



**Learn English Through Stories**

**G Series**

**G36**

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# 1. Louise

By Somerset Maugham

I could never understand why Louise bothered with me. She disliked me and I knew that behind my back she seldom lost the opportunity of saying a disagreeable thing about me. She had too much delicacy ever to make a direct statement, but with a hint and a sigh and a little gesture of her beautiful hands she was able to make her meaning plain. It was true that we had known one another almost intimately for five and twenty years, but it was impossible for me to believe that this fact meant much to her. She thought me a brutal, cynical and vulgar fellow. I was puzzled at her not leaving me alone. She did nothing of the kind; indeed, she was constantly asking me to lunch and dine with her and once or twice a year invited me to spend a week-end at her house in the country. Perhaps she knew that I alone saw her face behind the mask and she hoped that sooner or later I too should take the mask for the face.

I knew Louise before she married. She was then a frail, delicate girl with large and melancholy eyes. Her father and mother adored and worshipped her, for some illness, scarlet fever I think, had left her with a weak heart and she had to take the greatest care of herself. When Tom Maitland proposed to her they were dismayed, for they were convinced that she was much too delicate for marriage. But they were not too well off and Tom Maitland was rich. He promised to do everything in the world for Louise and finally they entrusted her to him. Tom Maitland was a big strong fellow, very good-looking and a fine athlete. He adored Louise. With her weak heart he could not hope to keep her with him long and he made up his mind to do everything he could to make her few years on earth happy. He gave up the games he played excellently, not because she wished him to, but because it so happened that she always had a heart attack whenever he was going to leave her for a day. If they had a difference of opinion she gave in to him at once for she was the most gentle wife a man could have, but her heart failed her and she would stay in bed, sweet and uncomplaining, for a week. He could not be such a brute as to cross her.

On one occasion seeing her walk eight miles on an expedition that she especially wanted to make, I remarked to Tom Maitland that she was stronger than one would have thought. He shook his head and sighed.

"No, no, she's dreadfully delicate. She's been to all the best heart specialists in the world and they all say that her life hangs on a thread. But she has a wonderfully strong spirit."

He told her that I had remarked on her endurance.

"I shall pay for it tomorrow," she said to me in her melancholy way. "I shall be at death's door."

"I sometimes think that you're quite strong enough to do the things you want to," I murmured.

I had noticed that if a party was amusing she could dance till five in the morning, but if it was dull she felt very poorly and Tom had to take her home early. I am afraid she did not like my reply, for though she gave me a sad little smile I saw no amusement in her large blue eyes.

"You can't expect me to fall down dead just to please you," she answered.

Louise outlived her husband. He caught his death of cold one day when they were sailing and Louise needed all the rugs there were to keep her warm. He left her a comfortable fortune and a daughter. Louise was inconsolable. It was wonderful that she managed to survive the shock. Her friends expected her speedily to follow poor Tom Maitland to the grave. Indeed they already felt dreadfully sorry for Iris, her daughter, who would be left an orphan. They redoubled their attentions towards Louise. They would not let her stir a finger; they insisted on doing everything in the world to save her trouble. They had to, because if it was necessary for her to do anything tiresome or unpleasant her heart failed her and she was at death's door. She was quite lost without a man to take care of her, she said, and she did not know how, with her delicate health, she was going to bring up her dear Iris. Her friends asked her why she did not marry again. Oh, with her heart it was out of the question, she answered.

A year after Tom's death, however, she allowed George Hobhouse to lead her to the altar. He was a fine fellow and he was not at all badly off. I never saw anyone so grateful as he for the privilege of being allowed to take care of this frail little thing.

"I shan't live to trouble you long," she said.

He was a soldier and an ambitious one, but he threw up his career. Louise's health forced her to spend the winter at Monte Carlo and the summer at Deauville. He prepared to make his wife's last few years as happy as he could.

"It can't be very long now," she said. "I'll try not to be troublesome."

For the next two or three years Louise managed, in spite of her weak heart, to go beautifully dressed to all the most lively parties, to gamble very heavily, to dance and even to flirt with tall slim young men. But George Hobhouse had not the strength of Louise's first husband and he had to brace himself now and then with a drink for his day's work as Louise's second husband. It is possible that the habit would have grown on him, which Louise would not have liked at all, but very fortunately (for her) the war broke out. He rejoined his regiment and three months later was killed. It was a great shock to Louise. She felt, however, that in such a crisis she must not give way to a private grief; and if she had a heart attack nobody heard of it. In order to distract her mind she turned her villa at Monte Carlo into a hospital for convalescent officers. Her friends told her that she would never survive the strain.

"Of course it will kill me," she said, "I know that. But what does it matter? I must do my bit."

It didn't kill her. She had the time of her life. There was no convalescent home in France that was more popular. I met her by chance in Paris. She was lunching at a restaurant with a tall and very handsome young Frenchman. She explained that she was there on business connected with the hospital. She told me that the officers were very charming to her. They knew how delicate she was and they wouldn't let her do a single thing. They took care of her, well - as though they were all her husbands. She sighed.

"Poor George, who would ever have thought that I with my heart should survive him?"

"And poor Tom!" I said.

I don't know why she didn't like my saying that. She gave me her melancholy smile and her beautiful eyes filled with tears.

"You always speak as though you grudged me the few years that I can expect to live."

"By the way, your heart's much better; isn't it?"

"It'll never be better. I saw a specialist this morning and he said I must be prepared for the worst."

"Oh, well, you've been prepared for that for nearly twenty years now, haven't you?"

When the war came to an end Louise settled in London. She was now a woman of over forty, thin and frail still, with large eyes and pale cheeks, but she did not look a day more than twenty-five. Iris, who had been at school and was now grown up, came to live with her.

"She'll take care of me," said Louise. "Of course it'll be hard on her to live with such a great invalid as I am, but it can only be for such a little while, I'm sure she won't mind."

Iris was a nice girl. She had been brought up with the knowledge that her mother's health was very weak. As a child she had never been allowed to make a noise. She had always realized that her mother must on no account be upset. And though Louise told her now that she would not hear of her sacrificing herself for a tiresome old woman the girl simply would not listen.

With a sigh her mother let her do a great deal.

"It pleases the child to think she's making herself useful," she said.

"Don't you think she ought to go out more?" I asked.

"That's what I'm always telling her. I can't get her to enjoy herself. Heaven knows, I never want anyone to give up their pleasures on my account."

And Iris, when I talked to her about it, said: "Poor dear mother, she wants me to go and stay with friends and go to parties, but the moment I start off anywhere she has one of her heart attacks, so I much prefer to stay at home."

But presently she fell in love. A young friend of mine, a very good lad, asked her to marry him and she consented. I liked the child and was glad that she would be given at last the chance to lead a life of her own. But one day the young man came to me in great distress and told me that the marriage was postponed for an indefinite time. Iris felt that she could not desert her mother. Of course it was really no business of mine, but I made the opportunity to go and see Louise. She was always glad to receive her friends at teatime.

"Well, I hear that Iris isn't going to be married," I said after a while.

"I don't know about that. She's not going to be married as soon as I wished. I've begged her on my bended knees not to consider me, but she absolutely refuses to leave me."

"Don't you think it's rather hard on her?"

"Dreadfully. Of course it can only be for a few months, but I hate the thought of anyone sacrificing themselves for me."

"My dear Louise, you've buried two husbands, I can't see why you shouldn't bury at least two more."

"Oh, I know, I know what you've always thought of me. You've never believed that I had anything the matter with me, have you?"

I looked at her full and square.

"Never. I think you've carried out a bluff for twenty-five years. I think you're the most selfish and monstrous woman I have ever known. You ruined the lives of those two unhappy men you married and now you're going to ruin the life of your daughter."

I should not have been surprised if Louise had had a heart attack then. I fully expected her to fly into a passion. She only gave me a gentle smile.

"My poor friend, one of these days you'll be so dreadfully sorry you said this to me."

"Have you quite decided that Iris shall not marry this boy?"

"I've begged her to marry him. I know it'll kill me, but I don't mind. Nobody cares for me. I'm just a burden to everybody."

"Did you tell her it would kill you?"

"She made me."

"Nobody can make you do anything that you yourself don't want to do."

"She can marry her young man tomorrow if she likes. If it kills me, it kills me."

"Well, let's risk it, shall we?"

"Haven't you got any pity for me?"

"One can't pity anyone who amuses one as much as you amuse me," I answered.

A spot of colour appeared on Louise's pale cheeks and though she smiled her eyes were hard and angry.

"Iris shall marry in a month's time," she said, "and if anything happens to me I hope you and she will be able to forgive yourselves."

Louise was as good as her word. A date was fixed, a rich trousseau was ordered, and invitations were sent. Iris and the lad were very happy. On the wedding-day, at ten o'clock in the morning, Louise, that devilish woman, had one of her heart attacks - and died. She died gently forgiving Iris for having killed her.

- THE END -



## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
36

### would

**A** We use **would** ('d) / **wouldn't** when we *imagine* a situation or action (= we think of something that is not real):

- It **would be** nice to buy a new car, but we can't afford it.
- I'**d love** to live by the sea.
- A: Shall I tell Chris what happened?  
B: No, I **wouldn't say** anything.  
(= I wouldn't say anything in your situation)



We use **would have** (**done**) when we imagine something that didn't happen in the past:

- They helped us a lot. I don't know what we'**d have done** without their help.  
(we'**d have done** = we **would have done**)
- It's a shame you didn't see the film. You **would have liked** it.
- I didn't tell Sam what happened. He **wouldn't have been** pleased.

Compare **would** (**do**) and **would have** (**done**):

- I **would call** Lisa, but I don't have her number. (*now*)  
I **would have called** Lisa, but I didn't have her number. (*past*)
- I'm not going to invite them to the party. They **wouldn't come** anyway.  
I didn't invite them to the party. They **wouldn't have come** anyway.

We often use **would** in sentences with **if** (see Units 38–40):

- I **would call** Lisa **if** I had her number.
- I **would have called** Lisa **if** I'd had her number.

**B** Compare **will** ('ll) and **would** ('d):

- I'**ll stay** a little longer. I've got plenty of time.  
I'**d stay** a little longer, but I really have to go now. (so I can't stay longer)
- I'**ll call** Lisa. I have her number.  
I'**d call** Lisa, but I don't have her number. (so I can't call her)

Sometimes **would/wouldn't** is the past of **will/won't**.

Compare:

<i>present</i>		<i>past</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> TOM: I' <b>ll call</b> you on Sunday.	→	Tom said he' <b>d call</b> me on Sunday.
<input type="checkbox"/> AMY: I promise I <b>won't be</b> late.	→	Amy promised that she <b>wouldn't be</b> late.
<input type="checkbox"/> LISA: Oh, no! The car <b>won't start</b> .	→	Lisa was annoyed because her car <b>wouldn't start</b> .

Somebody **wouldn't do** something = he/she refused to do it:

- I tried to warn him, but he **wouldn't listen** to me. (= he refused to listen)
- The car **wouldn't start**. (= it 'refused' to start)

**C** You can also use **would** to talk about things that happened regularly in the past:

- When we were children, we lived by the sea. In summer, if the weather was fine, we **would** all get up early and go for a swim. (= we did this regularly)
- Whenever Richard was angry, he **would** walk out of the room.

With this meaning, **would** is similar to **used to** (see Unit 18):

- Whenever Richard was angry, he **used to walk** out of the room.