

D. H. Lawrence

# The Lovely Lady



Pauline Attenborough was seventy-two years old, but she looked much younger. When a soft light shone on her, she could look as young as thirty. She had a lovely figure and face, and her nose was a very good shape. Only her big grey eyes made her look older.

Pauline had left her husband, Ronald, many years ago. Pauline and Ronald had had two sons, Henry and Robert. Henry, the older son, had died when Robert was only ten. Now Robert was thirty-two. He lived with his mother and worked as a lawyer in London. Robert Attenborough did not earn very much money, but this was not a problem. His mother was a rich woman.

Pauline's niece, Ciss, also lived in the house. Her father, Ronald Attenborough's brother, had died five years ago. Ciss had no money or home of her own. She needed a place to live. So she depended on her Aunt Pauline.

Ciss was a big young woman, with dark hair and eyes. She was very shy. She was in love with her cousin, Robert, but she had never told him this. Robert was also very shy. He had no confidence in himself.

Pauline, Robert and Ciss lived together quietly, in a lovely house about twenty-five miles from London. The house was surrounded by pleasant gardens. It was the perfect house and the perfect life for Pauline. Every day, Robert went to work in London. Then when he came home, the three of them - Pauline, Robert and Ciss - ate dinner together.

During dinner, there were always candles on the table. Pauline liked candles because the soft candlelight made her look young and beautiful. The soft light shone on the skin of her bare arms and the soft material of her dress. Pauline shone with happiness. She looked like a beautiful woman of only thirty-two or thirty-three.

After dinner, they had coffee in the warm drawing room. The room was full of lovely furniture. For many years, Pauline had collected furniture and beautiful, unusual pictures from many different countries. She had sold

these things to museums for a lot of money. This had made her a rich woman.

Pauline, Robert and Ciss chatted together pleasantly. Their conversation was always simple and bright. Then at half-past eight, Ciss carried the tray of coffee things out of the room. Robert always stayed and continued chatting to his mother. He always listened to everything that she said.

At the side of the house, there was a large courtyard. Ciss had a flat just across the courtyard, above the old coach house and stables. Several years ago, a carriage and horses had been kept in these buildings. Now Robert kept his car in the coach-house.

Ciss did not always go to her flat after dinner. In summer, she sometimes sat outside in the large garden. She listened to Pauline's laughter coming from the drawing room. In winter, Ciss put on a thick coat and walked through the garden and down to the little bridge over the stream. She liked to hear the water running under the bridge. She would look back at the lighted windows of the drawing room, where Pauline and Robert were so happy together.

Ciss loved Robert. 'I believe that Pauline wants Robert to marry me when she dies,' she thought. 'But Robert is very shy. Perhaps his mother won't die for many years. By that time, it will be too late. Robert will be just an empty man who never enjoyed his life.'

Sometimes Ciss stayed in the dark garden until about ten o'clock, when she saw the light go on in Pauline's bedroom. Robert usually stayed in the drawing room for another hour, then he would go to bed too. Ciss, standing in the garden, wanted to go to him. She wanted to say, 'Oh, Robert! This is all wrong!' But she could not do this because Aunt Pauline would hear. So she went to her own rooms.

In the mornings, Robert went to London at about nine o'clock. Pauline rested in bed. She came downstairs at lunchtime. Sometimes she did not leave her bedroom until teatime. But she always looked fresh and young.

Pauline always had a rest in the afternoons. When the sun shone, she liked to lie outside and bathe in the warm sun. Behind the stables, there was a second, smaller courtyard, which was surrounded by trees. The sun shone right down into this little courtyard, so it was a perfect place for sunbathing. Here, Ciss put a chair for Pauline to lie on, a large umbrella and blankets. If the sun became too hot, Pauline could lie in the shade of the umbrella.

One afternoon, Ciss decided to sunbathe too. She found a ladder and climbed up onto the flat roof of the stables. Then she lay down on a blanket in one corner of the roof. The sun shone brightly here and it was very hot. Ciss was above Aunt Pauline, who lay in the little courtyard below. But Pauline did not know that Ciss was on the roof above her.

It was lovely, lying in the warm sun and air. The warmth of the sun on her legs and arms made Ciss feel comfortable and relaxed. Suddenly she heard a voice speaking softly and her heart jumped with fear and shock.

'No, Henry dear!' said the voice. 'It was not my fault that you died instead of marrying Claudia.'

The voice did not sound human. Where was it coming from? There must be someone on the roof! Ciss lifted her head and looked around. But there was nobody on the roof with her.

Suddenly she heard the soft voice again.

'No, darling! I said that you would be tired of her in six months! I warned you, and it was true. I couldn't do anything more. And you died without ever knowing me again.'

The voice was silent. Ciss lay on her blanket. It was a beautiful summer afternoon. Did the voice belong to a ghost? Ciss hated the idea of ghosts, spirits and magic.

Then she heard a deep sigh and the strange voice spoke again.

'Ah, well, a heart must feel pain! But it wasn't my fault, dear. It is better for a heart to feel pain, rather than break from sorrow. And Robert

could marry poor, boring Ciss tomorrow, if he wanted to. But he doesn't care about her.'

Ciss sat up quickly. She was very surprised. It was Aunt Pauline talking! It must be Aunt Pauline! Where was she? And how was Ciss hearing her strange whispers? Aunt Pauline must be lying right below her. And she must be using a trick to make her voice sound strange. Aunt Pauline was trying to frighten her! Ciss was still afraid, but she was now thinking more clearly.

Ciss lay down again. She knew the story of Henry, Robert's older brother. Henry had been in love with Claudia, a beautiful young actress. But his mother had been against Claudia and had laughed at Henry. Henry had become ill with a brain disease and died at the age of twenty two.

'I think that I should get up now,' the voice was saying. 'I've had enough sun. A woman might live forever if she has enough sun, love and good food. I truly believe a good life will make me live forever.'

'That is certainly Aunt Pauline's voice,' Ciss said to herself. 'How horrible! I'm hearing Aunt Pauline's thoughts.'

Ciss turned and looked down in front of her. She was staring at a hole in the corner of the roof. The lead gutter, the pipe for taking away the rainwater, went down into this hole. The water then came out of the rain pipe, near the ground. Suddenly a sigh and a whisper came out of the hole.

'Ah well, Pauline! Get up. You've had enough sun today.'

Now Ciss understood. Aunt Pauline was lying below her and the rain pipe was carrying her voice up to the roof! Aunt Pauline was speaking her thoughts aloud. She did not know that the sound of her voice was going up to the roof.

So Aunt Pauline was feeling guilty about Henry's death. He had died and she thought that it was her fault. Ciss believed that Pauline had loved her big, handsome son Henry, more than she loved Robert. Henry's death

had been a terrible shock for Pauline. She only loved Robert because Henry was dead.

Ciss put on her clothes, picked up her blanket, and carefully climbed down the ladder. As she went down, she heard her aunt calling, 'All right, Ciss!' The lovely lady had finished sunbathing. She was returning to the house.

Ciss went into the small courtyard. She picked up Pauline's blankets and the chair and put them in the house. Then she looked for the opening of the rain pipe. She found it in the corner of two walls of the stable building. The mouth of the rain pipe was almost hidden by the leaves of a plant on the wall. When Pauline sat in her chair and turned her face to the wall, her mouth would be near to the rain pipe. Ciss had heard her aunt's voice. No ghosts, spirits, or magic had made the voice.

That evening, after they had drunk their coffee, Pauline stood up. 'The sun has made me so sleepy today,' she said. 'I shall go to bed now. You two sit and chat.'

When Pauline had gone to bed, Ciss turned towards Robert. 'Do you remember your brother, Henry?' she asked him.

Robert looked at her in surprise. 'Yes, very well,' he said.

'What was he like?' asked Ciss.

'Tall and handsome, with soft brown hair like mother,' Robert said. 'Women liked him. Henry was very happy and clever.'

'Did he love your mother?'

'Very much,' Robert said. 'She loved him too - more than she loves me.'

'Robert,' Ciss said. 'Do you like me?'

Ciss saw Robert's face become pale.

'Yes,' Robert said. 'I like you very much.'

'Will you kiss me? Nobody ever kisses me,' Ciss said.

Robert looked at his cousin with fear in his eyes. Then he stood up and kissed her gently on the cheek. Ciss held Robert's hand and pressed it against her breast.

'Come and sit with me in the garden,' she said.

'But what about mother?' he said. He was nervous and shy.

Ciss smiled a little and looked into his eyes. Suddenly Robert's face became red. A few minutes later, she left him and went to her flat.

The sunny weather continued. It was now July. Every afternoon, Pauline sunbathed in the small courtyard. And Ciss lay on the roof above the stables, listening. But the sound of Pauline's voice did not come up the pipe again.

After dinner in the evenings, Ciss waited in the garden. She saw the light go on in her aunt's bedroom. She saw the lights go out in the drawing room. She waited, but Robert did not come into the garden. Then one night, he came out and walked towards her. Ciss stood up and walked softly over the grass to him.

'Don't speak,' Robert whispered.

They stood together, looking up at the stars in the dark sky.

'How can I ask you to love me?' he said. 'And how can I marry? I haven't made much money. And I can't ask my mother for money.'

'Then don't worry about marrying yet,' Ciss said. 'But do love me a little.'

Robert gave a short laugh. 'It's hard to begin,' he said.

They sat down and he held her hand. At last, she said goodnight, stood up, and went indoors.

The next day, Ciss lay on the roof, sunbathing. Suddenly she heard her aunt's voice from the hole in the lead gutter.

First Pauline spoke in Italian, then she spoke in English.

'No, Robert dear,' said Pauline's voice. 'You will never be the same kind of man as your father. But you look like him. Mauro was a wonderful lover. Mauro! Mauro! How you loved me!'

The voice stopped speaking. Ciss realized that her aunt had a secret. Pauline's husband, Ronald, had not been Robert's father! Robert's father had been an Italian man called Mauro.

'I'm disappointed with you, Robert,' continued Pauline's voice. 'Your father was a priest, but he was the best lover in the world. You are like a cold fish. And Ciss is like a cat who is trying to catch you.'

Ciss suddenly put her mouth near the hole in the rain pipe and spoke. 'Leave Robert alone!' she said in a deep voice. 'Don't kill him too.'

There was a silence. The hot afternoon sun shone on the flat roof of the stables. Ciss listened, with her heart beating quickly. At last, she heard her aunt Pauline whisper the words, 'Did someone speak?'

Ciss spoke again into the hole of the lead gutter.

'You killed me,' she said in a deep, terrible voice. 'Don't kill Robert too!'

'Ah!' said Pauline, giving a little cry. 'Who's speaking?'

'Henry!' said Ciss in the same, deep voice.

There was silence again.



'I didn't kill you, Henry,' said Pauline. 'No! No! Henry, it wasn't my fault. I loved you, my dearest boy. I only wanted to help you.'

'You killed me!' Ciss said in the deep voice. Now, let Robert live. Let him go! Let him marry!'

'Henry!' said Pauline. Are you a ghost? Have you come to punish me for your death?'

'YES! I HAVE COME TO PUNISH YOU!' said Ciss in a terrible, frightening voice.

She was very angry with Pauline. She felt that her anger was going down the rain pipe to her aunt. At the same time, she almost laughed. This was a very funny conversation!

Ciss lay and listened. No sound came from the rain pipe. The afternoon had become cooler. Yellow and grey clouds had covered the sun. There was a roar of thunder. A storm was coming. Ciss dressed quickly, went down the ladder, and ran to the corner of the stables.

'Aunt Pauline!' she called. 'Did you hear thunder?'

'Y-yes! I am going indoors,' her aunt replied in a weak voice. 'Don't wait for me.'

Ciss watched her aunt go inside the house. The sky was growing darker. Ciss took the blankets and the chair and hurried inside.

Then the storm began. Pauline did not come downstairs to tea because she did not like thunder. Robert did not arrive home until after tea. By this time, the rain was pouring down.

Ciss went to her flat and got ready for dinner. She put on a pretty white dress and fastened some white flowers at her breast. When she went into the drawing room, Robert was waiting. He was standing by the drawing-room window and listening to the rain falling. He now had a different look on his face as he watched her.

The drawing room was lit by the soft light of a table lamp. Ciss walked towards the bookshelves near the door. When she heard the door opening softly, Ciss suddenly turned on the switch of the ceiling light. Her aunt, wearing a black dress, stood in the doorway. The strong, hard light showed her face clearly. Pauline was wearing make-up, but her face looked old and full of hate.

'Oh, aunt!' cried Ciss.

'Mother, you look like a little old lady!' said Robert in a shocked voice.

'Aren't we going to eat dinner?' asked Pauline angrily.

Pauline sat at the table, getting angrier and angrier. She looked very, very old and very ugly.

Ciss and Robert watched each other. He was very shocked by his mother's face. Pauline ate her dinner quickly, like a hungry dog. As soon as they had finished eating, she ran towards the stairs. Robert and Ciss followed her from the room.

'You pour the coffee. I hate it,' said the old woman quickly. 'I'm going to bed! Goodnight!'

There was silence. At last, Robert said, 'I'm afraid that mother isn't well. She must see a doctor.'

'Yes,' said Ciss.

The rest of the evening passed in silence. Robert and Ciss stayed in the drawing room. A fire was lit. Outside, cold rain was falling.

At about ten o'clock, the door opened and Pauline came into the room. She shut the door and came to the fire. Then she looked at Robert and Ciss with hate in her eyes.

'You two should get married quickly,' she said in an ugly voice. 'You are so much in love.'

Robert looked up at his mother. 'You believed that cousins should not marry, Mother,' he said quietly. 'You told me that often.'

'I do believe that cousins shouldn't marry,' replied Pauline. 'But you're not cousins. Your father was an Italian priest, Robert. He was a great man. And he was too great to have a weak son like you.'

With a terrible look on her face, Pauline left the room.

Pauline had gone mad. Her madness continued for a week. The doctor came and told her that she must sleep. He gave her drugs to help her. But she did not take the medicine. She walked about her room, looking ugly and full of hate. She would not look at either Robert or Ciss.

At first, Ciss was frightened by what she had done. She realized that her trick had made her aunt mad. Ciss almost felt sorry for the terrible thing that she had done.

Then she thought, 'This woman is the real Pauline. We never saw her true character before.'

But Pauline was not going to live long. She stayed in her room, and did not see anyone. She had her mirrors taken away. She did not want to look at herself.

Robert and Ciss spent a lot of time together. But Ciss could not tell Robert what she had done. She was afraid.

'Do you think that your mother ever loved anybody?' Ciss asked him one evening.

'Mother only loved herself!' Robert said. 'And she loved power. She got her power by controlling other people's lives. She was beautiful, and she grew strong by controlling everyone and everything. She destroyed Henry and she was destroying me.'

'And don't you forgive her?' asked Ciss.

'No, I don't. She took other people's hopes and happiness and destroyed them.'

Two days later, Pauline died.

Ciss found her dead, in her bed. Pauline's heart had become weak, and the drugs that she took were too strong for her. But after her death, Pauline got her revenge on her son and her niece.

Pauline Attenborough was a very rich woman, but she left Robert only one thousand pounds. And she left Ciss only one hundred pounds. The rest of her money went to a museum. She had built a museum and given it her own name - the Pauline Attenborough Museum.

- THE END -

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