



Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter (Perennial Classics)

By Simone de Beauvoir

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She vividly evokes her friendships, love interests, mentors, and the early days of the most important relationship of her life, with fellow student Jean-Paul Sartre, against the backdrop of a turbulent political time.

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Editorial Review

Review

"It is a book that will leave no one indifferent, and no one affected in quite the same way." (New York Times)

"[Beauvoir's] graciously written memoirs carry distinct appeal in recording the emotional and intellectual birth pangs of a fascinating woman." (Time)

"This is perhaps the best piece of writing Mlle. de Beauvoir has yet done; the translator does it justice." (Saturday Review)

About the Author

French Existentialist philosopher, novelist, essayist, editor, and groundbreaking feminist Simone De Beauvoir was born in Paris, where she lived most of her life. She was the author of the feminist classic **The Second Sex**, several volumes of autobiography, and highly acclaimed novels, including **The Mandarins**, winner of the Prix Goncourt.

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Though it was still daylight, the hot lamp was shining full-beam over the mahjong table. Diamond rings flashed under its glare as their wearers clacked and reshuffled their tiles. The tablecloth, tied down over the table legs, stretched out into a sleek plain of blinding white. The harsh artificial light silhouetted to full advantage the generous curve of Chia-chih's bosom, and laid bare the elegant lines of her hexagonal face, its beauty somehow accentuated by the imperfectly narrow forehead, by the careless, framing wisps of hair. Her makeup was understated, except for the glossily rouged arcs of her lips. Her hair she had pinned nonchalantly back from her face, then allowed to hang down to her shoulders. Her sleeveless cheongsam of electric blue moire satin reached to the knees, its shallow, rounded collar standing only half an inch tall, in the Western style. A brooch fixed to the collar matched her diamond-studded sapphire button earrings. The two ladies--tai-tais--immediately to her left and right were both wearing black wool capes, each held fast at the neck by a heavy double gold chain that snaked out from beneath the cloak's turned-down collar. Isolated from the rest of the world by Japanese occupation, Shanghai had elaborated a few native fashions. Thanks to the extravagantly inflated price of gold in the occupied territories, gold chains as thick as these were now fabulously expensive. But somehow, functionally worn in place of a collar button, they managed to avoid the taint of vulgar ostentation, thereby offering their owners the perfect pretext for parading their wealth on excursions about the city. For these excellent reasons, the cape and gold chain had become the favored uniform of the wives of officials serving in Wang Ching-wei's puppet government. Or perhaps they were following the lead of Chungking, the Chinese Nationalist regime's wartime capital, where black cloaks were very much in vogue among the elegant ladies of the political glitterati. Yee Tai-tai was chez elle, so she had dispensed with her own cape; but even without it, her figure still seemed to bell outward from her neck, with all the weight the years had put on her. She'd met Chia-chih two years earlier in Hong Kong, after she and her husband had left Chungking--and the Nationalist government--together with Wang Ching-wei. Not long before the couple took refuge on the island, one of Wang Ching-wei's lieutenants, Cheng Chung-ming, had been assassinated in Hanoi, and so Wang's followers in Hong Kong were keeping their heads down. Yee Tai-tai, nonetheless, was determined to go shopping. During the war, goods were scarce in both the

unconquered interior and the occupied territories of the Mainland; Yee Tai-tai had no intention of wasting the golden purchasing opportunity offered by a stopover in the commercial paradise of Hong Kong. Someone in her circle introduced her to Chia-chih--the beautiful young wife of Mr. Mai, a local businessman--who chaperoned her on her shopping trips. If you wanted to navigate Hong Kong's emporiums, you had to have a local along: you were expected to haggle over prices even in the biggest department stores, and if you couldn't speak Cantonese, all the traders would overcharge you wickedly. Mr. Mai was in import-export and, like all businesspeople, delighted in making political friends. So of course the couple were incessantly hospitable to Yee Tai-tai, who was in turn extremely grateful. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the fall of Hong Kong, Mr. Mai went out of business. To make some extra money for the family, Mai Tai-tai decided to do a little smuggling herself, and traveled to Shanghai with a few luxury goods--watches, Western medicines, perfumes, stockings--to sell. Yee Tai-tai very naturally invited her to stay with them. "We went to Shu-yu, that Szechuanese restaurant, yesterday," Yee Tai-tai was telling the first black cape. "Mai Tai-tai hadn't been." "Oh, really?" "We haven't seen you here for a few days, Ma Tai-tai." "I've been busy--a family matter," Ma Tai-tai mumbled amid the twittering of the mahjong tiles. Yee Tai-tai's lips thinned into a smile. "She went into hiding because it was her turn to buy dinner." Chia-chih suspected that Ma Tai-tai was jealous. Ever since Chia-chih had arrived, she had been the center of attention. "Liao Tai-tai took us all out last night. She's been on such a winning streak the last couple of days," Yee Tai-tai went on to Ma Tai-tai. "At the restaurant, I bumped into that young Mr. Lee and his wife and invited them to join us. When he said they were waiting for guests of their own, I told him they should all join us. After all, it isn't often that Liao Tai-tai gives dinner parties. Then it turned out Mr. Lee had invited so many guests we couldn't fit them all around our table. Even with extra chairs we couldn't all squeeze in, so Liao Tai-tai had to sit behind me like a singsong girl at a banquet. 'What a beauty I've picked for myself tonight,' I joked. 'I'm too old a piece of tofu for you to swallow,' she replied. 'Old tofu tastes the spiciest,' I told her! Oh, how we laughed. She laughed so much her pockmarks turned red." More laughter around the mahjong table. While Yee Tai-tai was still updating Ma Tai-tai on the goings-on of the past couple of days, Mr. Yee came in, dressed in a gray suit, and nodded at his three female guests. "You started early today." He stood behind his wife, watching the game. The wall behind him was swathed in heavy, yellowish-brown wool curtains printed with a brick-red phoenix-tail fern design, each blade almost six feet long. Chou Fo-hai, Wang Ching-wei's second in command, had a pair; and so, therefore, did they. False french windows, and enormous drapes to cover them, were all the rage just then. Because of the war, fabrics were in short supply; floor-length curtains such as those hanging behind Mr. Yee--using up an entire bolt of cloth, with extra wastage from pattern matching--were a conspicuous extravagance. Standing against the huge ferns of his backdrop, Yee looked even shorter than usual. His face was pale, finely drawn, and crowned by a receding hairline that faded away into petal-shaped peaks above his temples. His nose was distinguished by its narrowed, almost ratlike tip. "Is that ring of yours three carats, Ma Tai-tai?" Yee Tai-tai asked. "The day before yesterday, P'in Fen brought a five-carat diamond to show me, but it didn't sparkle like yours." "I've heard P'in Fen's things are better than the stuff in the shops." "It is convenient to have things brought to your home, I suppose. And you can hold on to them for a few days, while you decide. And sometimes she has things you can't get elsewhere. Last time, she showed me a yellow kerosene diamond, but he wouldn't buy it." She glanced icily at Mr. Yee before going on: "How much do you imagine something like that would cost now? A perfect kerosene diamond: a dozen ounces of gold per carat? Two? Three? P'in Fen says no one's selling kerosene or pink diamonds at the moment, for any price. Everyone's hoarding them, waiting for the price to get even more insane." "Didn't you feel how heavy it was?" Mr. Yee laughed. "Ten carats. You wouldn't have been able to play mahjong with that rock on your finger." The edges of the table glittered like a diamond exhibition, Chia-chih thought, every pair of hands glinting ostentatiously--except hers. She should have left her jadeite ring back in its box, she realized; to spare herself all those sneering glances. "Stop making fun of me!" Yee Tai-tai sulked as she moved out one of her counters. The black cape opposite Ma Tai-tai clatteringly opened out her winning hand, and a sudden commotion of laughter and lament broke the thread of conversation. As the gamblers busily set to calculating their wins and losses, Mr. Yee motioned

slightly at Chia-chih with his chin toward the door. She immediately glanced at the two black capes on either side of her. Fortunately, neither seemed to have noticed. She paid out the chips she had lost, took a sip from her teacup, then suddenly exclaimed: "That memory of mine! I have a business appointment at three o'clock, I'd forgotten all about it. Mr. Yee, will you take my place until I get back?" "I won't allow it!" Yee Tai-tai protested. "You can't just run away like that without warning us in advance." "And just when I thought my luck was changing," muttered the winning black cape. "I suppose we could ask Liao Tai-tai to come over. Go and telephone her," Yee Tai-tai went on to Chia-chih. "At least stay until she gets here." "I really need to go now." Chia-chih looked at her watch. "I'm going to be late--I arranged to have coffee with a broker. Mr. Yee can take my place." "I'm busy this afternoon," Mr. Yee excused himself. "Tomorrow I'll play all night." "That Wang Chia-chih!" Yee Tai-tai liked referring to Chia-chih by her full maiden name, as if they had known each other since they were girls. "I'll make you pay for this--you're going to treat us all to dinner tonight!" "You can't let your guest buy you dinner," Ma Tai-tai objected. "I'm siding with Yee Tai-tai," the other black cape put in. They needed to tread carefully around their hostess on the subject of her young houseguest. Although Yee Tai-tai was easily old enough to be Chia-chih's mother, there had never been any talk of formalizing their relationship, of adopting her as a goddaughter. Yee Tai-tai was a little unpredictable, at the age she was now. Although she had a dowager's fondness for keeping young, pretty women clustered around her--like a galaxy of stars reflecting glory onto the moon around which they circulated--she was not yet too old for flashes of feminine jealousy. "All right, all right," Chia-chih said. "I'll take you all out to dinner tonight. But you won't be in the party, Mr. Yee, if you don't take my place now." "Do, Mr. Yee! Mahjong's no fun with only three. Play just for a little, while Ma Tai-tai telephones for a replacement." "I really do have a prior engagement." Whenever Mr. Yee spoke of official business, his voice sank to an almost inaudibly discreet mutter. "Someone else will come along soon." "We all know how busy Mr. Yee is," Ma Tai-tai said. Was she insinuating something, Chia-chih wondered, or were nerves getting the better of her? Observing him smile and banter, Chia-chih even began to read a flattering undertone into Ma Tai-tai's remark, as if she knew that he wanted other people to coax the details of his conquest out of him. Perhaps success, she speculated, can turn the heads of even the professionally secretive. It was getting far too dangerous. If the job wasn't done today, if the thing were to drag on any longer, Yee Tai-tai would surely find them out. He walked off while she was still exhaustingly negotiating her exit with his wife. After finally extricating herself, she returned briefly to her room. As she finished hurriedly tidying her hair and makeup--there was too little time to change her clothes--the maidservant arrived to tell her the car was waiting for her at the door. Getting in, she gave the chauffeur instructions to drive her to a cafe; once arrived, she sent him back home. As it was only midafternoon, the cafe was almost deserted. Its large interior was lit by wall lamps with pleated apricot silk shades, its floor populated by small round tables covered in cloths of fine white linen jacquard--an old-fashioned, middlebrow kind of establishment. She made a call from the public telephone on the counter. After four rings, she hung up and redialed, muttering "wrong number" to herself, for fear the cashier might think her behavior strange. That was the code. The second time, someone answered. "Hello?" "Thank goodness--it was K'uang Yu-min. Even now, she was terrified she might have to speak to Liang Jun-sheng, though he was usually very careful to let others get to the phone first. "It's me," she replied in Cantonese. "Everyone well?" "All fine. How about yourself?" "I'll be going shopping this afternoon, but I'm not sure when." "No problem. We'll wait for you. Where are you now?" "Hsia-fei Road." "Fine." A pause. "Nothing else then?" Her hands felt cold, but she was somehow warmed by the sound of a familiar voice. "No, nothing." "I might go there right now." "We'll be there, don't worry. See you later." She hung up and exited to hail a pedicab. If they didn't finish it off today, she couldn't stay on at the Yees'--not with all those great bejeweled cats watching her every move. Maybe she should have found an excuse to move out as soon as she had hooked him. He could have found her a place somewhere: the last couple of times they'd met in apartments, different ones each time, left vacant by British or Americans departed to war camps. But that probably would have made everything even more complicated--how would she have known what time he was coming? He might have suddenly descended upon her at any moment. Or if they had fixed a time in advance, urgent business might have forced him to cancel at the last minute. Calling him would also have

been difficult, as his wife kept a close eye on him; she probably had spies stationed in all his various offices. A hint of suspicion and the whole thing would be undone: Shanghai crawled with potential informers, all of them eager to ingratiate themselves with the mighty Yee Tai-tai. And if Chia-chih had not pursued him so energetically, he might have cast her aside. Apartments were a popular parting gift to discarded mistresses of Wang Ching-wei's ministers. He had too many temptations jostling before him; far too many for any one moment. And if one of them weren't kept constantly in view, it would slip to the back of his mind and out of sight. No: he had to be nailed--even if she had to keep his nose buried between her breasts to do it."They weren't this big two years ago," he had murmured to her, in between kisses. His head against her chest, he hadn't seen her blush. Even now, it stung her to recall those knowing smirks--from all of them, K'uang Yu-min included. Only Liang Jun-sheng had pretended not to notice how much bigger her breasts now looked. Some episodes from her past she needed to keep banished from her mind. It was some distance to the foreign concessions. When the pedicab reached the corner of Ching-an Temple and Seymour roads, she told him to stop by a small cafe. She looked around her, on the off chance that his car had already arrived. She could see only a vehicle with a bulky, charcoal-burning tank parked a little way up the street.

Users Review

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