

Am I Insane?

By Guy De Maupassant

Am I insane or jealous? I know not which, but I suffer horribly. I committed a crime it is true, but is not insane jealousy, betrayed love, and the terrible pain I endure enough to make anyone commit a crime, without actually being a criminal?

I have loved this woman to madness—and yet, is it true? Did I love her? No, no! She owned me body and soul, I was her plaything, she ruled me by her smile, her look, the divine form of her body. It was all those things that I loved, but the woman contained in that body, I despise her; hate her. I always have hated her, for she is but an impure, perfidious creature, in whom there was no soul; even less than that, she is but a mass of soft flesh in which dwells infamy!

The first few months of our union were deliciously strange. Her eyes were three different colors. No, I am not insane, I swear they were. They were gray at noon, shaded green at twilight, and blue at sunrise. In moments of love they were blue; the pupils dilated and nervous. Her lips trembled and often the tip of her pink tongue could be seen, as that of a reptile ready to hiss. When she raised her heavy lids and I saw that ardent look, I shuddered, not only for the unceasing desire to possess her, but for the desire to kill this beast.

When she walked across the room each step resounded in my heart. When she disrobed and emerged infamous but radiant from the white mass of linen and lace, a sudden weakness seized me, my limbs gave way beneath me, and my chest heaved; I was faint, coward that I was!

Each morning when she awakened I waited for that first look, my heart filled with rage, hatred, and disdain for this beast whose slave I was; but when she fixed those limpid blue eyes on me, that languishing look showing traces of lassitude, it was like a burning, unquenchable fire within me, inciting me to passion.

When she opened her eyes that day I saw a dull, indifferent look; a look devoid of desire, and I knew then she was tired of me. I saw it, knew it, felt it right away that it was all over, and each hour and minute proved to me that I was right. When I beckoned her with my arms and lips she shrank from me.

“Leave me alone,” she said. “You are horrid!”

Then I became suspicious, insanely jealous; but I am not insane, no indeed! I watched her slyly; not that she had betrayed me, but she was so cold that I knew another would soon take my place.

At times she would say:

“Men disgust me!” Alas! It was too true.

Then I became jealous of her indifference, of her thoughts, which I knew to be impure, and when she awakened sometimes with that same look of lassitude I suffocated with anger, and an irresistible desire to choke her and make her confess the shameful secrets of her heart took hold of me.

Am I insane? No.

One night I saw that she was happy. I felt, in fact I was convinced, that a new passion ruled her. As of old, her eyes shone, she was feverish and her whole self fluttered with love.

I feigned ignorance, but I watched her closely. I discovered nothing, however. I waited a week, a month, almost a year. She was radiantly, ideally happy; as if soothed by some ephemeral caress.

At last I guessed. No, I am not insane, I swear I am not. How can I explain this inconceivable, horrible thing? How can I make myself understood? This is how I guessed.

She came in one night from a long ride on horseback and sank exhausted in a seat facing me. An unnatural flush tinted her cheeks and her eyes—those eyes that I knew so well—had such a look in them. I was not mistaken, I had seen her look like that; she loved! But whom? What? I almost lost my head, and so as not to look at her I turned to the window. A valet was leading her horse to the stable and she stood and watched him disappear; then she fell asleep almost immediately. I thought and thought all night. My mind wandered through mysteries too deep to conceive. Who can fathom the perversity and strange caprices of a sensual woman?

Every morning she rode madly through hills and dales and each time she came back languid; exhausted. At last I understood. It was of the horse I was jealous—of the wind which caressed her face, of the drooping leaves and of the dewdrops, of the saddle which carried her! It was all those things which made her so happy and brought her back to me satiated; exhausted! I resolved to be revenged. I became very attentive. Every time she came back from her ride I helped her down and the horse made a vicious rush at me. She would pat him on the neck, kiss his quivering nostrils, without even wiping her lips. I watched my chance.

One morning I got up before dawn and went to the path in the woods she loved so well. I carried a rope with me, and my pistols were hidden in my breast as if I were going to fight a duel. I drew the rope across the path, tying it to a tree on each side, and hid myself in the grass. Presently I heard her horse's hoofs, then I saw her coming at a furious pace; her cheeks flushed, an insane look in her eyes. She seemed enraptured; transported into another sphere.

As the animal approached the rope, he struck it with his forefeet and fell. Before she had struck the ground I caught her in my arms and helped her to her feet. I then approached the horse, put my pistol close to his ear, and shot him—as I would a man.

She turned on me and dealt me two terrific blows across the face with her riding whip which felled me, and as she rushed at me again, I shot her!

Tell me, am I insane?