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***MADemoiselle  
MISS, AND  
OTHER STORIES***

**Henry Harland**

# **Mademoiselle Miss, and Other Stories**

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# MADemoiselle Miss

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*“Mais que diable allait-elle faire en cette galère?”*

**P**aris is the gloomiest town in Christendom today,—though it is a lovely day in April, and the breeze is full of softness, and the streets are gay with people,—and the Latin Quarter is quite the dullest bit of Paris: Mademoiselle Miss left last night for England.

We all know what it is like when a person who has been an absorbing interest in our lives suddenly goes away: how, apart from the immediate pang of the separation and the after-pain of more or less consciously missing the fugitive, there is a wide, complex, dim underworld of emotion, that may be compared to the thorough-bass of a sad tune, and seems in some sort to relate itself to the whole exterior universe. The sun rises as usual, but the sunlight is not the same. Other folk, apparently unconcerned, pursue the accustomed tenor of their way; but we are vaguely surprised that this should be the case,—surprised, and grieved, and a little resentful. We can't realise without an effort how completely exempt they are from the loss that has befallen us; and we feel obscurely that their air of indifference is either sheer braggadocio, or a symptom of moral insensibility. The truth of the matter is, of course, that our departing friend has taken with him not his particular body and baggage only, but an element from the earth and the sky. and a fibre from ourselves. Everything is subtly, incommunicably altered. We wake up to a changed horizon: and our distress is none the less keen because the

changeling bears a formal resemblance to the vanished original.

So! Mademoiselle Miss has gone to England; and to-day it is anew and an unfamiliar and a most dismal Paris that confronts the little band of worshippers she has left behind her. Indeed, it was already a new Paris that the half dozen of us who had assembled at St. Lazare to see her off, emerged into from the station last night, after her train had rolled away. We found a corner seat for her in a third-class compartment reserved for dames seules; and while some of us attended to the registering of her box, others packed her light luggage into the rack above her head; and this man had brought a bunch of violets, and that a book for her to read; and Jean contributed a bottle of claret, and Jacques a napkin full of sandwiches: and taken for all in all, we were the forlornest little party you can easily conceive of, despite our spasmodic attempts at merriment. We grouped ourselves round the window of her carriage,—stopping the way thereby, though not with malice aforethought, for such other solitary ladies as might wish to enter,—whilst Miss smiled down upon us from eyes that were perilously bright; and we sought to defy the ache that was in our hearts, by firing off brisk little questions and injunctions, or abortive little jests.

“Sure you’ve got your ticket all right?”

“You must make a rush for a berth directly you reach Dieppe.”

“Mind you write the moment you arrive.”

“Oh, we’ll get news of her through Don Antonio.”—This was meant as facetious, and we all laughed, though rather

feebly: Don Antonio being an aged Italian model whom Miss had painted a good deal, and between whom and herself there was humorously supposed to have taken place a desperate flirtation.

We were constantly lapsing into silence, however; and for the last five minutes we scarcely spoke at all. We simply waited there, moving uneasily among ourselves, and gazed up at her. She kept on smiling at us; but it was a rueful smile, and we could easily see that the tears weren't far behind it. Then suddenly a bell rang; the officials shouted "*En voiture;*" there was a volley of good-byes, a confusion of handshaking; the engine shrieked; her arm was drawn in through the window; the train moved; and Miss was gone.

We lingered for a moment on the platform, looking stupidly after the red lamp at the end of the last carriage, as it waned swiftly smaller and fainter in the distance.

Presently someone pulled himself together sufficiently to say, "Well, come on."

And we made our way out of the station into a Paris that was blank and strange. Aubémont (Adolphe) was frankly holding his pocket-handkerchief to his eyes; but we Anglo-Saxons chid and chaffed him till he put it out of sight.

"By Christopher! when I think of the way we treated that girl in the beginning!" cried Chalks, an American, whose lay-name is Charles K. Smith, but he's called Chalks by all his English-speaking fellow-craftsmen.

Whereat—"Oh, shut up!" came in chorus from the rest of us. We didn't care to be reminded of those old days.

Then little Schaas-Keym, the Dutchman, proposed that we should finish the evening, and court oblivion, at the

Galurin Cassé: and we adopted his suggestion, and drank beer, and smoked, and chattered, and ate cold beef and pickles, till the place was closed, at 2 a. m., when we returned to the Quarter, six in a single cab.

Thus we managed to wear out last night with sufficient comfort. We gave ourselves no time, no chance, to think. We stood together, and drowned our sorrow in the noise we made. And then, by the time we parted, we were sleepy, so that we could go straight to our beds and forget everything.

But—this morning!

It is proverbially on the next morning that a man's wound begins to hurt. For the others, since I've seen none of them, I can speak only by inference: in the morning our little *cénacle* scatters to the four corners of the town, not to be reunited till the hour of dinner; but what reason is there to doubt that the day will have treated them very much as it has treated me? And oh, the weary, dreary, bright spring day it is! The Luxembourg is fragrant with budding trees, and vocal with half a thousand romping children; the Boule-Miche is at its liveliest, with a ceaseless ebb and flow of laughing young men and women; the *terrasse* of the Vachette is a mass of gleaming top-hats and flaunting feminine bonnets; and the sky overhead is one smooth blue vault, and the sun is everywhere, a fume of gold: but the sparkle and the joyousness of it all are gone. Turn where I will, I find the same awful sense of emptiness. The streets are deserted, in spite of the crowds: I can hear my solitary footsteps echo gruesomely through them. Paris is like Pompeii.

After luncheon, thinking to obtain relief by fleeing the Quarter (where every blessed stick and stone has its bitter-sweet association with her), I crossed the river, mixed with the throng in the Boulevard, sat for a while at the Café de la Paix. But things were no whit better. The sun shone with the same cheerless brilliancy; the air touched one with the same light, uncomfoting caress; the laughter of the wayfarers had the same hollow ring. A blight had fallen upon man and nature. I came back to the Rue Racine, and its ghosts of her.

That exclamation of Smith's last night, to which we all cried taboo, really hit one of the salient points of the position: when I think of the way we treated her in the beginning! Extenuating circumstances might be pleaded for us, no doubt. It was only natural that we should have treated her so, if tradition and convention can make a thing natural—if it is natural that men should glare at a woman in a smoking-carriage, for example. And besides, she has had her revenge. For that matter, she was never conscious of our offences; but she has had her revenge, if to see us one by one prostrate ourselves at her feet, humble adorers, eager servitors,—if that may constitute revenge. And then, we are told, though our sins be as red as scarlet, if we do truly repent, they shall be washed as white as snow: and we have repented, goodness knows how truly. All the same, forgiveness without forgetfulness being but the guinea-stamp without the gold, I wish I could forget the way we treated her in the beginning.

One is judged by the company one keeps; and she kept—ours. It is now some nine months ago that she appeared in



it, at the Hôtel de l'.céan et de Shakespere, in the Rue Racine. We were just hasty enough, unobservant enough, blunt enough of perception, to judge her accordingly,—to take for granted, in a casual, matter-of-course fashion, that she would be a vessel of like clay to our own.

The entrance to the Hôtel de l'.céan et de Shakespere, a narrow, dark, ambiguous-looking entrance, is flanked by two tin signs. That at the right hand reads, "*Chambres ci Cabinets Meublés,*" that at the left, "*Pension de Famille.*" Call it a *Pension de Famille*, if you will: at the epoch when Mademoiselle Miss arrived among us, we were, to put it squarely, the most disreputable family in Europe.

Our proprietress, Madame Bourdon, was a gelatinous old person from Toulouse, with a pair of hazy blue eyes, a mottled complexion, a worldly-wise smile, an indulgent heart, and an extremely nasal accent. I speak of her as old; but she wasn't old enough to know better, apparently. At any rate she had a certain unbeneficed *abbé* perpetually hanging to her apron-strings, and she kept him to dinner half a dozen evenings in the week. Of her boarders all the men were students, all the women *étudiantes*,—which, being interpreted, I suppose means students too. There were Mesdames Germaine, Fifine, Olga, Yvonne, Zélie, and Lucile,—

"*Whose names are six sweet symphonies,*"—and perhaps it was because Lucile was her niece that Madame had dubbed her shop a *pension de famille*. You paid so much for your room and service, and then you could take table d'hôte or not, as you elected. Most of us took it, because it was only fifty francs a month, *vin compris*. Our ladies dined

abroad a good deal, being inconstant quantities, according to the custom of their sex; but the men were almost always present in full number. We counted seven: Chalks, Schaas-Keym, Aubêmont, Jeanselme, Campbell, Norton, and myself. We formed a sort of close corporation, based upon a community of tastes, interests, and circumstances. We were all “arts,”—except Jeanselme, who was a “mines,” with a disordered tendency to break out in verse: we were all ridiculously poor, and we were all fond of bohemianising up and down the face of Paris.

One evening in September of last year, on entering our *salle-à-manger*, we beheld a stranger, an addition to our ranks; and Madame, with a comprehensive gesture, introduced her to us in these terms: “*Une nouvelle, une anglaise, Mees,...*” Then she made awful hash of rather a long-winded English name: and we were content to accept the newcomer simply as Miss. The concierge and the servants, though, (to anticipate a little), treated Miss as a *petit-nom*, like Jane or Susan, and prefixed the title Mademoiselle. The pleonasm seemed a happy one, and we took it up: Mademoiselle Miss. On her visiting-card the legend ran, “Miss Edith Thorowether.” It was probably as well, on the whole, that French lips should not too frequently have tackled that.

Now if she had been plain or elderly or constrained in her bearing or ill-natured-looking, no doubt we should have felt at once the difference between her and ourselves, and understood her presence with us as merely the outward and visible sign of some inward and spiritual blunder. But, as it happened, she was young and distinctly pretty; and she

appeared to be entirely at her ease; and she smiled graciously in acknowledgment of the somewhat cursory nods with which we favoured her. We hadn't the wit or the intuitions to recognise her ease for the ease of innocence; and our hotel was *such* a risky box; and ladies of English or American origin were no especial novelty in the Quarter; and we didn't stop to examine this one critically, or to consider; and so things fell out in a way we now find disagreeable to remember. It was Saul who had strayed by hazard into the midst of our prophetic councils; and we mistook him for one of our own prophetic caste, and proceeded to demean and express ourselves in our usual prophetic manner. Fortunately, Saul's knowledge of our prophetic tongue was limited. We spoke the slang of the Boulevards; whilst the little French that Mademoiselle Miss was mistress of she had learned from Ollendorf and Corinne.

The situation was partially cleared up, I forget how long afterwards, by our discovering in her room, whither she had bidden us for an evening's entertainment, an ancient copy of a certain Handbook to Paris,—“the badge of all our tribe,” as the tourist called it. On opening to its list of hotels (which somebody did by chance), we found the following note, with a pencil-mark against it: “Hotel de l'.céan et de Shakespeare, Rue Racine, chiefly frequented by visitors pursuing art-studies: well spoken-of and inexpensive.” That explained it. Mademoiselle Miss had trusted to a guide that was ten years behind the times: so the date on the title-page attested. And in ten years how had the Hôtel de l'.céan et de Shake-spere fallen from its respectable estate!—unless, ten years ago, the editor of that most exemplary handbook