insurance against his falling ill for a day or two, and as freedom for him to take the occasional day off—days he implied were devoted to romantic preoccupations. For Doctor Gros had something of a reputation as a rake and a devil with the women who were his patients. He never boasted openly of his conquests to the worthies of Salies who were his companions over a few glasses each evening in one of the arcade cafés around the center

square. Instead he relied on the silent smile, the shrug, the weak gesture of protest, to establish his reputation, not only as a romancer of potency, but as a man possessed of great discretion and a finely tuned sense of honor.

Nor did Doctor Gros's particularly advantageous position in the stream of sexual opportunity engender the jealousy one might have expected among his peers, for he was protected from their envy by a fully deserved reputation as the ugliest man in Gascony, perhaps in all of France. His was a uniquely thoroughgoing ugliness embracing both broad plan and minute detail, an ugliness the total of which was greater than the sum of the parts, an ugliness to which each feature contributed its bit, from the bulbous veiny nose, to the blotched and pitted complexion, well warted and stained, to the slack meaty mouth, to the flapping wattles, to the gnarled, irregular ears, to the undershot chin overbalanced by a beetling brow. Only his eyes, glittering and intelligent within their sunken, rheumy sockets, escaped the general aesthetic holocaust. But withal there was a peculiar attraction to his face, a fascination at the abandon with which Nature can embrace ruin, that lured one's glance again and again to his features only to have the gaze deflected by self-consciousness.

Doctor Gros was by far the wittiest and best-educated man in Salies, but the audience for his pompous, rather purple style of monologue were the dull-minded men who controlled the social community: the owners of the hotel-restaurants, the manager of the casino, the village lawyer, the banker, all of whom felt a certain reluctant debt to the doctor, for it was his clinic that was the principal attraction for the summer tourist/patients who were the economic foundation of the town. Still—even though Profit occupies so dominant a position in the moral order of the French bourgeois mentality that vague impulses towards fair play and decency are easily held in rein—it is possible that the more prudish of Salies's merchants might have found Doctor Gros's cavalier treatment of the ladies' patients offensive, had these pampered, well-to-do women been genuinely ill. But in fact they were robust middle-class specimens whose only physical distress was having attained an age at which fashionable society allowed them to flap and flutter over "women's problems," the clinical details of which they whispered to one another with that appalled delectation later generations would reserve for sex. So it was that I alone found Doctor Gros's sexual hinting and double entendres medically unethical and socially distasteful, a view that my youthful addiction to moral simplism required me to express. Looking back, I wonder that Doctor Gros put up with my self-assured censure at all, but the peculiar fact was that he rather seemed to like me, in a gruff sort of way. He took impish delight in outraging my tidy and compact sense of ethics. Also, I was in a position, by virtue of education, to catch his puns and comic images that went over the heads of his merchant-minded cronies. But I believe the principal reason he was fond of me was nostalgic egotism: he saw in me, in both my ambitions and limitations, the young man he had been before time and fate reduced his brilliance to a mere table wit, and eroded the scope of his aspirations to the dimensions of a profitable small-town clinic.

Perhaps this is why his reaction to my attitude of moral superiority was limited to giving me only the most trivial tasks to perform. And, in fact, I was not all that distressed at being relegated to the role of an elevated pharmacist, for I had just finished years of grinding work and study that had drained mind and body and was in need of a lazy summer with time on my hands, with freedom to wander through the quaint, slightly shoddy resort village or to loaf on the banks of the sparkling Gave overarched by ancient trees and charming stone bridges. I wanted time to rest, to dream, to write.

Ah yes, write. For at that time in my life I felt capable of everything. Having attempted nothing, had no sense of my limitations; having dared nothing, I knew no boundaries to my courage. During the years of fatigue and dulling rote in medical school, I had daydreamed of a future confected of two careers: that of the brilliant and caring doctor and that of the inspired and inspiring poet. And why not? I was an avid and sensitive reader, and I made the common error of assuming that being a responsive reader indicated latent talent as a writer, as though being a gourmand was but a short step from being a chef. Indeed, my first interest in the pioneer work of Doctor Freud sprang, not from a concern for persons wounded in their collisions with reality, but from my personal curiosity about the nature of creativity and the springs of motivation.

So it was that, for several hours a day throughout that indolent, radiant summer, I wandered into the countryside with my notebook, or sat alone at an out-of-the-way café, sipping an aperitif and holding imagined conversations with important and terribly impressed lions of the literary world, or I lounged by the banks of the Gave, notebook open, sketching romantic impressions, my lofty poetic intentions inevitably withering to a kind of breathless shattered prose in the process of being recorded—dissipation that I was sure I would learn to avoid once I had mastered the “tricks” of writing.

Then, too, there was the matter of love. As the reader might suspect, the expansive young man that I was had no doubt but that he was capable of a great love . . . a staggering love. I was, after all, twenty-five years old, brimming with health, a devourer of novels, fertile of imagination. It is no surprise that I was ripe for romance.

Ripe for romance? Is that not only the self-conscious and sensitive young man’s way of saying he was heavy with passion? Is not, perhaps, romance only the fiction by means of which the tender-minded negotiate their lust?

No, not quite. I am painfully aware that the young man I used to be was callow, callous, self-confident, and egotistic. There is no doubt he was heavy with passion. But, to give the poor devil his due, he was also ripe for romance.

I slipped into a comfortable, rather lazy, routine of life, doing all that Doctor Gros demanded of me and nothing more. A more ambitious person—or a less blindly confident one—would have filled his time with study and self-improvement, for any dispassionate analysis of my future prospects would have revealed them to be most uncertain. I was, after all, without family and without means; I was in debt for my education; and I had no inclination to waste my talents on some impoverished rural community. Yet I was content to laze away my days, resting myself in preparation for some unknown prospect or adventure that I was sure, without the slightest evidence, lay just around the corner. As events turned out, I would have wasted any time spent in work and study; for the war came that autumn and I was called up immediately. Romantically—and quite stupidly—I joined the army as a simple soldier.

Four years of mud and trenches, stench, fear, brutalizing boredom. Twice wounded, once seriously enough to limit my physical activities for the rest of my life. Four years recorded in my memory as one endless blur of horror and disgust. Even to this day I am choked with nausea and rage when I stand among my fellow veterans in the graveyard of my village and recite the names of those “*mort pour France.*”

Why did I submit myself to the butchery of the trenches when I might have served in the echelon as a medical officer? Even the most rudimentary knowledge of Doctor Freud would suggest that I was pursuing a death wish . . . as indeed I was. I knew this at the time, but that knowledge neither freed nor sustained me, as I had assumed self-understanding would, in my sophomoric grasp of the unconscious.

I am rushing ahead of my tale—beyond it, really. But then, life is neither linear nor tidy. Too, there is a direct link between my being heavy with passion that long delicious summer and my being possessed of a death wish that autumn. The link is Katya.

Katya . . .

Three days ago I returned to Salies for the first time in twenty-four years, the first time since I left the army and came back to assume the shabby practice of the aging doctor of my native village. Forty years in the trenches had pulverized my fine aspirations; I no longer yearned for fame or dreamed of excitement; I clung thankfully to the peace and inner silence I found in the featureless rounds of country practice. The years passed unnoticed and unremembered, and one autumn morning I found myself suddenly forty-five years old. It was a time for weighing youthful hopes against mature accomplishment, for it was quite certain that I had by then done all I was ever going to do. Sitting alone at my desk that evening of my forty-fifth birthday I asked that least original of introspective questions: Where had it all gone? And the somewhat less banal question: What, after all, had it been?

My heart swollen with nostalgia, with a pain akin to remorse, I decided to return to Salies and look for the threads of my life there, where the fabric had been torn apart. I had an impulse to drop everything and rush off that evening, but there is a heavy irony in the way prosaic life refuses to accommodate the theatrical rhythms of fiction, and it was another three years before I was able to arrange a vacation and come for a fortnight to Salies.

I have been here for three days now; wandering, walking alone. I even purchased a child's notebook for the purpose of recording memories of that summer. At this moment I am writing in that notebook as I sit beside the flowing Gave beneath an ancient overhanging tree that I remember from my first summer here. Externally, Salies has changed very little during the intervening quarter century; the same Second Empire fancywork on the façades of the casino and the public baths, the same self-conscious quaintness in the décor of the restaurants. But a certain diminished melancholy can be felt in long overdue repainting and in postponed repairs; for Salies fell out of fashion when it became no longer acceptable for a woman to enjoy a comfortable middle age, cushioned by rounds of social trivia and routines of self-cossetting. Nowadays such women are driven by both self-image and external imposed ideals to play forever at the burlesque of youth, plying their cosmetics with trowels, and panting feverishly after the phantoms of fun, purpose, and fulfillment.

Still, the hydropathic branch of French medicine is nothing if not responsive to the vagaries of economics and fashion, and it was not long after women of a certain age stopped coming to Salies that its water was discovered to contain just that combination of temperature, salts, and trace minerals that made it sovereign for the treatment of severely retarded children. The casino and the charming little hotels have become establishments for the year-round care of such unfortunates as are kept, for their own good, well away from the quotidian lives of their discomfited parents. And today, down street where once pairs of modish ladies paraded their gowns of mauve or ashes-of-rose, queues of gawking

bland-faced children slap and stumble along under the control of large, disinterested matrons who bring them daily to the baths. There they splash about in the tepid waters or gag and grimace as they swallow their daily dosage.

But it is not this change of tone and clientele that makes it difficult for me to record my impressions and memories of that summer before the war. Indeed, Salies has been spared the architectural blemishes of the 'twenties and 'thirties that have scarred most resort villages, protected by its fall from fashion and subsequent lack of growth and modernization, and the unchanged physical surroundings tempt and prompt my recall, each remembered event dislodging in turn another incident, another sound, another image from the deep lagan of my memory. And there is another, rather frightening, bridge between this time and that summer nearly quarter of a century past. Now as then there are whispers and rumors of impending war. There is a kind of melancholy excitement in the air, a timid hysteria, a low-grade fever of patriotism. Plans and projects are suspended; and there is an ambience of hopelessness in the brave talk and awkward swagger of the young men who are half-expecting to be mobilized, despite everyone's confidence in General Maginot's impregnable line.

But despite the physical and emotional parallels between today and that distant summer, I find it difficult to express my memories lucidly. The problem is not in the remembering; it is in the recording; for while I recall each note clearly, they play a false melody when I string them together. And it is not only the intervening years that distort the sounds and images; it is the fact that the events occurred on the other side of the Great War, beyond the gulf of experience and pain that separates two centuries, two cultures. Those of us whose lives are draped across that war find their youths deposited on the shore of a receding, almost alien, continent where life was lived at a different tempo and, more important, in a different timbre. The things we did and said, our motives and methods, had different implications from those they now have; therefore, it is possible for a description of those things to be completely accurate without being at all truthful.

But I have promised myself that I would revisit, touch, and handle all the memories of that summer and Katya, and I must do this, although I am not at all confident that I can convert those memories into meaning.

I first saw Katya at a distance. I was sitting right here, beneath this ancient tree on the riverside park, my notebook in my lap as it is now. I was daydreaming under the guise of meditating, when I looked up and noticed her walking across the deep lawn towards me. My first glance, a squint from beneath my straw boater, was casual, and I returned to my thoughts, only to be attracted again almost immediately. I later told myself that I had sensed something of significance in her approach, but that is nonsense. It was probably the determination in her strong stride that captured my attention. The ladies who took the air and waters of Salies strolled around the paths of the park with studied aimlessness, gossiping as they engaged in attractive light exercise, always in twos, for ladies in those days did not stroll in a park alone. Katya's purposeful stride had none of the rhythms of strolling.

I was a bit embarrassed and uncertain at her approach, once I determined that, for lack of alternatives in the empty park, I must be her objective. Should I stand to greet her? Would that not seem forward as she was a stranger to me? On the other hand, how could I receive her sitting with my back against the tree, a notebook in my lap, my skimmer down over my eyes? One has to be young and of a certain temperament to find confusion and embarrassment in such trivial social incidents, and I was exact

the right age and temperament. I sat up and looked around rather theatrically, seeking to communicate to her that I was searching for the object of her quest and was not so bold as to assume it was I. Then I stood, took off my straw hat, and awaited her arrival with a smile that fluttered weakly for want of a sure purpose.

“Mademoiselle?” I ventured when she was standing before me.

“You are Dr. Montjean?”

“That is one of my burdens, yes.” It was a habit of mine to rehearse social situations and to develop what I thought were cultured and interesting responses to simple questions. The effect was rather stilted and artificial, and I almost always regretted the words as they escaped from my mouth.

“My brother has had an accident, Doctor.” The matter-of-fact way she said this suggested there was no great urgency.

“Oh?” I looked across the park, half expecting to see someone approaching—a friend, the brother himself—for who would send a young lady to fetch a doctor if there were others available. “Ah . . . where is your brother now, Mademoiselle . . . ?” I lifted my eyebrows in gentle request for her name.

“He’s at home.”

“At home?”

“Yes. We live at Etcheverria. Do you know the house?”

I confessed that I did not.

“It’s two-point-six kilometers from Salies, up the Mauleon road.”

I had to smile at the precision. “Two-point-six kilometers *exactly*?”

She nodded. “Shall we go?”

“Ah . . . by all means. I shall have to collect my bag.” She turned and began to walk across the grass towards the village square before I could offer my arm, so I found myself awkwardly hastening to catch up with her. “Ah . . . how did you come into the village? Have you a trap?”

“I rode in on my bicycle. I left it in the square.”

Young women of that era sometimes teetered about on bicycles for amusement and display, but the use of them for transportation was not common, inhibitions of propriety no less prohibitive than the inhibitions of dress. I found her indifference to those inhibitions intriguing. “Can you tell me something about your brother’s accident, Mademoiselle . . . ?”

“Treville. Oh, I don’t believe it’s anything really serious, Doctor. He fell from his machine.”

“His bicycle?”

“Yes. We were having a race, and he fell.”

“A race? I see.” I glanced over at her profile and was taken by the golden, suntanned cheek and the healthy complexion, uncommon in women of the middle class where pallor was not only accounted an element of beauty, but a cherished proof that one was leisured. She was hatless, a lapse of sartorial propriety when women wore fluttering, broad-brimmed hats even when motoring or riding. Her full dark hair was drawn back in a soft bun, but wisps had escaped to float about her temples—disarranged, no doubt, by her bicycle ride of exactly two and six-tenths kilometers. It would not be correct to describe her as a beauty, for there was too much vigor in her features, too much energy in her expression, to satisfy the popular ideal of plump passive beauty. One might more accurately call her a handsome woman . . . I thought her a very handsome woman indeed. I was looking at the graceful line of her neck, the nape of which was brushed by soft commas of hair, when she turned to me, her eyes asking why I was staring at her in that way.

“Ah . . . and what is the nature of your brother’s injuries?” I asked quickly.

“Well, he’s a bit scraped up, of course. And it could be that he has a broken clavicle. But there’s no concussion.”

I frowned. “I am impressed, Mlle Treville. You seem to have some knowledge of medicine.”

She shrugged and puffed air between slack lips in the way that peasants or street gamines dismiss some insignificant matter. “Not really.”

“But most people, and nearly all women, would have called the clavicle a collarbone.”

“One summer I developed an interest in anatomy, and I read several books. That’s all. There’s no mystery.”

How can I explain the implications of a young lady in the summer of 1914 admitting to an interest in anatomy? It would be as though one of today’s pert Modern Young Things were to confess to a fascination with pornography. The conventions of polite conversation did not admit the existence of the human body, much less its parts separately considered.

We had passed out of the park and were walking along the tree-lined central avenue of Salic towards the clinic. Two women on the other side of the street stopped to exchange whispers about the hatless girl walking brazenly with the young doctor. And indeed there was something in the vigor of Katya’s long, athletic stride that might be considered unladylike. It would not be exactly fair to say that ladies of that time *minced*, but certainly they did not stride along, as it was clearly *infra dig* to appear to have to get anywhere with urgency.

“How can you know your brother does not suffer from a concussion?” I asked.

“His eyes respond to light by a contraction of the pupil,” she answered with a tone suggesting an unnecessary statement of the obvious. “How else would one test for concussion?”

“How else indeed,” I said, a bit nettled. “I take it there was also a summer’s reading devoted

diagnostics?”

She stopped walking and turned to me, puzzled by the archness of my tone. Her eyes searched mine in a most disconcerting way, with an expression of sincere interrogation mixed with amusement, an expression I was later to find particular to her, and very dear to me. “I’ve been guilty of invading your domain of authority, haven’t I?” she said. “I am sorry.”

“Oh, no. It isn’t that at all,” I protested.

“Isn’t it?”

“Certainly not . . . well, yes frankly.” I grinned. “After all, I am supposed to be the wise old doctor and you the distressed and admiring patient.”

She smiled. “I promise to be as distressed and admiring as possible the next time we meet.”

“Ah, that’s more like it.”

“And you must play the wise old doctor . . . well, the wise young doctor.”

“Young . . . but dignified.”

“Oh, yes, dignified to be sure. Tell me, would it damage your dignity to learn that we have walked past the clinic?”

“What? Ah! So we have. Pretending to forget my destination is a little ruse I use to test whether my companion is paying attention.”

“Very clever.”

“Thank you. Would you care to step in while I gather my things?”

“Thank you, no. I’ll wait for you here.”

I borrowed Doctor Gros’s sulky and we rode south out of town into the countryside where apple trees bordering the dirt road scented the noonday air with their ripening fruit. Despite my practice of rehearsing ideal conversations to myself and loading my statements until they dripped with wit and insight, I could think of nothing amusing to say. She, for her part, seemed uninterested in social chatter as she sat with her face lifted to the sun in evident pleasure. Twice she turned to me and smiled in a generous, impersonal way. She delighted in the warmth of the sun and the touch of the breeze created by the motion of the trap, and she smiled back at the moment that was giving her pleasure. I was included in that smile as though I were a likable, anonymous thing.

Failing to think of anything interesting or witty to say, I fell back upon the banal. “I take it you are not of the *pays*, Mademoiselle?” Her speech lacked the chanting twang and the sounded final *e* of the south.

“No.” She was silent for a moment, then she seemed to realize that a one-syllable answer was a b

brusque. “No, we came for the waters.”

“It must be inconvenient.”

She had already returned to her pleasurable reverie, so it was several moments before she said, “I’m sorry. You were saying? . . .”

“Nothing important.”

“Oh? I see.”

Half a minute passed in silence. “I simply suggested that it must be inconvenient.”

“What must be?”

I sighed. “Living so far from the village . . . being here for the waters and living so far from the village.” I sincerely wished I had not entered on this topic of conversation that neither interested her nor showed me to advantage.

“We prefer it, really.”

“I suppose you don’t have to come into town every day for your regimen of the waters, then.” I said this knowing perfectly well that she did not come in every day. Salies is a very small place, and I was a romantic young man with much leisure. If she came often to Salies, I would have seen her; and if I had seen her, I would certainly have remembered her.

“No, not every day. In fact . . .” She smiled a greeting to an old peasant we were passing on the road, and he lifted his chin in the crisp Basque salute that is as much dismissal as it is greeting. Then she turned again to me. “In fact, we don’t come in at all.”

“But . . .”

“When I told you we were here to take the waters, I was lying.”

“Lying?” I smiled. “Do you make a practice of lying?”

She nodded thoughtfully. “It’s often the easiest thing to do, and sometimes the kindest. It is true that we are here for reasons of health, and to avoid unnecessary questions I say we are taking the waters.”

“I see. But what—” I stopped short and laughed. “I was going to indulge in one of those unnecessary questions.”

She laughed with me. “I’m sure you were. Ah! We have arrived. That lane to the right.”

The grassy, rutted condition of the tree-lined lane attested to its long period of disuse before the Trevilles occupied the house. As we approached the ancient stone heap called Etcheverria we passed along the crumbling wall of a derelict garden grown rank with weeds among which a few volunteer

flowers struggled in stunted bloom, reminders of the passing hand of man. Twice the horse jerked aside nervously.

“It’s haunted, you know,” she said with a smile.

“And you don’t mind living in a haunted house?”

“No, not the house. The garden. Local tradition says the garden is haunted.” She cocked her head thoughtfully and added, “Well, perhaps the house is haunted as well. Most houses are . . . in one way or another.”

“That’s an interesting observation. But Dr. Freud would contend that it is most people, not most houses, that are haunted . . . in one way or another.”

She nodded. “Yes, I know.”

I was genuinely surprised. And fascinated. “You have read Dr. Freud?”

“Yes. After I had learned what I wanted to know about anatomy.” She laughed. “One leads to the other, I suppose. First you learn how the various bits function, then you wonder why they bother to.”

We turned in at the sagging gate. It was not necessary to tie up the horse, as she was an experienced doctor’s mare used to standing calmly in the traces. By the time I walked around to offer her a hand down, Katya had already begun to descend on her own. My clumsy attempt to give unneeded assistance and her last-minute effort to accept the titular support of my guiding hand created a moment of awkward grappling that made us both laugh.

“This is the stuff of low comedy,” she said.

“Or of high romance,” I added.

She smiled up at me. “No. Only low comedy, I think.”

“Well, perhaps you’re right. That’s the first time I ever danced with a woman who wasn’t—” I am sure I must have blushed to my ears as I realized that my hand still rested on her waist. I pulled it back quickly.

She led the way towards the house. “A woman who wasn’t . . . what?” she asked over her shoulder.

How could I say: who wasn’t wearing stays? My palm still felt the indescribably exciting texture of soft flesh under firm fabric. “Who wasn’t . . .” I cleared my throat. “. . . a member of my family.”

She glanced at me sideways. “I don’t believe that.”

“Good. I often lie, you see. It’s the easiest thing to do, and sometimes the kindest.”

She chuckled. “All right.”

The façade of the house was in poor repair; rising damp had rotted the plaster in places, revealing rough-cut stone beneath. As we stepped into the central hall I was aware of a dank chill that must have made the place most uncomfortable in winter.

“Katya?” a man’s voice called from a room off the principal hall.

“Yes, Paul,” she answered. “I have the doctor with me. Help is on its way, if you can manage to cling to life for a moment longer.”

The man laughed in full voice as she motioned me to follow her into the salon.

“Paul, this is Dr. Montjean. Dr. Montjean, my poor battered brother.”

As he rose from a chaise, his right arm bound against his chest by strips of linen, my astonishment was undisguised.

They were twins. Identical in every feature: the full mouths, the high foreheads, the prominent cheekbones, the firm chins, the thick chestnut hair. The features were identical, but the effect was startlingly different, as the same elements were interpreted in the context of their sexes. What in her was a handsome beauty appeared frail and almost effeminate in him. What in her movements was grace, in his seemed affectation. An unkind critic might have described her as having, in a way of speaking, a bit too much face; while he had too little. This difference-within-similarity was nowhere more evident than in their eyes. The same almond shape and slightly crooked set, the same clear pale grey made startling by dark lush lashes, but they created totally opposite impressions. She had a gentleness of glance that seemed to invite one to look into the springs of her being. His glance was metallic and impenetrable. Light glinted on the surface of his eyes, while it glowed from deep within hers. Her eyes were bridges; his barriers.

They laughed together at my frank surprise. “It’s a tired old prank, Doctor, not warning people in advance that we are twins,” the brother said as he pressed my hand in that awkward upside-down way of the left-handed handshake. “But we never weary of the effect it has on people the first time they see us together. Forgive us for amusing ourselves at your expense, but there is so little to divert one in this out-of-the-way *bled*.”

I sought to recover my aplomb by assuming a professional tone. “Your sister tells me you fell from your bicycle.”

He glanced at her and grinned. “Well, I suppose you could put it that way if you wanted to. Actually, ___”

“—I’ll see to a little refreshment,” she interposed quickly. “A cup of tisane, Doctor?”

“Please.”

As she left the room, the brother raised his voice, pursuing her with his words. “That’s one way of putting it, Doctor. Actually, my good sister knocked me from my machine!”

“Rubbish!” she called back from down the hall.

He laughed softly and shook his head as I began undoing the rather expertly wrapped bandage. He winced at first contact but spoke on as I made my examination. “It’s true, you know. She’s vicious in competition. We were having a little race to the bottom of the lane and back and—Argh! Jesus Doctor! If you are going to ask if that hurt, the answer is *yes!*”

“Sorry.”

“I wonder if that’s enough? Well, I got ahead of her in the race by the mild subterfuge of starting before she was ready. I had reached the end of the lane and was on my way back, and what did she do? She—Ah! Damn it, man! Was your last post with the Inquisition? It’s broken, I assume?”

“Cracked surely.”

“Rotten luck. Well, as I passed her on the way back she kicked out at me and drove me into the garden wall. Just like that. The Jockey Club would certainly have disqualified her.”

“The Jockey Club? You are Parisian then?”

He lifted an eyebrow in surprise. “Why, yes. I’m amazed you’ve heard of it. From your accent, I assumed you were from hereabouts.”

“I was unaware that I had an accent.” Actually, I had been at great pains while studying in Paris to lose my singsong Basque accent, as its rustic implications had been a source of ridicule among my fellow students.

“Oh, it’s not much of an accent, I suppose. More a matter of rhythm than pronunciation. I am something of a student of accents, as nothing is so illustrative of breeding and class as customs and speech.”

Paul Treville himself had a tone of speech, a certain nasal laxity, that I recognized as upper-class Parisian, a sound I used to resent because it bespoke wealth and comfort while I had had to work and struggle for my education. It was a pattern of speech that I had always thought of, not as an accent, but as an affectation.

“If I were called upon to describe your accent, Doctor, I would say it was the sound of a man who had worked on losing his southern chant and had very nearly succeeded.”

It was, of course, the accuracy of his evaluation that irritated me. We all desire to be understood but no one enjoys being obvious. I am afraid my annoyance was not well concealed, for he smiled in a way that told me he took pleasure in baiting me.

“You’re rather young to be a doctor, aren’t you?”

“I’m only just out of training.”

“I see. I do hope I’m not your first patient.”

“You’d be better advised to hope you’re not my last. Don’t move about. I have to bind your arm and your chest to immobilize it. It may hurt a bit.”

“I’m sure it will. So you’ve heard of the Jockey Club, have you? I dare to assume you were not a member.”

“You assume correctly. My memories of Paris are those of the impoverished student—of the bohemian life that is more pleasant to talk about than to live. The cost of membership in your club—even assuming I had found a sponsor, which is most unlikely—would have paid for all of my education.”

“Yes, I daresay. But it may have been a better investment in the long run. You’d have met a better sort of people there.”

“The *important* people?”

He smiled at the archness of my tone, but I evaporated the smile with a firmer than necessary tug on the bandage.

“Ah! You do know that hurts, I suppose?”

“Hm-hm.”

“You appear to suffer under the delusion that the only important people are those who sweat in the vineyards, Doctor. The tinkers, the masons, the plowboys, the . . . leeches. You overlook the great social value of the aristocracy.”

“And what do you believe that to be?” I asked atonically as I busied myself with wrapping the gauze bandage around his smooth, hairless chest.

“Ever since the cultural suicide of the Revolution, it has been the role of my class to serve the bourgeoisie as object lessons against the evils of idle dissipation. I have approached my duties with admirable diligence, if I say so myself, devoting myself to gambling, target-shooting, listless promiscuity, vacuous badinage—all the traditional occupations of the young man of the world.”

“How boring that must be for you.”

“It is, rather.”

“And for your interlocutors.”

“Ah, the lad has fangs!”

“Do try to stand still.”

“Now, my father has gone about being useless in a more oblique way. He is something of

gentleman scholar. But I'm afraid his uselessness goes unnoticed and unappreciated, as uselessness the norm in academics."

"And your sister?"

"Katya? Ah, there you touch a sore point—do you enjoy puns?"

"Not overly."

"Pity. Yes, Katya is something of a disgrace to her class. Given half a chance, I'm afraid she would involve herself in all sorts of uplifting activities. Fortunately, there are no opportunities for her to indulge herself in this forgotten hole, so our family tradition of uselessness goes unblemished. Well, Doctor? What's the diagnosis? Am I to toil away the remainder of my life a hopeless cripple?"

"Not on a physical level. So long as your arm and shoulder are kept immobilized, nature will mend you. But it may be a month or so before you have full use of it."

"A month!"

"Bones mend at their own pace, Monsieur Treville."

He looked at me quizzically. "Treville? Did Katya tell you our name was Treville?"

"Why yes. Isn't it?"

He thrust out his lower lip and waved his free hand carelessly. "Oh, of course. Treville. Hm-m-m. rather like the sound of it, don't you?"

I felt I was being made a figure of fun, and there are few things less supportable for a young man whose fragile dignity is not buttressed by accomplishments. My resentment was manifest in the brusque, silent way I finished binding him up and in the cold tone of, "There you are, Monsieur Treville. Now. Are there any other injuries? I'm a bit pressed for time."

"Oh, are you really?" Paul Treville smiled and raised an eyebrow. "You know, Doctor, it has always amused me how people in your profession dare to assume a superior attitude on the basis of nothing more than having avoided going into trade by mucking about for a few years with chemicals and pig and fetal pigs in brine. You seem to forget that you make your money by selling your services to anybody who has the money."

"The same could be said of many professionals."

"Yes, indeed. Whores, for instance."

I stared at him silently for a long moment. Then I repeated coldly, "Are there any other injuries? Dizziness? Nausea? Headache?"

"Only the odd scrape and bruise. But I am sure they will heal *in time*. The passage of time, it would appear, is your idea of a universal panacea. Have you ever considered sharing your fee with Father?"

Time?"

I was on the verge of replying in kind when Katya returned bearing a silver tray with teapot and cups. "Shall we take it on the terrace?"

Still stung by her brother's attitude, I considered saying that I had too busy a schedule to dawdle over tea, but two things prevented me. The first was the thought that my languid condition when Katya first found me in the park might make this sound ridiculous. The second was the fact that I was in love with Katya.

I did not realize this at the time, of course, but hindsight clarifies events by diminishing blurring details, and it is obvious to me now that I was already in the first stages of interest, affection, and excitement that would soon blossom into love. Nothing significant had yet passed between us—the look of her suntanned profile as I walked beside her in the park, the wisps of hair at her temples, the way her eyes had searched mine with a mixture of sincerity and amusement, the accidental touch of her hand and the feel of her waist when I had awkwardly attempted to help her down from the sulky—nothing of substance. But the particles from which love is built up are too fine to be subdivided and analyzed, just as the total of a love is too extensive to be perceived at one time and from one emotional coign of vantage. Beyond reason, beyond logic, and without knowing it, I was in love with her.

I expressed my love with admirable restraint: I told her I would be delighted to take tea on the terrace.

The brother rose and said that he would have to deny himself the pleasure and enlightenment of my company, as he really should go to his room and rest in hopes of inspiring Time to intercede on his behalf and cure him. He bowed to me with a slightly taunting deference as he said, "Above all, Doctor, avoid challenging my sister on any subject. If she fears she might lose a contest, she's not above bashing you with the teapot. As for you, Katya, let me warn you that the good doctor seems to be in rather contentious mood this afternoon. No doubt a little sensitive about his limitations as a healer of broken bodies. Well, I'm off. Do have a pleasant chat."

The terrace on which we sat, overlooking the dank, neglected garden, was dappled with sunlight through branches of the trees. And when the slight breezes sketched patterns of shadow over Katya's high-necked dress of white lawn trimmed with lace at the cuffs and throat, the light striking her body reflected up under her firm round chin and seemed to set her face aglow. I watched, absorbed, as she served the pale tisane with gestures as graceful as they were sure and nonchalant. That ease of habit, assumed, was a matter of breeding, just as was her brother's indolent superiority. I was again struck by the similarities, and blessed differences, between them.

"You live here alone . . . you and your brother?" I asked.

"There is a village woman who comes."

"But not, presumably, a gardener." I gestured towards the congested overgrowth before us.

She laughed. "That's not fair. I have toiled long hours in an effort to create an artless, even wi-

effect. And you don't seem to be impressed by it."

"Oh, but I am impressed. You have achieved an effect that I might term . . . uniquely unstudied."

"Thank you," she said, bowing her head in modest acceptance of the praise.

"And your parents?" I asked. "Where are they?"

"My mother died in childbirth . . . our birth."

"I'm sorry."

"You're not really, of course. How could you be? But I appreciate your conventional expression of sympathy."

"And your father?"

She looked out over the garden and sipped her tisane. Then she replaced the cup in its saucer and said airily, "Oh, Father's hale enough."

"He lives here with you?"

"We live with him, actually."

I was somewhat surprised. If there was a father living here, how did it come to pass that Katya was dispatched on a bicycle to fetch a doctor, all the way to Salies?

She smiled. "Well, to tell the truth, Father does not know about Paul's little accident yet. The quotidian problems of life are quite beyond Father's capacity to cope. No, let me say that more correctly. It's not his capacity to cope that is in question, it's his interest in coping. He devotes most of each day to his 'studies.'" She accented the word comically in what I took to be an imitation of her father's voice.

"Studies of what kind?"

"Goodness only knows. He pores over thick tomes and works at reducing them to scratchings in the little notebooks, and every now and then he says 'Hm-m-m' or 'Ah!' or 'I wonder?'" She laughed lightly. "I'm really not doing him justice. He's a dear old thing with a passion for medieval village life and customs that absorbs his time and mind, leaving him with only the most vague interest in the here and now. I sometimes think Father believes us to be living in an era that is posthistoric and rather insignificant."

"Is that where it comes from? Your interest in books and learning? Not many women concern themselves with such things as anatomy and Dr. Freud."

"I've never cared much what other women do. Another cup?"

"Please."

As she leaned forward to pour, she said quietly, as though it had been on her mind all along, “You don’t like my brother, do you?”

“What makes you think that?”

“Oh, there was a certain tension in the air when I returned with tea.”

“Yes. I suppose there was.”

“And? What do you think of him?”

“Shall I be frank?”

“That means you intend to say something unpleasant, doesn’t it?”

“I could not be both pleasant and honest.”

“My word!” she said with mock astonishment. “Now, that *is* frank.”

“I don’t mean to be offensive—”

“But?”

“But . . . well, don’t you find him a little supercilious and arrogant?”

“He’s just playful.”

“Perhaps. May I ask you, is your name really Treville?”

She looked up in surprise. “What an odd question!”

I began to explain that it wasn’t odd at all, considering her brother’s reaction to being called Monsieur Treville, but she interrupted me with, “Oh, I see. He led you to believe Treville wasn’t our name.”

“He did in fact.”

She smiled and shook her head. “Isn’t that just like him.”

“I don’t know. But I assume it is.”

“Just a bit of his playfulness. He enjoys having people on . . . keeping them off balance. You must forgive him.”

“Must I?”

“I was rather hoping you two might hit it off. He knows no one here.”

“I’m afraid the possibility of our hitting it off is rather distant.”

~~“Too bad. The poor fellow has a quick, intelligent mind and nothing to exercise it on in the forgotten corner of the world. He’s bored to distraction.”~~

“Why doesn’t he go elsewhere?”

“He is not free to.”

The tone in which she said this prohibited me from pursuing the reasons he was not free, so I asked instead, “Why doesn’t he occupy himself with reading and study, as you do?”

“Other people’s ideas bore him. Shall we walk in the garden?”

So blatant was this change of subject that I had to smile. “Won’t we need a native boy to cut a trail for us?”

She laughed as she walked ahead of me. “No, there’s a well-worn path through the jungle. I spend much of the day at the bottom of the garden. There’s a summerhouse—well, what’s left of a summerhouse—where I enjoy hiding away with a book. Now, it *is* true that if you stray off the path you may have to muster a search party to find you, but you’re safe enough if you stay close to me.”

“I can imagine nothing less safe than staying close to you, Mlle Treville, and nothing more desirable.”

She frowned. “That is unworthy of you, Dr. Montjean. Men don’t seem to realize that automatic boyish gallantry can be a terrible bore. A woman must either pretend that she did not hear it, or she must respond to it. And often, she’d rather do neither.”

I felt my ears redden. “I am sorry. You are quite right, of course. May I make a confession to you?”

“I don’t know. Will the confession be a burden? Will I be obligated to keep your secrets? Or to pretend at compassion?”

“No, it’s an altogether trivial confession.”

“Oh, then by all means confess to me. I’m quite comfortable with the altogether trivial.”

“It’s actually more an explanation than a confession. That ‘automatic, boyish gallantry’ you quite rightly objected to is a result of a terrible habit I’ve fallen into. When I’m alone and daydreaming, I practice at confecting clever lines of dialogue. But when I inflict them on people in real life, somehow the cleverness dissolves in my mouth, and only a stilted artificiality is left. I didn’t mean to blurt forward. I confess, however, to being maladroit. Can you forgive me?”

She turned to me and searched my eyes with hers. “What is your given name, Dr. Montjean?”

“Jean-Marc.”

“Jean-Marc Montjean. Sounds like a character in a nineteenth-century novel. No wonder you’re

stricken with romanticism.”

I shrugged. “Didn’t I hear your brother call you Katya?”

“Yes.”

“Katya? Russian diminutive for Catherine? But you’re not Russian, are you?”

“No. And my name isn’t Catherine. With brutal disregard for the delicate feelings of a young woman, and with no ear for poetry at all, my father baptized me Hortense. As soon as I realized that one could do such things, I changed my name to Katya.”

“Changed your name? By legal process?”

“No. By simple force of will. I merely refused to respond to the name Hortense, and I did nothing was bade unless I was called Katya.”

“And you accuse *me* of being a romantic?”

“It wasn’t an accusation. It was simply a description.”

“What a strong-minded child you must have been to force everyone to call you by a new name.”

“‘Little brat’ might be closer to the mark.” She turned and continued down the narrow path.

As the overgrowth pressed in on us, the acrid smell of damp weeds rose from the cold earth and I felt a sudden ripple of chill over my skin. “Well, well. The ghost must be nearby,” I said, seeking to pass off my discomfort with a joke.

She stopped and turned to me, her expression quite serious. “Ghost? I’ve never thought of it as a *ghost*.”

“Well . . . what haunts this place then, if not a ghost?”

“A *spirit*. I’m sure she’d rather be called a spirit than a ghost.”

“It’s a woman then, the gho—spirit?”

“Yes. A girl, actually. Ghost indeed! What a grim idea!”

“Perhaps, but there’s something inevitably grim about ghosts. Being grim is their *métier*.”

“That may be true of ghosts, but it is not true of spirits, which are an altogether higher order beings. And that’s all I want to hear about the matter. Well, we have arrived. What do you think of my private library?”

I surveyed the ruin of what had once been a charming little summerhouse. “Ah . . . Oh, it’s . . . magnificent. Magnificent! Perhaps a touch of paint would not be inappropriate. And I don’t think the

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