

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis
Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Crane
Leslie Stockton Vatsyayana Verne
Burroughs Curtis Tocqueville Whittman Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Harte
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Hesse
London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Cooke
Poe Aristotle Wells Bunner Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott
Swift Chekhov Newton



tredition was established in 2006 by Sandra Latusseck and Soenke Schulz. Based in Hamburg, Germany, tredition offers publishing solutions to authors and publishing houses, combined with worldwide distribution of printed and digital book content. tredition is uniquely positioned to enable authors and publishing houses to create books on their own terms and without conventional manufacturing risks.

For more information please visit: www.tredition.com

TREDITION CLASSICS

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series. The creators of this series are united by passion for literature and driven by the intention of making all public domain books available in printed format again - worldwide. Most TREDITION CLASSICS titles have been out of print and off the bookstore shelves for decades. At tredition we believe that a great book never goes out of style and that its value is eternal. Several mostly non-profit literature projects provide content to tredition. To support their good work, tredition donates a portion of the proceeds from each sold copy. As a reader of a TREDITION CLASSICS book, you support our mission to save many of the amazing works of world literature from oblivion. See all available books at www.tredition.com.



Project Gutenberg

The content for this book has been graciously provided by Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg is a non-profit organization founded by Michael Hart in 1971 at the University of Illinois. The mission of Project Gutenberg is simple: To encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks. Project Gutenberg is the first and largest collection of public domain eBooks.

The Grey Wig: Stories and Novelettes

Israel Zangwill

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Israel Zangwill

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-8130-5

www.tredition.com

www.tredition.de

Copyright:

The content of this book is sourced from the public domain.

The intention of the TREDITION CLASSICS series is to make world literature in the public domain available in printed format. Literary enthusiasts and organizations, such as Project Gutenberg, worldwide have scanned and digitally edited the original texts. tredition has subsequently formatted and redesigned the content into a modern reading layout. Therefore, we cannot guarantee the exact reproduction of the original format of a particular historic edition. Please also note that no modifications have been made to the spelling, therefore it may differ from the orthography used today.

TO
MY MOTHER AND SISTERS
THIS BOOK
Mainly a Study of Woman
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED

PREFATORY NOTE

This Volume embraces my newest and oldest work, and includes—for the sake of uniformity of edition—a couple of shilling novelettes that are out of print.

I.Z.

Mentone, February, 1903.

CONTENTS

THE GREY WIG

CHASSÉ-CROISÉ

THE WOMAN BEATER

THE ETERNAL FEMININE

THE SILENT SISTERS

THE BIG BOW MYSTERY

MERELY MARY ANN

THE SERIO-COMIC GOVERNESS

THE GREY WIG

Contents

- I
- II
- III
- IV
- V
- VI
- VII
- VIII
- IX
- X
- XI
- XII
- XIII
- XIV
- XV

I

They both styled themselves "Madame," but only the younger of the old ladies had been married. Madame Valière was still a *demoiselle*, but as she drew towards sixty it had seemed more *convenable* to possess a mature label. Certainly Madame Dépine had no visible matrimonial advantages over her fellow-lodger at the Hôtel des Tourterelles, though in the symmetrical cemetery of Montparnasse (Section 22) wreaths of glass beads testified to a copious domesticity in the far past, and a newspaper picture of a *chasseur d'Afrique* pinned over her bed recalled—though only the uniform was the dead soldier's—the son she had contributed to France's colonial empire. Practically it was two old maids—or two lone widows—whose boots turned pointed toes towards each other in the dark cranny of the rambling, fusty corridor of the sky-floor. Madame Dépine was round, and grew dumpier with age; "Madame" Valière was long, and grew slimmer. Otherwise their lives ran parallel. For the true madame of the establishment you had to turn to Madame la Propriétaire, with her buxom bookkeeper of a daughter and her

tame baggage-bearing husband. This full-blooded, jovial creature, with her swart moustache, represented the only Parisian success of three provincial lives, and, in her good-nature, had permitted her decayed townswomen—at as low a rent as was compatible with prudence—to shelter themselves under her roof and as near it as possible. Her house being a profitable warren of American art-students, tempered by native journalists and decadent poets, she could, moreover, afford to let the old ladies off coffee and candles. They were at liberty to prepare their own *déjeuner* in winter or to buy it outside in summer; they could burn their own candles or sit in the dark, as the heart in them pleased; and thus they were as cheaply niced as any one in the gay city. *Rentières* after their meticulous fashion, they drew a ridiculous but regular amount from the mysterious coffers of the *Crédit Lyonnais*.

But though they met continuously in the musty corridor, and even dined—when they did dine—at the same *crémérie*, they never spoke to each other. Madame la Propriétaire was the channel through which they sucked each other's history, for though they had both known her in their girlish days at Tonnerre, in the department of Yonne, they had not known each other. Madame Valière (Madame Dépine learnt, and it seemed to explain the frigidity of her neighbour's manner) still trailed clouds of glory from the service of a Princess a quarter of a century before. Her refusal to wink at the Princess's goings-on, her austere, if provincial, regard for the convenances, had cost her the place, and from these purpleal heights she had fallen lower and lower, till she struck the attic of the *Hôtel des Tourterelles*.

But even a haloed past does not give one a licence to annoy one's neighbours. Madame Dépine felt resentfully, and she hated Madame Valière as a haughty minion of royalty, who kept a cough, which barked loudest in the silence of the night.

"Why doesn't she go to the hospital, your Princess?" she complained to Madame la Propriétaire.

"Since she is able to nurse herself at home," the opulent-bosomed hostess replied with a shrug.

"At the expense of other people," Madame Dépine retorted bitterly. "I shall die of her cough, I am sure of it."

Madame showed her white teeth sweetly. "Then it is you who should go to the hospital."

II

Time wrote wrinkles enough on the brows of the two old ladies, but his frosty finger never touched their glossy brown hair, for both wore wigs of nearly the same shade. These wigs were almost symbolic of the evenness of their existence, which had got beyond the reach of happenings. The Church calendar, so richly dyed with figures of saints and martyrs, filled life with colour enough, and fast-days were almost as welcome as feast-days, for if the latter warmed the general air, the former cloaked economy with dignity. As for *Mardi Gras*, that shook you up for weeks, even though you did not venture out of your apartment; the gay serpentine streamers remained round one's soul as round the trees.

At intervals, indeed, secular excitements broke the even tenor. A country cousin would call upon the important Parisian relative, and be received, not in the little bedroom, but in state in the mustily magnificent salon of the hotel—all gold mirrors and mouldiness—which the poor country mouse vaguely accepted as part of the glories of Paris and success. Madame Dépine would don her ponderous gold brooch, sole salvage of her bourgeois prosperity; while, if the visitor were for Madame Valière, that *grande dame* would hang from her yellow, shrivelled neck the long gold chain and the old-fashioned watch, whose hands still seemed to point to regal hours.

Another break in the monotony was the day on which the lottery was drawn—the day of the pagan god of Luck. What delicious hopes of wealth flamed in these withered breasts, only to turn grey and cold when the blank was theirs again, but not the less to soar up again, with each fresh investment, towards the heaven of the hundred thousand francs! But if ever Madame Dépine stumbled on Madame Valière buying a section of a *billet* at the lottery agent's, she insisted on having her own slice cut from another number. Fortune itself would be robbed of its sweet if the "Princess" should share it. Even their common failure to win a sou did not draw them from their freezing depths of silence, from which every passing year

made it more difficult to emerge. Some greater conjuncture was needed for that.

It came when Madame la Propriétaire made her *début* one fine morning in a grey wig.

III

Hitherto that portly lady's hair had been black. But now, as suddenly as darkness vanishes in a tropic dawn, it was become light. No gradual approach of the grey, for the black had been equally artificial. The wig is the region without twilight. Only in the swart moustache had the grey crept on, so that perhaps the growing incongruity had necessitated the sudden surrender to age.

To both Madame Dépine and Madame Valière the grey wig came like a blow on the heart.

It was a grisly embodiment of their secret griefs, a tantalising vision of the unattainable. To glide reputedly into a grey wig had been for years their dearest desire. As each saw herself getting older and older, saw her complexion fade and the crow's-feet gather, and her eyes grow hollow, and her teeth fall out and her cheeks fall in, so did the impropriety of her brown wig strike more and more humiliatingly to her soul. But how should a poor old woman ever accumulate enough for a new wig? One might as well cry for the moon—or a set of false teeth. Unless, indeed, the lottery—?

And so, when Madame Dépine received a sister-in-law from Tonnerre, or Madame Valière's nephew came up by the excursion train from that same quiet and incongruously christened townlet, the Parisian personage would receive the visitor in the darkest corner of the salon, with her back to the light, and a big bonnet on her head—an imposing figure repeated duskily in the gold mirrors. These visits, instead of a relief, became a terror. Even a provincial knows it is not *convenable* for an old woman to wear a brown wig. And Tonnerre kept strict record of birthdays.

Tears of shame and misery had wetted the old ladies' hired pillows, as under the threat of a provincial visitation they had tossed sleepless in similar solicitude, and their wigs, had they not been wigs, would have turned grey of themselves. Their only consolation

had been that neither outdid the other, and so long as each saw the other's brown wig, they had refrained from facing the dread possibility of having to sell off their jewellery in a desperate effort of emulation. Gradually Madame Dépine had grown to wear her wig with vindictive endurance, and Madame Valière to wear hers with gentle resignation. And now, here was Madame la Propriétaire, a woman five years younger and ten years better preserved, putting them both to the public blush, drawing the hotel's attention to what the hotel might have overlooked, in its long habituation to their surmounting brownness.

More morbidly conscious than ever of a young head on old shoulders, the old ladies no longer paused at the bureau to exchange the news with Madame or even with her black-haired bookkeeping daughter. No more lounging against the newel under the carved torch-bearer, while the journalist of the fourth floor spat at the Dreyfusites, and the poet of the *entresol* threw versified vitriol at perfidious Albion. For the first time, too—losing their channel of communication—they grew out of touch with each other's microscopic affairs, and their mutual detestation increased with their resentful ignorance. And so, shrinking and silent, and protected as far as possible by their big bonnets, the squat Madame Dépine and the skinny Madame Valière toiled up and down the dark, fusty stairs of the Hôtel des Tourterelles, often brushing against each other, yet sundered by icy infinities. And the endurance on Madame Dépine's round face became more vindictive, and gentler grew the resignation on the angular visage of Madame Valière.

IV

"*Tiens!* Madame Dépine, one never sees you now." Madame la Propriétaire was blocking the threshold, preventing her exit. "I was almost thinking you had veritably died of Madame Valière's cough."

"One has received my rent, the Monday," the little old lady replied frigidly.

"*Oh! là! là!*" Madame waved her plump hands. "And La Valière, too, makes herself invisible. What has then happened to both of you? Is it that you are doing a penance together?"

"Hist!" said Madame Dépine, flushing.

For at this moment Madame Valière appeared on the pavement outside bearing a long French roll and a bag of figs, which made an excellent lunch at low water. Madame la Propriétaire, dominantly bestriding her doorstep, was sandwiched between the two old ladies, her wig aggressively grey between the two browns. Madame Valière halted awkwardly, a bronze blush mounting to match her wig. To be seen by Madame Dépine carrying in her meagre provisions was humiliation enough; to be juxtaposed with a grey wig was unbearable.

"*Maman, maman*, the English monsieur will not pay two francs for his dinner!" And the distressed bookkeeper, bill in hand, shattered the trio.

"And why will he not pay?" Fire leapt into the black eyes.

"He says you told him the night he came that by arrangement he could have his dinners for one franc fifty."

Madame la Propriétaire made two strides towards the refractory English monsieur. "*I told you one franc fifty? For déjeuner, yes, as many luncheons as you can eat. But for dinner? You eat with us as one of the family, and vin compris and café likewise, and it should be all for one franc fifty! Mon Dieu!* it is to ruin oneself. Come here." And she seized the surprised Anglo-Saxon by the wrist and dragged him towards a painted tablet of prices that hung in a dark niche of the hall. "I have kept this hotel for twenty years, I have grown grey in the service of artists and students, and this is the first time one has demanded dinner for one franc fifty!"

"*She* has grown grey!" contemptuously muttered Madame Valière.

"Grey? She!" repeated Madame Dépine, with no less bitterness. "It is only to give herself the air of a *grande dame!*"

Then both started, and coloured to the roots of their wigs. Simultaneously they realised that they had spoken to each other.

V

As they went up the stairs together—for Madame Dépine had quite forgotten she was going out—an immense relief enlarged their souls. Merely to mention the grey wig had been a vent for all this morbid brooding; to abuse Madame la Propriétaire into the bargain was to pass from the long isolation into a subtle sympathy.

"I wonder if she did say one franc fifty," observed Madame Valière, reflectively.

"Without doubt," Madame Dépine replied viciously. "And fifty centimes a day soon mount up to a grey wig."

"Not so soon," sighed Madame Valière.

"But then it is not only one client that she cheats."

"Ah! at that rate wigs fall from the skies," admitted Madame Valière.

"Especially if one has not to give dowries to one's nieces," said Madame Dépine, boldly.

"And if one is mean on New Year's Day," returned Madame Valière, with a shade less of mendacity.

They inhaled the immemorial airlessness of the staircase as if they were breathing the free air of the forests depicted on its dirty-brown wall-paper. It was the new atmosphere of self-respect that they were really absorbing. Each had at last explained herself and her brown wig to the other. An immaculate honesty (that would scorn to overcharge fifty centimes even to *un Anglais*), complicated with unwedded nieces in one case, with a royal shower of New Year's gifts in the other, had kept them from selfish, if seemly, hoary-headedness.

"Ah! here is my floor," panted Madame Valière at length, with an air of indicating it to a thorough stranger. "Will you not come into my room and eat a fig? They are very healthy between meals."

Madame Dépine accepted the invitation, and entering her own corner of the corridor with a responsive air of foreign exploration, passed behind the door through whose keyhole she had so often peered. Ah! no wonder she had detected nothing abnormal. The

room was a facsimile of her own—the same bed with the same quilt over it and the same crucifix above it, the same little table with the same books of devotion, the same washstand with the same tiny jug and basin, the same rusted, fireless grate. The wardrobe, like her own, was merely a pair of moth-eaten tartan curtains, concealing both pegs and garments from her curiosity. The only sense of difference came subtly from the folding windows, below whose railed balcony showed another view of the quarter, with steam-trams—diminished to toy trains—puffing past to the suburbs. But as Madame Dépine's eyes roved from these to the mantel-piece, she caught sight of an oval miniature of an elegant young woman, who was jewelled in many places, and corresponded exactly with her idea of a Princess!

To disguise her access of respect, she said abruptly, "It must be very noisy here from the steam-trams."

"It is what I love, the bustle of life," replied Madame Valière, simply.

"Ah!" said Madame Dépine, impressed beyond masking-point, "I suppose when one has had the habit of Courts—"

Madame Valière shuddered unexpectedly. "Let us not speak of it. Take a fig."

But Madame Dépine persisted—though she took the fig. "Ah! those were brave days when we had still an Emperor and an Empress to drive to the Bois with their equipages and outriders. Ah, how pretty it was!"

"But the President has also"—a fit of coughing interrupted Madame Valière—"has also outriders."

"But he is so bourgeois—a mere man of the people," said Madame Dépine.

"They are the most decent sort of folk. But do you not feel cold? I will light a fire." She bent towards the wood-box.

"No, no; do not trouble. I shall be going in a moment. I have a large fire blazing in my room."

"Then suppose we go and sit there," said poor Madame Valière.

Poor Madame Dépine was seized with a cough, more protracted than any of which she had complained.

"Provided it has not gone out in my absence," she stammered at last. "I will go first and see if it is in good trim."

"No, no; it is not worth the trouble of moving." And Madame Valière drew her street-cloak closer round her slim form. "But I have lived so long in Russia, I forget people call this cold."

"Ah! the Princess travelled far?" said Madame Dépine, eagerly.

"Too far," replied Madame Valière, with a flash of Gallic wit. "But who has told you of the Princess?"

"Madame la Propriétaire, naturally."

"She talks too much — she and her wig!"

"If only she didn't imagine herself a powdered marquise in it! To see her standing before the mirror in the salon!"

"The beautiful spectacle!" assented Madame Valière.

"Ah! but I don't forget — if she does — that her mother wheeled a fruit-barrow through the streets of Tonnerre!"

"Ah! yes, I knew you were from Tonnerre — dear Tonnerre!"

"How did you know?"

"Naturally, Madame la Propriétaire."

"The old gossip!" cried Madame Dépine — "though not so old as she feigns. But did she tell you of her mother, too, and the fruit-barrow?"

"I knew her mother — *une brave femme*."

"I do not say not," said Madame Dépine, a whit disconcerted. "Nevertheless, when one's mother is a merchant of the four seasons —"

"Provided she sold fruit as good as this! Take another fig, I beg of you."

"Thank you. These are indeed excellent," said Madame Dépine. "She owed all her good fortune to a *coup* in the lottery."

"Ah! the lottery!" Madame Valière sighed. Before the eyes of both rose the vision of a lucky number and a grey wig.

VI

The acquaintanceship ripened. It was not only their common grievances against fate and Madame la Propriétaire: they were linked by the sheer physical fact that each was the only person to whom the other could talk without the morbid consciousness of an eye scrutinising the unseemly brown wig. It became quite natural, therefore, for Madame Dépine to stroll into her "Princess's" room, and they soon slid into dividing the cost of the fire. That was more than an economy, for neither could afford a fire alone. It was an easy transition to the discovery that coffee could be made more cheaply for two, and that the same candle would light two persons, provided they sat in the same room. And if they did not fall out of the habit of companionship even at the *crémèrie*, though "two portions for one" were not served, their union at least kept the sexagenarians in countenance. Two brown wigs give each other a moral support, are on the way to a fashion.

But there was more than wigs and cheese-parings in their *camaraderie*. Madame Dépine found a fathomless mine of edification in Madame Valière's reminiscences, which she skilfully extracted from her, finding the average ore rich with noble streaks, though the old tirewoman had an obstinate way of harking back to her girlhood, which made some delvings result in mere earth.

On the Day of the Dead Madame Dépine emerged into importance, taking her friend with her to the Cemetery Montparnasse to see the glass flowers blooming immortally over the graves of her husband and children. Madame Dépine paid the omnibus for both (inside places), and felt, for once, superior to the poor "Princess," who had never known the realities of love and death.

VII

Two months passed. Another of Madame Valière's teeth fell out. Madame Dépine's cheeks grew more pendulous. But their brown wigs remained as fadeless as the cemetery flowers.

One day they passed the hairdresser's shop together. It was indeed next to the tobacconist's, so not easy to avoid, whenever one wanted a stamp or a postcard. In the window, amid pendent plaits of divers hues, bloomed two wax busts of females—the one young and coquettish and golden-haired, the other aristocratic in a distinguished grey wig. Both wore diamond rosettes in their hair and ropes of pearls round their necks. The old ladies' eyes met, then turned away.

"If one demanded the price!" said Madame Dépine (who had already done so twice).

"It is an idea!" agreed Madame Valière.

"The day will come when one's nieces will be married."

"But scarcely when New Year's Day shall cease to be," the "Princess" sighed.

"Still, one might win in the lottery!"

"Ah! true. Let us enter, then."

"One will be enough. You go." Madame Dépine rather dreaded the *coiffeur*, whom intercourse with jocose students had made severe.

But Madame Valière shrank back shyly. "No, let us both go." She added, with a smile to cover her timidity, "Two heads are better than one."

"You are right. He will name a lower price in the hope of two orders." And, pushing the "Princess" before her like a turret of defence, Madame Dépine wheeled her into the ladies' department.

The *coiffeur*, who was washing the head of an American girl, looked up ungraciously. As he perceived the outer circumference of Madame Dépine projecting on either side of her turret, he emitted a glacial "*Bon jour, mesdames.*"

"Those grey wigs—" faltered Madame Valière

"I have already told your friend." He rubbed the American head viciously.

Madame Dépine coloured. "But—but we are two. Is there no reduction on taking a quantity?"

"And why then? A wig is a wig. Twice a hundred francs are two hundred francs."

"One hundred francs for a wig!" said Madame Valière, paling. "I did not pay that for the one I wear."

"I well believe it, madame. A grey wig is not a brown wig."

"But you just said a wig is a wig."

The *coiffeur* gave angry rubs at the head, in time with his explosive phrases. "You want real hair, I presume—and to your measure—and to look natural—and *convenable!*" (Both old ladies shuddered at the word.) "Of course, if you want it merely for private theatricals—"

"Private theatricals!" repeated Madame Dépine, aghast.

"A *comédienne's* wig I can sell you for a bagatelle. That passes at a distance."

Madame Valière ignored the suggestion. "But why should a grey wig cost more than any other?"

The *coiffeur* shrugged his shoulders. "Since there are less grey hairs in the world—"

"*Comment!*" repeated Madame Valière, in amazement.

"It stands to reason," said the *coiffeur*. "Since most persons do not live to be old—or only live to be bald." He grew animated, professorial almost, seeing the weight his words carried to unthinking bosoms. "And since one must provide a fine hair-net for a groundwork, to imitate the flesh-tint of the scalp, and since each hair of the parting must be treated separately, and since the natural wave of the hair must be reproduced, and since you will also need a block for it to stand on at nights to guard its shape—"

"But since one has already blocks," interposed Madame Dépine.

"But since a conscientious artist cannot trust another's block! Represent to yourself also that the shape of the head does not remain as fixed as the dome of the Invalides, and that—"