

The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard

The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard by Anatole France is a witty and philosophical tale of a kind-hearted scholar whose love for books leads him into moral and emotional dilemmas.



Summaryer

Part I--The Log

I shut myself up in my room, with the "Golden Legend" opened before me. I was stunned. This, then, was the secret of Princess Trepof! An old almanac-peddler's wife, the signora Coccoz, had become a millionaire and a princess. Nothing more natural in our democratic society, where all is possible. But was it very probable? Above all, was it likely that this same person, having heard me tell Madame Trepof all about the manuscript in Sicily, did, on arriving in Paris, conceive the generous fancy of giving me back my cherished dream, my long-desired treasure? All this seemed to me in the highest degree improbable; yet it was the truth. And I, who glory in my reason, had never once suspected the secret.

I devoted myself to accomplishing the task imposed by my gratitude to the singular and touching Princess Trepof—the task of publishing the "Golden Legend" of Jacque de Voragine, completed by the Clerk Alexander. The work was long and arduous; but I brought to it all the devotion of which my heart and mind were capable.

Now, as I write these last lines, the task is finished. The work is published, and already it has won the approval of the learned world. It is not for me to speak of its scientific value; but this I can declare: never, in the course of my long career, have I undertaken

a task that brought me greater joy. I think of it as a monument raised, not to my own glory, but to honor the noble and generous deed of a woman who, beneath the frivolous appearance of Madame Trepof, hid the warm heart and the fine mind of Jeanne Alexandre Coccoz.

My career draws to its close. I have not many more joys to expect from life; but among those few I count this strange and happy adventure of the "Legende Doree." And, lost in these reflections, I imagine I can see, under the golden skies of Sicily, the laughing face of Madame Trepof, forever mingled in my memory with the fragrance of violets.

[The End]



Summaryer

Chapter I -The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard

As Sylvestre Bonnard alights from the train at Melun station, he enters a peaceful, night-draped countryside, his senses alive with the warm scents of sun-baked earth and lush grasses. Carrying a light traveling bag filled with essentials prepared by his housekeeper, Bonnard's thoughts drift nostalgically to his schoolboy days, evoking a longing for the innocence and simplicity of youth. He reminisces about his schoolmaster, the stern Monsieur Douloir, and the tender memories of his mother, contrasted sharply with a bittersweet reflection on Clementine, a lost love who married another.

Bonnard's musings then shift to an acknowledgment of his life lived in the realm of words and books, pondering over the dream of having a son to continue observing the stars long after he's gone. Despite the absence of direct lineage, there's a profound appreciation for the continuity of life and learning. The narrative takes a turn as Monsieur Paul de Gabry, a young man who has recently inherited a property with a valuable library, intercepts Bonnard. The two set off towards the Chateau de Lusance, where Bonnard is to catalog ancient manuscripts.

Monsieur Paul, contrasting his bibliophile father, holds interests primarily in sports and outdoor activities, lacking enthusiasm for the scholarly pursuits that deeply engage Bonnard. During their journey, Paul mentions the other inhabitants of the Chateau and a mysterious Mademoiselle Jeanne, a magician of sorts with a troubled past intertwined with the history of the chateau. The conversation hints at a complex web of relationships and past events that Bonnard is about to step into, setting the stage for intriguing developments at the Chateau de Lusance.

Ultimately, the chapter gently weaves the themes of memory, lost love, and the inexorable passage of time, anchoring them in the physical journey from the train station to the chateau. The night's tranquility and the anticipation of scholarly work

juxtapose with Bonnard's introspective reverie and the forthcoming entanglement in the chateau's affairs, promising a narrative rich with emotion and intellectual pursuit.



Chapter II -The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard

In the second chapter of "The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard," the narrator reflects further on the concept of time and life, emphasising the preciousness of time allotted to us and his desire to accomplish his work before death. He introduces Madame de Gabry, who enlivens breakfast with tales of the chateau's ghosts, notably the "Lady-with-three-wrinkles-in-her-back." The setting provides a glimpse into the decay and resilience of the chateau, juxtaposed with the narrator's efforts to catalog manuscripts in the vast library, hinting at themes of preservation and the relentless force of nature.

Amid his scholarly pursuits, the narrator is drawn into an unexpectedly whimsical encounter with a fairy, who, despite her diminutive size, exudes an imposing presence and grandeur. The fairy's attire and actions, blending magnificence with mischief, enchant the narrator. Her humorous and somewhat irreverent interaction with him, involving tossing nut shells and tickling his nose with a feather pen, highlights a stark contrast between the mundane and the magical.

This encounter with the fairy symbolises the intrusion of the fantastical into the narrator's analytical, scholarly life, offering a moment of reflection on the importance of wonder, imagination, and the unseen aspects of the world that defy rational explanation. The fairy's presence and actions challenge the narrator's usual reliance on logic and evidence, inviting him into a realm where curiosity, charm, and the inexplicable reign supreme.

Despite the initial shock and the humorous indignities he endures, the narrator perceives the encounter as an honour, indicating his openness to the wonder and mystery symbolised by the fairy. This experience suggests that life's richness is not solely found in scholarly achievements or the material world but also in the unexpected and the magical, enriching the human experience with depth and enchantment.

Chapter III -The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard

Chapter III of "The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard" unfolds with Sylvestre recalling an odd dream where fairy-like figures accost him, before shifting back to his reality as a scholar. Ignoring his housekeeper's potential fretting, Bonnard chooses to share his intriguing vision with Madame de Gabry, who delightfully acknowledges the dream's charm, suggesting a hidden genius within him, especially during his sleep. This interaction reveals a warm, gentle camaraderie between Bonnard and Madame de Gabry, accentuated by his gratitude towards her encouraging words.

As days progress, Bonnard immerses himself in cataloging the Lusance library manuscripts. Learning of the financial woes shadowing Monsieur Honore de Gabry's estate prompts him to seek a publisher's counsel for auctioning the library—evidence of Bonnard's naiveté in business matters. His interlude—visiting churches, engaging with local clergy, and enjoying the simple life—suggests a peaceful, reflective period in his research journey.

Upon returning to Lusance, Bonnard is struck by an astonishing sight: a statuette that strikingly resembles the fairy from his dream, sitting on a pier-table. The sight confuses him until Madame de Gabry introduces him to Jeanne, a young orphaned girl with evident talent in wax modeling who crafted the statue based on Bonnard's dream narrative. Jeanne's shy, yet evidently deep, connection to Bonnard's story and Madame de Gabry's subsequent query about the potential of Jeanne's craft to support her financially, highlights themes of creativity, mentorship, and the search for one's place in the world. The chapter tenderly touches on human connections and the impact of nurturing talent within the younger generation, amid Bonnard's continuing scholarly pursuits and personal reflections.

Chapter IV -The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard

This diary entry marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life. The City of Books, once my sanctuary of solitude and scholarly pursuit, had become alive with the presence of youth and love. Jeanne and Gelis, with their innocent affections, had transformed the atmosphere from one of solemn studiousness to one of hopeful brightness.



Summary

As I continued to compile the catalog of my beloved collection for its eventual sale, each book I handled felt like a farewell to an old friend, each with its own story, its own place in my heart. Yet the heaviness of these goodbyes was lifted by the spirit of what I was giving Jeanne—a future, a hope, a new beginning.

I watched Jeanne grow from the scared, fragile girl who had first arrived at my door, into a confident young woman, ready to step into a new life with Gelis. Their love, so pure and fervent, was a reminder of the enduring power of human connection, a testament to the capacity for renewal and joy.

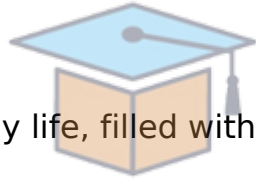
In organizing Jeanne's dowry, I realized I was not just parting with my books, but passing on the wisdom, beauty, and intrigue they contained. This was not a loss but a legacy, a way to extend the life of these treasures beyond my own.

The moment of their betrothal was bittersweet, a culmination of my role as Jeanne's guardian and the beginning of her journey without me. Yet, in her happiness, in the promise of their shared future, I found a deep, fulfilling peace.

The realization that I could be tempted to withhold some volumes for myself was as surprising as it was human. My early morning escapade, driven by an irresistible desire to keep a part of my collection, was a moment of weakness and fondness for the written word that had defined my life.

As I reconciled with this new role, no longer the solitary scholar but a benefactor of youth and love, I felt a profound shift within me. The City of Books, with its many memories and stories, would find a new life through Jeanne and Gelis, and through the love that had unexpectedly bloomed within its walls.

The prospect of leaving my library for a more pastoral life, following in the footsteps of Madame de Gabry, became a desire for simplicity, for living amid the natural beauty that had always inspired me in literature but had been absent from my lived experience.



Summaryer

In this chapter of my life, filled with unexpected joy, love, and sacrifice, I found the true essence of my legacy—not in the shelves of my library, but in the hearts of those I helped bring together and in the promise of the life they would build.

The Last Page

On August 21, 1869, within the confines of his study and nearing the completion of his book on the interaction between insects and flowers, Monsieur Sylvestre Bonnard reflects on the intricate relationships within nature. He articulates the crucial role insects play in the process of pollination, emphasizing the evolutionary adaptations flowers have undergone to attract these vital agents. Through detailed observations and references to esteemed scholars like Sprengel, Bonnard marvels at the purposeful design of nature, where even the most splendidly adorned flowers serve a fundamental role in the perpetuation of their species. Unbeknownst to him, contemporaneous scientists like Darwin, Dr. Hermann Muller, and Sir John Lubbock have embarked on similar lines of inquiry, drawing near-parallel conclusions about the symbiotic bonds between flora and fauna, underscoring Bonnard's unintentional alignment with cutting-edge research despite his primary engagement in archaeology and late-life pivot to natural sciences.

Monsieur Bonnard's dwelling in Brolles, characterized by its picturesque appearance and the notable weather-vane that both amuses and endears him to the local populace, stands as a testament to his cultivated yet simple life. His abode, adorned with personal mementos and spaces dedicated to his family and the cherished memories of little Sylvestre, exudes warmth and reflective solitude. Little Sylvestre's poignant struggles with fear and sleeplessness, soothed only by Bonnard's storytelling--most notably, "The Blue Bird" tale, underscore a tender bond marked by the fragility of life and the transcendental comfort found in shared stories. The narrative juxtaposes Bonnard's intellectual pursuits with the intimate, universal struggles of health, family, and the passing of time, illustrating a life intertwined with the academic, personal, and profound.