

My Twenty-Five Days

Guy de Maupassant

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

My Twenty-five Days.

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

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

"CHATEL-GUYON, July 15th.

"At the first glance it is not lively, this country. However, I am going to spend twenty-five days here, to have my liver and stomach treated, and to get thin. The twenty-five days of any one taking the baths are very like the twenty-eight days of the reserves; they are all devoted to fatigue duty, severe fatigue duty. To-day I have done nothing as yet; I have been getting settled. I have made the acquaintance of the locality and of the doctor. Chatel-Guyon consists of a stream in which flows yellow water, in the midst of several hillocks on which are a casino, some houses, and some stone crosses. On the bank of the stream, at the end of the valley, may be seen a square building surrounded by a little garden; this is the bathing establishment. Sad people wander around this building--the invalids. A great silence reigns in the walks shaded by trees, for this is not a pleasure resort, but a true health resort; one takes care of one's health as a business, and one gets well, so it seems.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"July 18th.--Nothing new.

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

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

"The air is good to inhale in these valleys. And, if it is very warm, the dust bears with it a light odor of vanilla and of the stable, for so many cows pass over these routes that they leave reminders everywhere. And this odor is a perfume, when it would be a stench if it came from other animals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"In the first place, they assume she must be your wife, for how could it be supposed that you would have an unattractive sweetheart? A true woman may be ungraceful; but then, her ugliness implies a thousand disagreeable things for you. One supposes you must be a notary or a magistrate, as these two professions have a monopoly of grotesque and well-dowered spouses. Now, is this not distressing to a man? And then, it seems to proclaim to the public that you have the odious courage, and are even under a legal obligation, to caress that

ridiculous face and that ill- shaped body, and that you will, without doubt, be shameless enough to make a mother of this by no means desirable being--which is the very height of the ridiculous.

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

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

"Supposing we bathe?"

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

"Bah! we are in the wilderness.'

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

"July 26th.--Some persons seem to look with shocked and disapproving eyes at my rapid intimacy with the two fair widows. There are some people, then, who imagine that life consists in being bored. Everything that appears to be amusing becomes immediately a breach of good breeding or morality. For them duty has inflexible and mortally tedious rules.

"I would draw their attention, with all respect, to the fact that duty is not the same for Mormons, Arabs Zulus, Turks, Englishmen, and Frenchmen, and that there are very virtuous people among all these nations.

"I will cite a single example. As regards women, duty begins in England at nine years of age; in France at fifteen. As for me, I take a little of each people's notion of duty, and of the whole I make a result comparable to the morality of good King Solomon.

"July 27th.--Good news. I have lost 620 grams in weight. Excellent, this water of Chatel-Guyon! I am taking the widows to dine at Riom. A sad town whose anagram constitutes it an objectionable neighbor to healing springs: Riom, Mori.

"July 28th.--Hello, how's this! My two widows have been visited by two gentlemen who came to look for them. Two widowers, without doubt. They are leaving this evening. They

have written to me on fancy notepaper.

"July 29th.--Alone! Long excursion on foot to the extinct crater of Nachere. Splendid view.

"July 30th.--Nothing. I am taking the treatment.

"July 31st.--Ditto. Ditto. This pretty country is full of polluted streams. I am drawing the notice of the municipality to the abominable sewer which poisons the road in front of the hotel. All the kitchen refuse of the establishment is thrown into it. This is a good way to breed cholera.

"August 1st.--Nothing. The treatment.

"August 2d.--Admirable walk to Chateauneuf, a place of sojourn for rheumatic patients, where everybody is lame. Nothing can be queerer than this population of cripples!

"August 3d.--Nothing. The treatment.

"August 4th.--Ditto. Ditto.

"August 5th.--Ditto. Ditto.

"August 6th.--Despair! I have just weighed myself. I have gained 310 grams. But then?

"August 7th.--Drove sixty-six kilometres in a carriage on the mountain. I will not mention the name of the country through respect for its women.

"This excursion had been pointed out to me as a beautiful one, and one that was rarely made. After four hours on the road, I arrived at a rather pretty village on the banks of a river in the midst of an admirable wood of walnut trees. I had not yet seen a forest of walnut trees of such dimensions in Auvergne. It constitutes, moreover, all the wealth of the district, for it is planted on the village common. This common was formerly only a hillside covered with brushwood. The authorities had tried in vain to get it cultivated. There was scarcely enough pasture on it to feed a few sheep.

"To-day it is a superb wood, thanks to the women, and it has a curious name: it is called the Sins of the Cure.

"Now I must say that the women of the mountain districts have the reputation of being light, lighter than in the plain. A bachelor who meets them owes them at least a kiss; and if he does not take more he is only a blockhead. If we consider this fairly, this way of looking at the matter is the only one that is logical and reasonable. As woman, whether she be of the town or the country, has her natural mission to please man, man should always show her that she pleases him. If he abstains from every sort of demonstration, this means that he considers her ugly; it is almost an insult to her. If I were a woman, I would not receive, a second time, a man who failed to show me respect at our first meeting, for I would consider that he had failed in appreciation of my beauty, my charm, and my feminine qualities.

"So the bachelors of the village X often proved to the women of the district that they found

them to their taste, and, as the cure was unable to prevent these demonstrations, as gallant as they were natural, he resolved to utilize them for the benefit of the general prosperity. So he imposed as a penance on every woman who had gone wrong that she should plant a walnut tree on the common. And every night lanterns were seen moving about like will-o'-the-wisps on the hillock, for the erring ones scarcely like to perform their penance in broad daylight.

"In two years there was no longer any room on the lands belonging to the village, and to-day they calculate that there are more than three thousand trees around the belfry which rings out the services amid their foliage. These are the Sins of the Cure.

"Since we have been seeking for so many ways of rewooding France, the Administration of Forests might surely enter into some arrangement with the clergy to employ a method so simple as that employed by this humble cure.

"August 7th.--Treatment.

"August 8th.--I am packing up my trunks and saying good-by to the charming little district so calm and silent, to the green mountain, to the quiet valleys, to the deserted Casino, from which you can see, almost veiled by its light, bluish mist, the immense plain of the Limagne.

"I shall leave to-morrow."

Here the manuscript stopped. I will add nothing to it, my impressions of the country not having been exactly the same as those of my predecessor. For I did not find the two widows!