

The following excerpt from *Spiritism*, a play by Victorien Sardou; translation by Frank J. Morlock, copyright © 2001, all rights reserved. A woman, bored of her life and feeling ignored by her husband, who seems more interested in the spirit world than their own, is tempted to have an affair. The complete text is available for purchase from Rogue Publishing at [www.roguepublishing.com](http://www.roguepublishing.com).

SIMONE (*interrupting him*) If you only come here to speak evil of my friends—

*She starts to rise. He makes her sit.*

VALENTIN Come, come! I am the best of your friends, you know it. And the oldest. He who carried you in his arms so as not to wet your small feet in the dew of the morning, and who caught butterflies for you. Your wonderful father—who spoiled you, God knows!—invested me with the authority of a big brother, and told me to take care of you and scold you if necessary. One does not remake old practices. I still take care and I scold a little, very little, like a good old watchdog, which cannot be resigned to growl anymore at suspect figures . . . one likely to be made to return to its kennel. . . .

SIMONE You know very well I accept everything from you, and you can say anything without angering me.

VALENTIN Then may I continue?

SIMONE If you wish!

VALENTIN Yes—for this touches on you.

SIMONE You are funny! Go on, go on—scold at your ease. Scold! Bowwow!

VALENTIN I noted you lead a life that is unoccupied. Your idleness will lead to boredom, and boredom to stupid actions. At your age, Balzac said, all women realize they are victims of the social situation.

SIMONE Oh—that's true!

VALENTIN But as we men are your dupes, that restores the equilibrium. At your age, unless distracted by prudery, great concern of duty, or maternal feelings, a woman concludes that an illicit love is not much different than a legitimate one—and that it's hardly worth the trouble to look for a joy as tepid as the one one finds at home.

SIMONE What preaching! Did you get this from your English girl?

VALENTIN Go ahead and joke, but if I've committed stupidities at least you can profit from my experience.

SIMONE Me? In what way?

VALENTIN Simonette, you are a dupe of your imagination, an enthusiast! When you were little, I could never make you admit that the mushroom with the more beautiful color could be the more poisonous. And one doesn't have to be a sorcerer to see that even now your dreams are far from conjugal happiness.

SIMONE Yes—let's speak of that type of happiness.

VALENTIN Haven't you a good husband, as brave and honest as he ought to be?

SIMONE Oh, as to honest and good, yes!

VALENTIN And who loves you?

SIMONE In his way.

VALENTIN Not so bad. He satisfies all your caprices, he has no other will than yours, he gives you freedom, he's not bossy, nor arrogant, nor grouchy, nor jealous—

SIMONE Oh, that, no.

VALENTIN You complain of it?

SIMONE But it's sometimes irritating, you will admit, this self-satisfaction which gives him so much security.

VALENTIN Oh fine!

SIMONE He seems to say, "Oh, I am quite at ease. I am not one of those to be deceived, me! Oh, my wife is not the woman to excite passion!" Which makes me want to scream: "You're not so perfect as all that, and I am not so unattractive as you think!"

VALENTIN Let's admire the exquisite art with which you turn his confidence in you into a crime.

SIMONE It's indifference! But of course—he cares a lot for me! All he has in his head is his physiology, his biology!

VALENTIN Go ahead, complain. After eight years of marriage to have no other rivals to reproach him with than those!

SIMONE For what I gain out of it.

VALENTIN Oh—Simonette.

SIMONE And it isn't enough with his alembics, his retorts, with his laboratory which drives me out with its pharmaceutical odors; now he wants to know what occurs in the other world!

VALENTIN Spiritism.

SIMONE Yes! How much better it would be if he worried about this one!

VALENTIN Oh, so then it is serious?

SIMONE Believe it!

VALENTIN I thought it was a question of salon amusements.

SIMONE Ah, you know very well! This is a new passion. The others occupy him all day. This occupies him all night.

VALENTIN And it's this Scotsman who put it in his head?

SIMONE Oh, yes! First they exchanged letters and books without ever meeting. Then he invited this doctor to stop here for three or four days to show us his little talents. The first night it amused me enough to see the table creak under his fingers, raise a foot, and knock. But the next day I found the game a little monotonous and I left the place.

VALENTIN How can d'Aubenas be the dupe of this exotic doctor?

SIMONE A charlatan, isn't he?

VALENTIN By God! I am going to try to catch him at his tricks. But there is another, my little Simonette, that I warn you of.

SIMONE Another?

VALENTIN Charlatan, yes. The Serb.

SIMONE Mikaël!

VALENTIN Manifestly smitten of you, or at least pretending to be.

SIMONE (*irritated*) You've seen that?

VALENTIN I've also seen his attentions are not disagreeable to you.

SIMONE (*excitedly*) What?

VALENTIN You make me laugh!

SIMONE Then I must give him his dismissal to please you?

VALENTIN Oh, how charmed I would be! And if you could get rid of Thécla with him—arm in arm, as they came. For it was she who presented him to you, right?

SIMONE Yes.

VALENTIN I would have bet on that!

SIMONE Why? Mikaël is her friend!

VALENTIN He's likely more than that.

SIMONE (*shrugging her shoulders with scorn*) Him? You are mad. One cannot talk seriously with you!