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"THE ORDERLY"

By Guy de Maupassant

When Col. de Limousin returned from the funeral of his beautiful young wife, who, for a reason he did not know, had committed suicide in her bath, he was startled to find that the mail had brought him a letter from her.

He tore open the envelope with fingers that trembled and hungrily read her last message to him-- her confession of her weakness and her infidelity.

"My dear husband," she wrote. "In this, my confession to you, I must go back to the time when you visited your country home to hunt with some friends. Because I was the daughter of a friend of yours, you made happy my mother's last hours by promising to take care of me.

"After her death you took me to your home in the city, and gave me a father's care. The years until I became twenty-one flew by happily and all too quickly. Then I told you that I was able to take care of myself; that I need no longer impose upon your kindness and generosity. You replied that I could thank you by being your wife. Out of gratitude, I consented.

"Two years passed. You surrounded me with goddness and affection, and I loved you. But when another came into my life I found that I had never known love. Our love was so great it seemed that the whole world must have seen it, but you, with your great trust in me, saw nothing.

"Then, one night I stole through the garden, swam the lake to the little island, and met him. Do not try to find him, and do not hate him. It was not his fault; neither was it mine. Love was stronger than us.

"There were other secret meetings, but once, when I had just landed at the island, I saw your orderly, Phillipe, watching us. I returned home, expecting a catastrophe. Instead, he offered his services to carry letters.

"Finally deception and my fatal love made me so unhappy that I implored you to take me far away. I decided to break with him and wrote him accordingly, but when I went to bid him a last good-bye, he was not there, but Phillipe was!

"Then I realized that I had put myself in Phillipe's power, for he told me that he loved me, too, and if I repulsed him he would tell you all. A cowardly fear clutched me and there seems but one way out.

"Living, you would have hated me; dead, may you forgive and let live in your memory,

"Jeanne."

The Colonel finished the letter and sent for his orderly.

"Tell me the name of my wife's lover," he demanded.

The man hesitated.

"Quickly, his name!"

A second time the orderly hesitated, and was lost. A bullet pierced his heart!

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