

THE WOODSTOCK DISPATCH

JUNE 23, 1897.

LUCIE.

Translated From the French of Gilbert Mareuil.

"Yes, it is true," said Marciennes to us the other day. "I have, in a way, caused the death of a woman; at least I was the instrument which led to her death, and I have suffered an undying remorse for it ever since. Listen and I will tell you all about it."

And this is the story as he told it:

You remember the charming and pretty Lucie Delorme, who was engaged to my old friend, Claude Chevrier? She was the bravest and best girl that ever lived, and proved that all actresses are not frivolous, but have true hearts like other women, for she knew how to die for her love, when the time came. Claude is the son of a rich northern manufacturer. He came to Paris 25 years ago, with a long bank account, and as he was bent on having a good time, went a great deal to the theatres. It was during the production of "Turlutaine" that he first met Lucie, who was playing an insignificant role in the piece, but putting so much of her captivating personality, animation and spirit into it, that Claude was fascinated with her. Before long all Paris knew that he and Lucie, who was not 20 years old, had become the very best of friends. Everyone praised her. All the paper united in declaring her an artiste of the first class, one even saying she had a great future before her.

About the time I was called away from Paris on business, and remained away for some time, for almost a year, in fact, and I did not keep in touch with what was happening on the boulevards. But having known Claude long and well, and his love of liberty being one of his strongest characteristics, I was pretty sure that his attachment for Lucie would not go far, but would end as a friendship pure and simple. Imagine my surprise upon returning, to learn that they were engaged to be married. I called on Claude, but was told that he had gone to see his family for a few days. I left my card and said I would come again.

The next day he came to see me.

I found him changed; he seemed to have lost his good humor. I asked him what was the matter, and without preamble he replied: "Marciennes, you must render me a good service; you must help me break my engagement with Lucie."

"Ah! then you no longer love her?"

"Of course it would be foolish to say that I never did love her. She is gentle, amiable and gay. I loved her as one loves a bird that sings and flutters. I adore her smile, her grace, her caprice, but, as you know, that can't last forever. Some months ago my father told me I must give up my idle life here and come home, for he wanted me to succeed him in directing his factory. I have spent, in three years, 90,000 francs, which he seems to think too much. I asked for a little delay and now the time is up. If I do not go my father will never give me another sou, and I am making absolutely no money myself. I told Lucie I had to leave Paris for a few days, but that I would come back as soon as possible, which I really meant to do, for I thought I could tell my father about her and he would allow us to marry."

"And you learned something to the contrary?"

"Precisely. My cousin, whom I have not seen since we were children, has become a very pretty young lady, and since the death of her parents has lived with my father. My mother has talked much of me to her and tried to make her regard me as her future husband. And so they want me to give up my Paris life, become a business man and marry my cousin, who, I must add, has inherited a fortune of 600,000 francs."

"That is not to be disdained."

"I should think not."

"Why don't you tell Lucie that your father insists that your engagement be broken?"

"Oh, you don't know her. She expects to marry me, and there would be a distressing scene, which, as you know, I can't stand. No, she does not know that I am here, and it is you, Marciennes, who must tell her the truth. I was looking for some one to do it, and no one can do it better than you."

"You wish it told exactly as you have told it to me?"

"Not exactly. I know Lucie, and I also know the best way of taking leave of her. You see, she is devoted to me, and if she believes that my whole future depends on obeying my father, who desires our engagement broken, she would sacrifice herself willingly."

"You are smiling."

"No; just thinking—my plan is excellent—listen. Tell her that I have refused to give her up, that I have quarrelled with my father on her account, and am coming back penniless to Paris."

"Why on earth am I to say that?"

"Don't you see? Lucie will cry with a beautiful gesture: 'No; I will not let him

make the sacrifice for me!' Why, I can hear her say it. And so she will break the chain herself."

"Very well, I will do it; but it is a villainous commission and more than one friend has a right to ask for another."

The next day I called on Lucie Delorme. I found her little changed—still possessing that animation and sweetness which I had always found so attractive. As soon as I spoke of Claude her face lit up with a smile.

"You are a friend of his," said she, "which makes you my friend, too; for everything which touches him is interesting to me. I am so happy in the thought of sharing his life, hopes, joys and sorrows." Suddenly all the gaiety left her face. "He is coming back?" she asked.

"Certainly."

"I am so afraid his family may object to his marrying me, because I am an actress. Only today a man came here, and in the pleasure of speaking of Claude I had forgotten it. He was sent, he said, by Claude's father and wanted me to say I would release Claude because he had no more money—as if I loved him for his money! If you could have seen how quickly I showed him the door. If Claude knew of it he would be so angry. And the miserable creature, just as he went off, he said that Claude was going to marry some one else."

"That is what his family want him to do. Has he never spoken to you about it?"

"Never. When he comes back I shall ask him to tell me what it all means."

"What did you tell the messenger who came today?"

"That Claude's father could keep his money; that I loved Claude for himself and not for his fortune."

And for a quarter of an hour she talked volubly about him, of his merits and of his life, with a pleasure that showed how sincere her love was. I let her go on because I had not the courage to stop her; to show her the fragility of her joy, the destruction of her hopes. I thought for a moment of leaving undone what I had come to do and of departing as I had come, in friendship. But I remembered that I had given my promise and that Claude was determined to break with her.

"Yes," said I, finally, "Claude is coming back, but, to tell the truth, his family do wish him to break his engagement with you. What you heard is true; it is a question of another marriage, and all his future depends on it. If he comes back to Paris his father will disown him, will never see him again."

Lucie had risen.

"Oh, how cruel you are!" she said.

"Have no fear," said I, "Claude intends to defy his father. They have already quarrelled violently and Claude has sworn he will never give you up."

"And the rupture with his family?"

"Well, that will mean poverty for Claude." She burst into tears, and, though I tried to console her, I knew it was useless, and would have given I don't know what to have found myself in the street. Fortunately, Lucie wanted to be alone.

"Monsieur," she said, "I think I have lost my head, for I do not know what to say or what to do. I cannot decide what is best on the instant; will you come tomorrow? I want you to help me."

So the next day I returned and found her pale and sad, with traces of tears about her eyes.

"I have decided," she began, firmly, "that I cannot allow Claude to suffer through me."

"But," I interrupted, "if he wants to come back, what can you do?"

"I will prevent his coming."

"How?"

"By telling him not to come."

"Do you think that will stop him?"

"Yes, if I add that I no longer love him."

"Will you do that?"

"Oh! can't you see that I have broken my own heart in coming to this decision? Claude has told his father that he will not give me up, because we love one another. Well, I shall tell him that I no longer love him. This is simple, is it not?"

Surely it was not simple. While she was speaking her breast heaved, her voice trembled and her words came from pale, drawn lips.

"Of course," she continued, "if you see him, you must not tell the truth. You are my accomplice."

She explained that she had written to him saying that their marriage was an impossibility, that her future as an actress required that she should be free, and that she had

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profited by his absence to come to the decision. Claude had been right, she had sacrificed herself. In order to assure his not returning, she told him that she had signed a contract for an engagement in St. Petersburg, and was about to leave Paris. She had ceased weeping and had the light of a solemn joy in her eyes at the thought of having secured Claude's future welfare.

"You see," said Claude to me when I had told him the result of the interviews, "she will not know I am in Paris, and when I go home I will find her letter. Of course, I feel sorry for her, but don't you think we were rather ill suited to each other?"

"That does not make it any easier for Lucie."

"Oh, well! she will forget it in her theatrical success."

The next day I learned a terrible thing: That Lucie Delorme had killed herself with an overdose of morphine. The following letter, addressed to Claude, was found in her room:

"My Dear Claude,—It was not true. I am not going to Russia. I love you. I was told that your future depended on our separation, and so wrote that I did not love you. But my resolution was greater than my strength. I could not bear to think of your believing that I had ceased to love you. Oh! Claude, I cannot live without you! Do not feel badly when you know that I am dead, for I go gladly to make you happy and to tell you that I love you. Good-bye.—Lucie."

When Claude Chevrier came to see me a few days after this tragedy I refused to receive him. And bitterly I repented my share in the event, you may imagine, but it was not as bitter as my hatred for him.

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