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## Select Tale.

From Blackwood's Magazine.  
**THE WIFE'S SECRET.**

Within two hours of the birth of Paul Vedot, his mother died; and as her husband had departed this life some six months previously, little Paul was left an orphan almost as soon as he well could be; and but for his grandame Truquet, manufacturer and vender of sabots in the ancient town of Amiens, in the department of the Somme, France, the little fellow must have been conveyed to the basket of the *enfants-trouvés*, and consigned to the pious care of the good nuns attached to that anti-Malthusian establishment. Kind Dame Truquet having wrapped her tiny grandson carefully up in her lap, carried him safely home, and by dint of careful nursing, unstinted scolding, and stripes not a few, contrived to bring him creditably up to young man's estate, with only one mishap of any consequence. This occurred one day when Paul was about three years old. Madame Truquet kept a stall in the market place on Saturday, for the more ready disposal of her wares, and one or two likely-looking customers coming up as she was dandling Paul affectionately in her arms, she too hastily popped him down upon a lofty and loose heap of sabots just deposited on the narrow stall, which, unable to support the sudden and straggling weight, slid over, carrying the child with it, who fell heavily upon the pavement, and broke his right leg. This unfortunate tumble resulted in permanent lameness, the wounded limb when cured being about two inches shorter than his fellow—a calamity not without its compensating benefit, inasmuch as it rendered Paul forever ineligible as a candidate for military glory; in other words, deprived him of the honor of contributing a unit to the conscription lists.

Nothing otherwise especially noteworthy is especially recorded of Paul's boyhood. He very early mastered the art and mystery of the sabot manufacturing, and at his own request, was apprenticed to a *cordonnier*, so that he might thereafter be able to combine the twin trades of wood and leather shoe-making. Paul finished his time at twenty, and but for a mishap which befel him at that susceptible age, he would at once have set out with a light heart, like other young men of his class, for a two or three years' tour thro' France, to acquire experience in his craft, and such general knowledge of the ways of the world as would qualify him to settle down quietly and comfortably at Amiens, with 'Truquet and Verdout, boot, shoe and sabot manufacturers,' over the shop-door. This first stumble, as it may be called, upon the threshold of life, was caused by the bewitching black eyes of Lucille Borlase, a young shoe-binder employed by his master, at whose dwelling poor Paul used frequently to call for the work which had been given out to the mischievous damsel, and he was only too happy, when occasionally asked to sit down and wait awhile till it was finished. At those times, as Paul subsequently confessed to his indignant grandmother, he felt Lucille's merry glance shoot through and through his heart and back again, just as her bright needle pierced in and out of the less tender binding she was sewing on. This resolution, made on the day his apprenticeship expired, would hardly, perhaps, then have bubbled over his lips, but for the great additional fervency imparted to his passion by the numerous wine-cups he had been draining on taking final leave of his *camarades de boutique*.

Lucille Borlase! exclaimed Madame Truquet, with explosive wrath, why, Paul, you must have lost your senses! The Borlases have been children of the devil time out of mind. The men, sons, idlers, spend-thrifts; the women, two-faced, dissembling furies, that would deceive Satan himself, much more a poor gawby like you. 'Come, come,' broke in Paul, with great heat, 'not such a gawby as you may suppose, *bonne mere*. Besides, a girl isn't always a saint for having been brought up in a convent; as for Lucille, *parbleu!* she is simplicity and candor itself. One can see it in her looks. O—h!'

The long-drawn sigh with which Paul concluded, completely overset the old lady's patience—never too steadily balanced—and she replied to it in a way not uncommon with her when very angry, by slaying a sabot she was varnishing at the delinquent's head, accompanied by a volley of epithets not necessary to repeat.—Frequent practice enabled her grandson to easily avoid the dangerous missile; and her words went equally astray of their mark after a few moments, as Paul hastened along towards the slandered damsel's residence, and, arrived there, poured forth, with all the energy and distinctness swift speed and ardent affection permitted, the hopes, tribulations, wishes, anxieties, excited in his bosom by the too charming Lucille.

'You do not know, then,' replied that much amused baggage, 'you do not know, then, my poor *louteux*, that—' 'Boiteux!' echoed Paul, springing indignantly from his knees to the full height of his best leg—that is true; still, if one is a little lame—' 'One may be six feet up one side,' interrupted Lucille, with the same delightful mockery of tone as before.

'No doubt; but I would say, if permitted, that you do not know, it seems, that I am betrothed to Jacques Dupre, the mason, who can earn ten francs to your five, my friend, and that we intend marrying next week.'

Paul heard no more, or, at least he would not, if he could have helped it; but the hussy's merry laugh, by which he was pursued, seemed sounding in his ears, even whilst recounting his disfigurement to Madame Truquet.

'Console yourself, Paul,' said the dame, as she handed her afflicted grandson a spiced night-cap, and tucked him up comfortably in bed—'console yourself, *mon garcon*; there are prettier faces in Amiens than ever beamed under the cap of Lucille Borlase. Besides, as I told you, they are dissemblers to their very nails; you shall as easily find out their secret meaning, as what is hidden under a conjurer's palm. Good night, *mon brave*; you have had a lucky escape, and it is I, who have known the Borlase family these fifty years, who tell you so.'

Paul was very much better the next morning; the fires of love and liquor had cooled sensibly during the night, and by noon he was sturdily marching along, with his kit strapped to his back, on the road to Paris, determined to bravely face the world spite of all the Lucille's in creation. Paul did not, however, get farther on his road to the metropolis than Abbeville, where he found immediate and constant work, and such agreeable associates, that he remained there contentedly something over six years, during which time he contrived to save about eight hundred francs—the best possible proof that could be given of his general steadiness and sobriety. During that long period he had only paid two or three brief visits to Madame Truquet; and all he heard of Lucille, was that she had married Dupre at the time indicated, and soon afterwards left Amiens with him for Paris. Paul Verdout then had been residing at Abbeville, approaching to seven years, when a letter reached him to the effect that his grandmother had been seized with a sudden, and it was feared, mortal illness, and was very desirous of seeing him before she died. He set off at once for Amiens, and arrived there barely in time to close the eyes of his kind and aged relative, and to hear her faintly murmur, in the last words that fluttered on her lips, an injunction 'to avoid the revolutionary, and to beware of Lucille Dupre, *veuve*.'

The Revolutionists! Yes! Paul comprehended and acceded to that without effort. It was the beginning of the year 1792, under which date is inscribed the bloodiest pages of that frightful history. Amiens, like other towns, had its *Salut Public* and guillotine in vigorous execution, and drunken snatches of Carmagnole and *Candira* penetrated to the sick room, and mingled with the death-sobs of the expiring woman. But Lucille Dupre, widow!—He would not conceal from himself that the last word had excited, even at the solemn moment when it was uttered, some score of feverish pulse beats; but what of that? He would, upon reflection, be as cool as ice, obdurate as granite, to any advance from that quarter. Lucille had made a fool of him once, long ago, when he was poor and inexperienced, but now he was rich—comparatively so, at least, (two thousand francs had been accumulated by Madame Truquet—not to speak of the business and stock in trade,) and, moreover, knew the world, Lucille Dupre, *veuve*, if she entertained any thought, as his deceased relative's words seemed to intimate, of hooking him for second husband, was miserably mistaken; upon that point, she might depend he was rock—adamant.

Error, Monsieur Paul Verdout! A young and pretty widow, and especially a French widow, aware of how and where, and when, she once drilled a hole in your susceptible heart, will, if it be worth her while, reopen the wound in a way that all the defensive armor in the world can avail nothing against. It so fell out. Paul Verdout was standing at his shop-door one afternoon, smoking serenely, spite of the hurly-burly of fierce politics raging in all directions, of which he kept himself studiously aloof, when all in a moment a pair of eyes that had not their equals in all France flashed upon him, and a voice which he had never ceased to hear in his dreams, exclaimed in softest, sweetest tones, 'Bon jour, citoyen Verdout! Ah! I see you do not remember old acquaintances as well as I do. I'm in want of a nice light pair of sabots, and I thought I might as well give you the preference.'

'Lucille!' exclaimed Paul, letting fall his pipe and staggering back into his shop, as if struck by a blow. 'A thousand pardons—that is, I mean Madame Lucille Dupre, *veuve*,' he added, mechanically repeating a sentence that had been seldom out of his head since Madame Truquet's death, some five months previously.

'Hlas! yes, monsieur,' was the reply; 'and for nearly a twelve month now! A light varnished pair,' Lucille added—a bright smile chasing away the demure expression into which she had momentarily constrained her features, as she seated herself, and extended one of the prettiest feet in Amiens for admensurement. 'Not of that Wagoner's size, my dear Paul—so far had Lucille Dupre, *veuve*, got already—'not that Wagoner's size! Surely my foot is not such a monstrous one?'

It's my firm belief that citizen Verdout did not, at that precise moment, know whether he stood upon his head or his heels, or the foot to which he had applied the measuring stick was six or sixty inches long. Presently, however, he became more composed, the sabots were fitted, and the result of the meeting was, that half an hour had barely passed before Paul had once more offered his hand to the Lucille who, in days gone by, had so scornfully rejected it. This occurred in the sitting-room, at the rear of the shop, where the young widow had allowed Paul to induce her to take a glass of wine and some cake.

'It's very kind and generous of you,' replied Lucille—a real emotion filling her eyes with tears as she spoke; 'but you were always kind and generous; and I hope adversity has somewhat improved me. My past wedded life was not a happy one, Paul; but with you,' she added, in a gay tone, 'I think I may venture to hope for—'

We will skip, with the reader's leave, the next two or three minutes, as non-essential to the story—resuming the conversation when Lucille is readjusting her cap, which had been in some way slightly disordered, and putting on her gloves preparatory to Paul escorting her home. 'You will be charmed, Paul,' the young widow is saying, as she gives a final finger twist to one of her dark curls, and turns smilingly away from the glass; 'you will be charmed with my beautiful and gentle Lucille.'

'Your own daughter?' exclaimed Paul, greatly surprised.

Lucille seemed to hesitate, and her face flushed vividly—as Paul afterwards remembered; but she replied, 'Yes—I thought you might have been aware of that?'

'Not I,' replied Paul. 'But what then! I shall love all that belongs to you, dear Lucille; we shall be happy, us three, I make no doubt, as people in a fairy tale.' Precisely one week from that day, Paul

and Lucille were married; and a very happy, prosperous ménage that at Numero 13, Rue des Capucins, proved for a considerable time; adversity had greatly improved Madame Verdout, than whom a more kind, prudent, notable, industrious wife, could scarcely be. She was soon able to manage the business, and guide the house much better than her husband could pretend to do, and every body said Paul had obtained a jewel of a partner. He thought so himself; the brightest and most precious in the world—but for one flaw there, which, in his eyes, gradually overgrew and dimmed its radiance. Lucille was, he felt, a dissembler, in one important particular at least; the child whom she kept in such rigorous seclusion, always appearing restless and agitated if even he addressed a few words to her! What honest cause could there be for that? His grand-mother's warning of the deceptive impenetrable character of the Borlase family, constantly recurred to his mind in spite of himself. Then the child, who appeared to be about six years of age, did not in the slightest degree resemble either of her reputed parents. They had both olive complexions, and dark hair and eyes, whilst the young Lucille was a beautiful blonde, with finely chiselled patrician features—'Like,' Paul would sometimes murmur, 'like the haughty impress of himself with which a proud aristocrat might stamp with shame an honest family. Worse than all, it came to Paul's knowledge that his wife had received several letters through a private channel, with respect to which she would only, when questioned, say they came from a relative of a daughter's, and did not in the slightest degree concern any one else, certainly not her husband. All this had an evil effect upon Paul Verdout's habits. He began to frequent much more than he ought to have done, a wine-shop near the Pont Neuf, kept by one Bontemps, and this led, of course, to fresh attentions with his wife. One morning, after a late breakfast, during which he had listened in moody silence to his wife's earnest remonstrances upon his growing habits of intemperance, he raised his pale, almost haggard face, from the hands in which it had been buried, and looking at her with something of sad sternness, said: 'Lucille, when we were married, I gave you everything; I do not mean alone my worldly substance—though that was considerable, and has been ever since, as you know, more yours than mine. I gave all; my heart, my confidence, my every thought was and is open and plain to you. You cannot say the same, Lucille; and yet must know it is the weight of the accursed secret you so jealously guard, that is sinking in me the abyss of low vice, which I abhor as much as you do.'

'What accursed secret? Surely—'

'The child!' cried Paul, starting to his feet, and addressing his wife with passionate and imploring voice and gesture. 'Tell me in what way it is connected with you—who the mysterious correspondent of yours is; let me know the worst, if worse there be. I will bear anything for your sake, beloved Lucille—even shame—if you will but be frank and candid with your husband.'

'Shame!' repeated the wife, rallying with the sting of the word. 'How dare you address such a word to me? I will tell you nothing.'

'Then I am a lost man!' exclaimed Paul; and seizing his hat he rushed out of the house, and in a few minutes was seated in the wine-shop. He was still there when evening fell—very early—for the month was January, and the weather unusually dark and cold—and had been drinking freely all day, when a message arrived from Madame Verdout, who wished to speak with him without delay. Paul rose silently and followed the messenger home. The establishment he found was closed, the work-people dismissed, and his wife dressed as if going out. She was very pale, and seemingly excited, but her manner was unusually kind and caressing. 'Paul,' she said, laying her hand on his arm as he fell into a chair, 'I am going out—I and the child; a fiacre is waiting for us at the back gate, and I shall not probably return for several hours. The husband made no reply, and she went on: 'I have given Jeannett leave to go home,

and I hope, therefore, you will not go out again. And, Paul, added the wife, kissing his forehead, 'I feel I have been much to blame in having any concealment from you, and I promise you that to-morrow you shall know all.'

'To-morrow I shall know all, you promise?'

'I do, solemnly. And now, good-bye for a while.'

She went out, and presently Paul Verdout heard the smack of a whip and the sound of departing wheels from outside the back-yard entrance. He sat for a considerable time in a sort of confused, dozy dream, but the fire getting low, he roused himself, raked the embers together, threw on two or three fresh logs, and re-seated himself, his wife's promise, as he described it, gradually warming about his heart; 'I shall know all to-morrow,' he nudibly ejaculated, and as the words passed his lips, his eye fell upon the smouldering fragments of a letter, rendered visible in the far corner of the chimney-place, by the renewed fire-light. To start up, seize it, and devour its contents, as far as they could be discerned—for the fire had obliterated all but a few detached sentences—was the work of a moment. It was signed 'Auguste'; and 'chere Lucille' was implored not to lose a moment in coming with 'our child' to Selis, a hamlet about a league from Amiens, on the northern road, and to bring 'as much silver money' and 'clothes' with her as possible, instant flight being indispensable. The accursed words seemed to swim in fire before the frenzied gaze of the unfortunate man, and for a moment he was paralyzed by the terrible discovery: for a moment only. 'Infernal covetous!' he vociferated; 'I know all to-night, and may reach you yet.' He then bounded up to the stairs, found that several bags of coins, which he knew were there in the morning had been taken away, and that most of his wife's clothes were gone. There needed no further confirmation of the letter; and in five minutes Paul Verdout was on the road to Selis—armed.

It was about half-past eleven, according to Bontemps, when Paul Verdout returned to the wine-shop. He was as white as a corpse, and there was a large swelling on his forehead, as if he had received a violent blow, or had fallen down and struck himself heavily, which he said was the case. He told Bontemps that his wife would not return till the morning, and as there was nobody at home, not the servant even, he felt so lonely that he wished to sleep at his (Bontemps') house. This was accepted to, and he went to bed at once.—Very early in the morning a message came from Madame Verdout, that breakfast was ready, and her husband anxiously waited for. Bontemps delivered the message himself to Paul, who started while he spoke like a man in a dream, but said nothing, got up, dressed himself, and went home.

Paul Verdout, but for the strong shudder which passed over him as he encountered the surprised yet cheerful look of his wife, looked more like a stone image moving by automatic power, than a living man. 'Sit down, dear Paul,' said Lucille; soothingly, 'I have good news for thee.—Ah! I see how it is,' she added, 'thou hast seen this piece of a letter which I found on the table. I dropped it last night, I suppose; and it has put wicked thoughts in that jealous pate of thine.—Never mind; I am now going to explain everything, and satisfactorily too, as thou'lt find.'

'Brandy!' gasped the husband, faintly; 'brandy!' It was given him, and his wife, though apparently much astonished, proceeded:

'After all, *ma foi*, the explanation is a very simple one. The child was the daughter of the Comte and Comtesse Anguste de Vervay. They are proscrits, as you know, and the child was confided to me under a solemn promise never to divulge its name to a living soul, for fear of those Paris bloodhounds. The Countess has been long confined to her bed with illness, so that they could not till lately leave the concealment they had found, to attempt escaping from the country. That peril is now, however, surmounted, and they are, I trust, beyond the reach of their persecutors. The letter was, of course, from the

Count; the clothes were required for the disguise of the Countess, and the silver money was also essential; and see, *ma chere sœur*, here is the exchange I have made,' added Lucille, who had a keen eye to the main chance, displaying, with great glare, several jewels, evidently of great value.

The mental pallor of Paul Verdout's countenance had not been in the slightest degree diminished by his wife's revelation, to which he only faintly replied, by saying, 'Go on, go on! What more?'

'What more! *Parbleu*, that surely is enough? There is nothing else to say that I know of, except that the Chevalier Meudon, a friend of the Count's, who has been living perdu, not far from the back of our premises, and who has frequently slept in the stable, unknown to you, when apprehensive he was beset, will, I fear, find it difficult to get off, as the Count informed me pursuers had obtained a hint of his hiding-place. I thought it possible he might have sought shelter here last night, and that was one reason I sent everybody away, and asked you to stop at home, which I knew would never betray a poor hunted fugitive. But, heavens, Paul, what is the matter? Help! help! My God! he is dying!'

He was not dying, but rapidly losing consciousness; which, however, a glass restored sufficiently to enable him to say, in a rapid husky voice, 'Listen, Lucille, and hear how your accursed secret has destroyed me. I found that fragment of a letter, pursued you to Selis, and could nowhere find you there. I returned, crazed in mind, utterly crazed; for I swallowed brandy at every cabaret upon the road. I burst into the room, and, reclining upon the canape there, saw the figure of a man asleep. In my frenzy I rushed at, grappled with him and was grappled in return. A fierce, terrific conflict ensued. Several times I dashed him upon the floor, and at last received this blow on the forehead, which rendered me insensible. How long I remained so, I know not. The cold air revived me. I got upon my feet, procured a light and saw that I had killed my antagonist, who was stone dead. Its useless screaming, Lucille, in my horror and distraction, I hit upon the mad expedient of placing the body in a sack, bearing it forth in the dark night and casting it into the Somme. I did so, amidst, as I distinctly heard, the mocking laughter of demons—human devils they were not, or I should have been pursued. All! all is known, and I am lost!'

The entrance of a sergeant of the common guard was simultaneous with this explanation of Paul Verdout. 'Don't be alarmed, my friends,' said the sergeant; 'I have called upon a slight matter of form, nothing more. But upon my word, Verdout, that was a droll freak last night. There must have been an unusually large number of petit verres in that head of yours to have put such a fancy there.—Shall I tell?' continued the merry functionary.

'Yes—to be sure,' stammered Paul, utterly confounded. 'What do you mean?'

'*Figurez-vous, citoyen*,' said the sergeant, blandly addressing Lucille, 'this charming husband of yours, who, however, not a bad fellow, coming home in such a state, you being absent, as we know, that upon finding, decently laid out upon this canape, the dead body of—'

'Dead body, *parbleu!* that of the proscrit Meudon; and as dead, I'll warrant, as Louis Capet—killed by a couple of bullets from the patriotic muskets of two of our armed citizens, who had started the aristocrat from his lair. Another glass?—Well, yes; as you say, the weather is bitterly cold this morning. Well, madame, as I was saying, what does your amiable husband do whilst we are gone to procure means of fetching the corpse, but come in, pop it into a sack, carry it off, and pitch it into the Somme! Did you ever hear of such a droll dog, eh? But, seriously, you will come by-and-by to the Hotel de Ville, and sign the proces verbal, or there may be difficulty in apportioning the reward, which is handsome. Be it so, madame—I cannot refuse a lady; though, really, three glasses, one after the other, is no matter. Here is to our glorious Republic, one and indivisible!'

As the door closed, the husband and wife threw themselves with bursting sobs into each other's outstretched arms; and Lucille, as soon as her choking utterance permitted, whispered, brokenly, 'Never, never, Paul, shall there again be an unshared secret between us.'

## Humorous.

**A POLITICAL JOKE.**—In a neighboring county, one of the political parties had, for over twenty years, been in the habit of holding their county nominations at the house of Mr. G.—

He happened on a recent occasion, for the first time, to be in when they had finished their business, and heard a little delegate from R. move that 'this convention do now adjourn *sine die*.'

'Sine die,' said Mr. G.—, to a person standing near, 'where's that?'

'Why that's away up in the northern part of the county,' said his neighbor.

'Hold on, if you please, Mr. Chairman,' said G., 'with great emphasis and earnestness, hold on, sir. I'd like to be heard on that question. I have kept a public house now for more'n twenty years. I'm a poor man—I've always belonged to the party, and never split my ticket in my life. This is the most central location in the county, and it's where we've allers held our caucuses. I've never had, or asked an office, and have worked night and day for the party, and now I think, sir, it's contemptible to go adjourning this convention way up to *sine die*.'

**THOSE CREAM CAKES.**—A man, says the Boston Messenger, was seen last Wednesday to stagger heavily against a window of a store in Washington street, shivering a large pane of glass into fragments. Several persons ran to his assistance, and one more anxious than the rest, inquired the matter.

'Matter,' hiccupped the reeling pedestrian, 'matter; why I-ine eat some c-cream cakes, and they don't agree with me.'

'Hain't you better take something?' suggested another.

'Take something, hic, why, I have taken something; I took o-eight glasses of brandy and water; b-but hic, it's no use; them cream cakes have got the upper hand of me!'