

**Monsieur Latoit's Lesson**

*a 10-minute inappropriate relationship for fencing master and maiden*

by Jeff Goode  
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*(A secluded wood. Enter a FENCING MASTER and a FEMALE STUDENT for a private lesson.)*

DAMSEL

Monsieur Latoit, I know it is not the place of the student to question the master...

LATOIT

No, it is not.

DAMSEL

But why are we traveling so far into the woods?

LATOIT

I promised you a private lesson, and for that we must have utmost privacy.

DAMSEL

*(gasps)* The sincerest form of privacy!

LATOIT

These secluded woods are secluded for good reason, for they are rumored to be rife with rogues and highwaymen.

DAMSEL

And bears.

LATOIT

No one would dare to find us out here and disturb our concentration.

DAMSEL

Except the rogues and highwaymen.

LATOIT

Yes.

DAMSEL

And bears.

LATOIT

You need not fear the ravages of Mother Nature or the nature of Father Ravagery, while I am your fencing master. I would not let you fall into the marauding hands of such rude intruders.

DAMSEL

Bears have paws.

LATOIT

Whatever they hope to violate you with. You are in my paws now. And no man but I shall lay a finger on your chaste, but quivering form.

DAMSEL

Or bear.

LATOIT

Or bear.

DAMSEL

This is such an honour.

LATOIT

Of course, it is.

DAMSEL

To be selected by Monsieur Latoit, the second finest swordsman in the province, to be led alone into the woods for a private instruction.

LATOIT

It is beyond your dreams, is it not?

DAMSEL

Oh, no. It is almost exactly the dream of every girl at Monsieur Latoit's prestigious fencing academy for wayward damsels. (*dreamily*) As she lies awake nights on her little cot in the all-girls dormitory. Clutching her feather pillow tightly between her... arms. Yes, arms. Claspng it to her heaving bosom like a lover... of fine feather pillows... might do in her situation.

LATOIT

You are too fond of the pillows. We get them in bulk. They are hardly fine.

DAMSEL

But why me? Of all the damsels at the Latoit Academy, why single out a naïve and impressionable local peasant girl to receive your special attentions and intimate tutelage?

LATOIT

Well, you are, after all, the most gifted student at the school for damsels. There is no need to be modest. In fact, here in this secluded glade, away from prying eyes, I encourage you to be as immodest as possible.

DAMSEL

The other damsels will be so envious.

LATOIT

Really? How envious?

DAMSEL

Oh, very envious.

LATOIT

Will there be pillow fights?

DAMSEL

How do you know about the pillow fights?! ...which we use to settle disputes between sparring damsels.

LATOIT

Who do you think has to clean up after your nightly bouts of shameless girlish abandon?

DAMSEL

Monsieur Lebrosse the custodian.

LATOIT

That is correct! And he tells me everything.

DAMSEL

I suppose it is inconsiderate of us to leave the dormitory cluttered every morning with pillow feathers and torn camisoles. Is there no way to make it up to you?

LATOIT

Well, you could describe them to me.

DAMSEL

The camisoles?

LATOIT

No, the pillow fights. But feel free to mention the camisoles as they come up in your description.

DAMSEL

Well... Marie will probably start it.... She wears a burgundy nightshirt.

LATOIT

Marie the fat one? Never mind. Perhaps your nocturnal frolics are better left to my imagination.

DAMSEL

Yes, perhaps that's best. What the other girls would think of me if they found out I had divulged our frivolity in mixed company.

LATOIT

No, they must never find out! You must never speak of this conversation. Or any other conversations we may have here. Or positions we may occupy in space.

DAMSEL

But why may I not tell the other girls?

LATOIT

Because they are all such terrible gossips, for one thing.

DAMSEL

Yes, but if I swear them all to secrecy...

LATOIT

No.

DAMSEL

If I double swear them?

LATOIT

No! You must swear instead to me never to breathe a word of what goes on behind the closed doors of this secluded glade.

DAMSEL

I swear it. But why?

LATOIT

Because the lessons you will learn here are so secret...

DAMSEL

Yes? Yes?

LATOIT

So personal and private...

DAMSEL

Yes, Monsieur Latoit?

LATOIT

That even I cannot tell you how secret they are.

DAMSEL

Then how will I learn them?

LATOIT

How does one learn anything that is forbidden and inexplicable?

DAMSEL

Through terrible gossip?

LATOIT

No! Through first hand experience!

DAMSEL

First hand?! Oh, yes! I am eager to have that kind of experience!

LATOIT

Then wait right here.

*(He exits.)*

DAMSEL

To think that I should find myself in this position! Miles from the fencing academy. And on the verge of a learning experience I shall not soon forget.

LATOIT

*(offstage)* Nor shall I!

DAMSEL

I, a mere peasant girl from the local village, who could only attend the school for damsels on a generous endowment from an anonymous male benefactor—

*(Latoit suddenly pokes his head in.)*

LATOIT

What makes you think his endowment is male, this benefactor? And not perhaps an anonymous person of indeterminate gender who happened to notice you frolicking in the village square. And thought you showed natural grace and agility. *(dreamily)* And a certain coltish *je ne sais quoi*. Splashing about in the fountain. And followed you home to watch you change out of those wet things.

DAMSEL

Oh, Monsieur Latoit. You are teasing me. Who else but a man would have that kind of disposable income—in this quaint and bygone era—to spend on philanthropic pursuits?

LATOIT

You are right, of course. There is nothing suspicious about the endowment.

*(He quickly ducks back out.)*

DAMSEL

Though it is strange that only the prettiest girls at the academy receive them.

LATOIT

*(offstage)* Yes... that's lucky.

DAMSEL

But I am grateful for it, nonetheless, whoever he is. Or she. Though it saddens me that the academy's confidentiality agreement prevents me from showing him my gratitude in person.

*(Latoit reenters wearing silk pajamas.)*

LATOIT

Well, perhaps you could show your gratitude to me. And I will relay the message.

DAMSEL

Monsieur Latoit? Are you wearing pajamas?

What, these? No, not in the least. This is imported silk fighting gear. From the Orient. A kimono, they call it.

DAMSEL

I do so love the Orient. With its tea and *(dreamily)* whatever else they have. Do I smell sandalwood?

LATOIT

I lit some candles. To set the mood.

DAMSEL

What mood?

LATOIT

A proper environment allows the student to absorb the training more fully.

DAMSEL

So this is normal?

LATOIT

No, not at all. This is very advanced.

DAMSEL

I see.

LATOIT

Are you ready for your lesson?

DAMSEL

Yes, Monseieur.

LATOIT

Let us begin.

*(She draws her sword. He takes out a bottle of champagne.)*

LATOIT

Champagne?

DAMSEL

Oh... uh... I'd better not.

LATOIT

One glass couldn't hurt.

DAMSEL

But if we're going to be dueling...

LATOIT

Just a taste.

DAMSEL

Uh... No, thank you. I have water.

*(She takes out a canteen. He glares.)*

DAMSEL

I'm sorry. Was that rude of me?

LATOIT

*(blithely)* Not at all. In fact, you have just passed your first test!

DAMSEL

I have?

LATOIT

One must always be wary of adversaries bearing gifts. Especially, if they come in the form of an open beverage. Well done.

*(He raises his glass to her. She drinks from her canteen.)*

LATOIT

But what if your opponent has already spiked your canteen?

DAMSEL

Why would he—? *(She suddenly spits her water.)* Monsieur Latoit!

LATOIT

Cheers!

*(He drinks.)*

DAMSEL

Did you put something in my water?

LATOIT

We shall find out in a moment. En garde!

*(He draws his sword and attacks. They fight, somewhat perfunctorily. She manages to win.)*

LATOIT

You fight well.

DAMSEL

Thank you.

LATOIT

For the class room.

DAMSEL

But that's the only place I have ever fought. In the halls and gymnasiums of the academy. And once in the dormitory. But Marie started it!

LATOIT

That is my negligence. I have trained you for the disciplined duels of academia. But out on the battlefield. Or cornered alone in a remote wooded area. One cannot rely on one's rival to fight by the book.

DAMSEL

I suppose not.

LATOIT

A young mademoiselle must be prepared for anything.

DAMSEL

Yes, Monsieur.

LATOIT

I mean anything.

DAMSEL

Yes, Mons— What do you mean “anything”?

LATOIT

Oh, you know... Subterfuge. Sabotage. Games of the mind. And body. And mind again. Attacks by surprise. Attacks from behind. Attacks from underneath. Tickling.

DAMSEL

Tickling?!

LATOIT

Have you never been tickled into submission?

DAMSEL

You asked me not to describe our nocturnal frolics.

LATOIT

Maybe just this once.

DAMSEL

Well... Marie will probably start it...

LATOIT

Never mind!

DAMSEL

Perhaps that's best.

LATOIT

You can never be fully prepared for what you cannot expect. So you must expect only that for which you are least prepared.

DAMSEL

That makes sense.

LATOIT  
Does it?

DAMSEL  
No.

LATOIT  
Now you begin to understand.

*(She braces herself.)*

DAMSEL  
All right then, I am ready, Monseieur Latoit. There is nothing you can do to surprise me.

*(He rips off his pants.)*

LATOIT  
En garde!

*(He attacks.)*

DAMSEL  
Monseieur Latoit! You are bottomless!

LATOIT  
You sound surprised.

*(They fight. She keeps her eyes averted the whole time.)*

DAMSEL  
I don't know what to say. Or do. Or think.

LATOIT  
And that is exactly what your attacker would have been hoping for. If this had been a real attack, you would already be at my mercy. Fortunately, it is just a drill.

DAMSEL  
It feels very authentic.

LATOIT  
Come, come! How will you fight with your eyes averted?

*(He defeats her.)*

LATOIT  
Very poorly, it seems.

DAMSEL

I'm sorry. I could not concentrate. I am afraid I have let you down.

LATOIT

Do not be so hard on yourself.

*(He pulls her close.)*

LATOIT

That is my job.

DAMSEL

...Monseieur Latoit?

LATOIT

...Yes?

DAMSEL

...Are you offering me a cigarette?

LATOIT

Why would I offer you—Oh!—No!—That is a cigar at least!

DAMSEL

I wouldn't know.

LATOIT

An imported cigar. From Cuba. Big. Very thick.

DAMSEL

If you say so. I'm really not a smoker.

LATOIT

And expensive, too. Lasts all night.

DAMSEL

My Uncle Francois is a cigar lover.

LATOIT

You keep your pervert uncle away from me!

DAMSEL

I am very confused by this conversation.

LATOIT

I had such hopes. But if you haven't the courage to look a man in the pants. How will you face him on the battlefield?

DAMSEL

It's not his face I'm having trouble with.

LATOIT

I am so disappointed.

DAMSEL

But Monsieur, is this at all likely?

LATOIT

Likely?! What is likely about a damsel with a sword? Are you in a women's regiment? Are you likely to go to war? Do you work for the queen? And are you likely to duel the other ladies-in-waiting for her favour? No! There is only one "likely" reason for a damsel to know her way around a rapier, and that is to foil an attempt of violent seduction.

DAMSEL

But how can I defend myself against that?

LATOIT

Do you know, Mademoiselle, what the best defense is?

DAMSEL

A machicolated battlement?

LATOIT

No! It is a good offense.

DAMSEL

But what is more offensive than a man from the waist down? Especially a married man. Such as yourself.

LATOIT

Allow me to demonstrate. This is called the Latoit Defense. I will be you. You will be a depraved seducer. Come at me.

DAMSEL

*(manly)* Bon soir, Mademoiselle.

LATOIT

No, no you are a seducer. You must be seductive.

DAMSEL

*(manly)* I desire you in ways you had hitherto thought unimaginable.

LATOIT

And depraved!

DAMSEL

*(manly)* But enough talk. Prepare to be sullied!

*(She draws her sword.)*

LATOIT

*(womanly)* If you desire me, then you shall have me—!

DAMSEL

Now, wait a minute.

LATOIT

*(womanly)* Over the dead bodies of my sainted mother and all of my maiden aunts!

DAMSEL

That's better.

LATOIT

And now, the Latoit Defense. Have at me!

*(She attacks. In a flurry of defensive moves, Latoit allows himself to be backed across the clearing...)*

DAMSEL

*(manly)* Your eyes, Mademoiselle, say, "no", but your lips, say...

*(She pins him against a tree. He suddenly pulls her close and kisses her.)*

LATOIT

Hello.

DAMSEL

Monsieur Latoit! You took advantage of me.

LATOIT

Au contraire, you took advantage of me. And you should be ashamed.

*(He slaps her.)*

LATOIT

Now take off your clothes.

DAMSEL

But why?

LATOIT

You must stand for your final examination. Or sit. Or lie down, if you like.

DAMSEL

Am I still a depraved seducer?

LATOIT

You may play whatever part gets you through it. Just take off your clothes.

DAMSEL

Are you sure this is part of the lesson?

LATOIT

We are beyond lessons now.

DAMSEL

I don't think I want to go beyond lessons.

LATOIT

You have mastered all the offensive arts. There is only one thing left for you to learn.

DAMSEL

What's that?

LATOIT

What to do when you fail.

DAMSEL

When I fail?

LATOIT

Of course, Mademoiselle. Not every battle is won. We must always hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

DAMSEL

The worst?

LATOIT

If you are cornered in the woods, as you are now. And disarmed—(*he slaps the weapon out of her hands*)—as you are now. Yet still, somehow, alluring...as you are now. What will you do?

DAMSEL

I know a bit of screaming.

LATOIT

Screaming will get you bears.

DAMSEL

That's true. I could scream quietly.

LATOIT

I like the sound of that.

*(He kisses her neck. She screams quietly. It doesn't seem to help.)*

DAMSEL

I don't think the scream is working.

LATOIT

It's working for me.

*(She fends him off.)*

DAMSEL

Monsieur Latoit, please! You are married.

LATOIT

And you are not.

DAMSEL

So?

LATOIT

So you are doing nothing wrong.

DAMSEL

I suppose that's true.

LATOIT

And I, on the other hand, have sworn you to secrecy, so as far as my wife knows, I am doing nothing wrong.

DAMSEL

It does seem fool proof.

LATOIT

Now where was I? Ah, yes! So if you should ever find yourself in this situation— however unlikely that may be—you need only remember one thing:

DAMSEL

What's that?

LATOIT

A satisfied highwayman is a lethargic and docile highwayman.

DAMSEL

A satis—I've never heard that one.

LATOIT

No? Then how about this one: Your lips say, "no", but your eyes say—

DAMSEL

No!

*(She kicks him where he most deserves it. He recoils. They fight. She wins.)*

DAMSEL

I begin to suspect that this whole lesson has been nothing but a subterfuge! And that was no cigarette in your pocket!

LATOIT

Cigar! It's a cigar!

DAMSEL

Take one more step and your smoking days will be over!

*(She gathers up her things.)*

DAMSEL

And do not attempt to follow me, or they will have to fit you for a pipe.

LATOIT

Don't be childish. Where will you go? Into the dark woods? Filled with wild beasts and brambles. And possibly highwaymen or worse.

DAMSEL

What's worse than a highwayman?

LATOIT

*(shrugs)* A bare highwayman?

DAMSEL

Why would a bear want—Oh!

*(She tries to slap him. He catches her wrist.)*

LATOIT

You will have to return to the academy eventually, where I am the headmaster.

DAMSEL

Never!

LATOIT

Or to the village where you grew up and I am a well-known and respected philanthropist.

DAMSEL

I can think of nothing worse than returning to anyplace where you are considered respectable. Now that I know the sort of man you are, I'll take my chance with the brambles!

*(She knocks him down and runs off into the forest.)*

LATOIT

You'll be back! And if you're not back in five minute, I'm coming in after you. As soon as I find my pants.

*(She returns.)*

LATOIT

I knew you'd be back.

DAMSEL

You are right. If I flee into the brambles, you would only follow me. And I cannot run in these shoes.

LATOIT

I am glad you have learned your lesson.

DAMSEL

So I'm taking your pants!

*(She grabs his pants.)*

LATOIT

What?!

*(He chases her around the clearing, until he remembers that she is armed and he is not.)*

LATOIT

What are you going to do? Where are you going to go? Who are you going to talk to?

DAMSEL

Don't worry, Monsieur Latoit, I would never breathe a word of what has gone on here.

LATOIT

That's good to know.

DAMSEL

But when your wife sees you like this, I'm sure she'll beat it out of you. Adieu! And I hope you've learned your lesson.

*(She exits into the woods with his pants.)*

LATOIT

Wait! Come back here!! You can't just leave me! ...Please? ...You're getting very poor marks for this!

*(He picks up the champagne bottle and hides his shame with it.)*

~~ FIN ~~