



## Boule de Suif

*Guy de Maupassant (1850 - 1893)*

Read by:	Bob Neufeld	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case, jewel case, and paper sleeve
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“Boule de Suif” is one of the first short stories by Guy de Maupassant and possibly the most famous. The title phrase, which can be translated as “Dumpling”, “Butterball”, or “Ball of Fat”, is the name given to the title character, a prostitute by the name of Elisabeth Rousset. The story takes place during the Franco-Prussian War and concerns a group of ten residents of the French city of Rouen who have taken a carriage to flee the city for Le Havre shortly after its occupation by the Prussian army. The group represents a cross-section of French society: Ms. Rousset; a government official; a petty bourgeoisie shop-keeper couple; a wealthy factory owner and his wife; the Comte and Comtesse of Breville, and two nuns. A bad storm makes for slow going, and the travelers give the lady of the evening the cold shoulder

until she produces a picnic basket and offers to share her food. They put up at an inn the village of Tôtes only to discover they have stumbled into Prussian-held territory and are detained by an officer without explanation. After two testy days they learn from the Boule de Suif that the detention will continue until she agrees to sleep with the officer, which she has refused to do. Initially supportive of her, the travelers’ patience dissolves over the next two days and they convince her to relent. She agrees and consorts with the officer, and they are allowed to leave the next morning. En route to Le Havre the paragons of virtue refuse to engage with her and decline to share their food. No good deed goes unpunished.

**Guy de Maupassant** (August 5, 1850 – July 6, 1893) was a French writer considered one of the fathers of the short story. He wrote over 300 stories as well as six novels, three travel books and a book of poems. A protégé of Flaubert, he was a naturalist, depicting human life and social forces with an economy of style, clever plots, and surprise denouements. He was born into a prosperous family in Normandy. His mother separated from his father when he was eleven and he lived with his mother in the seaside town of Etretat. The Franco-Prussian War broke out soon after he finished college. He enlisted in 1871 and moved to Paris, where he served as a clerk in the Navy for ten years. He had been introduced to Flaubert while in junior high, and in Paris Flaubert took him under his wing and guided his literary efforts. Boule de Suif was a huge success upon publication in 1880. He followed with “Deux Amis”, “Mother Savage” and “Mademoiselle Fifif”. He was methodical and prolific, producing two to four collections a year during the 1880’s, and had a practical business acumen that made him a wealthy man. He avoided the limelight, preferring to travel, often cruising on his yacht, the Bel-Ami. He later became reclusive and obsessed with self-preservation and a fear of death, likely due to syphilis, which he had contracted in his youth. He was committed to an asylum after a suicide attempt in 1892 and died the following year.