

The Devil

Guy de Maupassant

This short story is written by Guy de Maupassant. The title tells us a great deal about the story itself. The devil here is either poverty or the son or mother Rapet. The story deals with the idea of moral duty and survival. Is it more important to gather the wheat crop or stay beside a dying mother who is on her deathbed?

From the very beginning, we are introduced to the fact that the mother is dying; the writer comments from his third person point of view and says, "she was going to die: she accepted the fact she was ninety-two, and her time had come." This is very difficult for the son. He does not know what to do. If he does not gather the wheat crop, it will be destroyed. If he leaves his mother, she may die.

We are then introduced to the name of the son, Honore. The doctor orders him to stay with his mother, to which Honore replies, "I've got to get my wheat is just right now. What do you say, Mother?" The doctor gets angry at him and orders him to "get Mother Rapet to watch over your Mother, dammit!" The doctor threatens him that when Honore is sick, he will refuse to come to cure him.

The peasant is not really heartless; he is very poor. If he does not go to collect the wheat, it will be damaged and he will not be able to survive for another year. So, he accepts the fact that his mother will die soon and she too accepts that. They are both realistic. It is an uncomfortable atmosphere that makes us frustrated. The mother wants her son to be practical because if he does not do that, he will die himself. So, the son has no choice. He cannot afford to have emotions since he is poor.

Moreover, Honore acts in the most possible way according to his circumstances. He is not afraid of death, and neither is she. There is something wrong in their relationship; the mother is very realistic and she accepts the situation. The doctor is rich, so he can afford to have feelings. He threatens the son because of his job. He is in a more controlling position. He threatens him because he is from a higher class; he is also brutish. The peasant is so scared from the doctor; he therefore has no choice and must get Mother Rapet. The writer uses the word "peasant" to generalize. He represents all poor peasants in the world.

Mother Rapet, an old woman who takes in ironing, watches over the dead and dying in the village and the surrounding countryside. She is old, has wrinkles

and is double-bent. She is very ugly and this is relevant to her role in the story. Both Mother Rapet and the peasant are very materialistic. Each one tries to cheat the other; they are both poor and miserable. Mother Rapet offers the peasant two prices, "Two francs a day and three francs a night for the rich." The peasant thinks this is expensive. He then tries to convince her to give her a fixed price, "Doctors says she will go pretty soon. Is she does, you win and I lose. But if she hangs on till tomorrow or longer, then I will and you lose." Mother Rapet hesitates because she has never taken a fixed price before. She decides to see his mother first. After seeing her, she finally agrees to take six francs for the whole job. "They haggled for a long time, each as stubborn as the other." It is very funny and ironic that they haggle about the death of a mother.

Mother Rapet starts to get bored because as she watches over the dying mother, she finds that the old woman refuses to die. She feels that she will lose her time and she will lose the bet. She starts to think of killing her. The whole situation is funny but painful at the same time. People do not have time to express their emotions. All these are the facts of the 19th century life.

The devil indicates two things in this short story. Mother Rapet may be the real devil who has to wait for the woman to die. She cannot afford to wait for her to die and she finally kills her. Mother Rapet is ugly from the inside and the outside. She talks about dead people as if it is something she is proud of. She has no emotions or feelings; she is rather practical. The word "devil" may also refer to poverty which becomes like a devil.

At one time, Mother Rapet thought that the old woman, mother Bontemps, is dying. She rushes to get the priest. After making her confession, the woman seems to refuse to die. When Honore returns home at night, he finds that his mother is still alive. **"The nurse realized that things could go on like this for two days, four days, even a week, and fear gripped her miserly heart, while she felt a rush of anger against the cunning fellow who had tricked and against this woman who refused to die"**. She then thinks of killing that **"stubborn, obstinate, pig-headed old fool by the throat"**. Then, she has a very clever and devilish idea. She tells the dying woman that at a certain time when death is so near to her, the devil always appears to the dying person. He has a broom in his hand and a cooking-pot on his head, and he utters loud shrieks. She then lists people who have seen it themselves on their deathbeds. The dying mother gets terrified. Then, Mother Rapet acts this role and appears to the dying woman as the devil himself. The dying woman "made superhuman effort to get up and run away". Yet, she finally dies.

A final ironic touch is when Honore comes home and finds his mother dead. He **"calculates that she has made a whole franc out of him, for she has spent**

three days and one night watching over his mother, which comes to five francs, whereas he owes her six". This is very ironic of the son who is not sad at all for the loss of his mother. He is only sad because he has lost the bet.

The title of the short story is important since it shows how the woman died and it also shows the ugliness of poverty.