

*Twenty-One Years of Illegal Imprisonment Suffered By A Beautiful Young Lady of the Polish Nobility*

The Polish Detective, Masilewski, Is Put On The Track Of A Most Outrageous Crime—Is There A “Woman In The Case”?—Jaromir Ubrik, The Gambler And Drunkard, Sells His Own Child—He Exchanges His Son For A Girl, Who Is Stolen From Him By A Jew—Bold Thefts Perpetrated In Warsaw—The Jew Is Found, But The Girl Is Lost—A New Track Found, The Child Is Lost Again—Kidnapped By Gypsies—A Gypsy Reveals The Future To The Countess Satorin—Judith In The Service Of The Countess— Jaromir At Last Rewarded For His Ardor—Mother And Daughter —Pater Gratian And Sister Jovita—In The Apothecary—An Elopement Failed—An Infernal Compound—”Possessed Of The Devil”— A Nocturnal Flight—A Delirious Woman—The Flight Of A Lunatic A Victim Claimed—A Horrible Scene—Terrible Punishment— Escape And Surprise—Trial And Sentence—Punishment And Cunning—Searching The Convent—Interviewing A Lunatic—The Sad Duty Of The Detective

by George McWatters

When on my trip through Europe, I met with the Polish detective, Masilewski, who told me the thrilling incidents of the illegal detention of a handsome young lady of about twenty years, belonging to the chief nobility of Russian-Poland. The facts are so startling that I will faithfully render Mr. Masilewski’s story, first warning my readers to reflect that the Polish people do not belong to the most civilized nations, and that the crimes perpetrated, as herein related, were due, not entirely to premeditated cruelty, but principally to lack of intellect, which so often induces us to err, or to apply a punishment which, otherwise, we would have scorned the very idea of. The career of a detective is so variegated, so many incidents come under his observation, that often he is obliged, against his taste and will, to trace out crimes, or bound to follow crime on its heels, when he would rather have had nothing to do with it, as his personal convictions and opinions often revolt against the search. Such was the case with Mr. Masilewski, in the incidents about to be related. I have faithfully rendered them, neither adding to or diminishing the facts. The reader will admit that if we are obliged to condemn the actions of a particular part of a body, we have no right to curse the whole. If a man’s leg is injured, the other parts of his body may be perfectly sound and healthy.

So much as a warning for the discriminating reader, and now let Mr. Masilewski tell his own story; the facts of which happened only a short time ago, and which filled the European papers of the day, especially those of Germany and Russia.

It is thus:

“At about mid-summer, a queer-looking man accosted me, while I was driving in the country with a friend, with the question:

‘Are you Mr. Masilewski, the secret detective?’

I replied in the affirmative, to which he answered:

‘In that case, I have some intelligence for you. A young gentleman, who did not tell me his name, asked me whether I wished to make a few florins; and when I told him that I would gladly do so if I could, honestly, he told me to find out where you were, to go immediately to you, and hand you this letter.’

Saying this, he handed me a note, carefully sealed, and which was directed thus: ‘*Personal. Mr. Masilewski, Detective, Warsaw.*’ Judge of my astonishment when I read the following lines:

‘Mr. Masilewski:

‘Dear Sir,—

‘In the convent of St. Mary of the Carmelites, at Cracow, Poland, a nun, by the name of Jovita, her real name being Barbara Ubrik, has been held a captive for twenty-one years, which imprisonment has made her a lunatic. I do not care to mention my name, but vouch for the truth of my assertion. Seek, and you will find.

Your correspondent.’

Of course, I was startled at the news, but, not caring to exhibit emotion to the bearer of the letter, I simply dismissed him with the assurance that I would see to the matter.

The question, how to arrange affairs so as to come to the bottom of the facts, if any there were, puzzled me. I concluded to go slowly to work, and first learn whether I had been deceived or not, and if not, to push the matter without exciting the suspicion of the guilty party, as I was afraid that, otherwise, measures would be taken to prevent a discovery. It has ever been my line of conduct to follow the method of the French detectives, who always try to find first the ‘woman in the case,’ and, for that reason, I began to inquire after the family of Barbara Ubrik. I soon found the following startling facts:

A certain Jaromir Ubrik, the descendant of one of the noblest families of Poland, had degenerated as a gambler, and fallen lower and lower, bringing his family to perfect misery. At the time of his greatest misery, his wife had borne a son. One evening, sitting, as he was accustomed to, in one of the lowest inns of Warsaw, he was accosted by a Jew, who told him that a noble lady in the neighborhood of Warsaw, had borne a girl, while her husband was on a journey, and as she knew that his intense desire was to have a son, she wished to exchange children with somebody who would be willing to do so, in consideration of ten thousand florins. Jaromir jumped at the chance, and the boy was delivered into the hands of the Jew, who went with him to the noble castle, and soon paid him the money agreed upon, and handed him a basket in which the little girl was packed. They went together to the inn, and Jaromir, wishing to count his money, put the basket on a seat next to him, and began to treat the Jew, until he was so intoxicated that he staggered home, without finding the basket. Inquiring, the next morning, for the basket, the host of the inn told him that a Jew, whom he did not know, had taken it with him, and that he had not objected, thinking that it was the Jew’s property. All he could say was that the name of the Jew was Aron, that he lived in Warsaw, and that he was a small, lean man, with a gray beard. The daughter of the host told Jaromir that the child wore a necklace with a golden

cross, which the Jew had put in his pocket. Jaromir had sought in vain for a trace of the Jew. All he could find out was that the name of the Jew was *Aron Koenigsberger*, and that he had left the city—whither, they did not know. Jaromir went home in a gloomy mood, and as he passed a jeweler's shop, he saw, in the show-window, the identical cross; he went in and bought it, but the jeweler could not give him information of any avail. The Jew and the child had disappeared, and no trace could be found.

Jaromir, who was now in better financial circumstances, resolved to change his manner of living, and become, once more, a decent man; he rented a neat dwelling, moved with his family, and was soon so well acquainted that he obtained the office of captain of police in Warsaw. Now, all his energy was directed to find the lost child and the track of the Jew, the more so, as the countess Satorin had called on him, proved, by recognizing the cross, that she was the mother of the girl, and urged him to do all in his power to find her child.

A series of bold thefts, which were perpetrated shortly after each other, in Warsaw, excited the wrath of its inhabitants, and the vigilance of the police. Soon a son of the house of Israel was arrested. The Jew had not committed the thefts himself, but was accused of having bought stolen goods, which circumstance put him under the same accusation as if he had been the very thief. The heart of Jaromir bounded for joy when he saw, on the list of the accused, the name of '*Aron Koenigsberger*,' The Jew at first denied everything, but after he had been put to torture, he confessed that he was *Aron Koenigsberger*, that he formerly had traded in cattle and wheat, but that he had left Warsaw, eight years ago, and had established himself in the southern part of Russia, where he had lost his fortune by speculations, and had returned to Warsaw, where he, during half a year, had purchased stolen goods.

The captain of police, Jaromir Ubrik, now asked him: 'Aron Koenigsberger, some eight years ago, you were in this city, and when you went out, one morning, to pursue your trade, you entered an inn near Warsaw, and met there two men, one of whom had a basket standing next to him, which he forgot to take along, when leaving, and you appropriated this basket and its contents.' When, however, the Jew denied, the captain threatened anew to put him on the torture-bench, and the frightened man confessed that he really was the man who had appropriated the basket, but that he had paid the host ten ducats for it. He had found, in the basket, besides some fine linen, a new-born child, with a golden cross on her neck. This he had sold to a jeweler in Warsaw, had taken the child to Brody, where he sold it, for thirty ducats, to Sara, the wife of the Jew, Isah Gerson, who had taken it to Kiew, in Southern Russia, and that Sara gave to the girl the name of 'Judith,' and seemed to love her.

This was all Aron could tell, and the captain of police, Jaromir, knowing that it was very probable that the child was alive yet, used all his energy to trace her out.

In Kiew, he received the intelligence that a Jewish family, Isah Gerson, his wife Sara, and four children, had been living there; that the name of one of the children was Judith, a girl of about eight years, who had been stolen by a band of gypsies, who had broken into the house, and kidnapped the girl. The captain now ordered all gypsies to be arrested; and soon he received the report that a large band of gypsies had shown themselves on the southern frontier, but as they saw that they were pursued, they scattered into little troops, and went in different directions; only

a few of them had been arrested and transported to Warsaw, and, really, on the next day, the members of the band stood before him; they firmly denied knowing anything about the girl. Among their number was a handsome gypsy girl of about sixteen years, with jet-black eyes, and that bronzed, free look, which forms their greatest attraction. Jaromir dismissed the men, and told the girl to remain. He spoke in a kindly manner to her, and soon the girl told him that the band which had been arrested formed only a small part of the whole, and that with one of the smaller parts, a girl was held captive, and carefully guarded. She was not a gypsy.

The captain now gave the most rigid orders to arrest all gypsies in the country, and to transport them to Warsaw, relying upon it that, by arresting as many as he could, the others would wander to the vicinity of Warsaw, in order to find out about the fate of their brethren. His calculation proved to be sound. Soon a woman was reported to be wandering in the neighborhood of Warsaw, who made her living by soothsaying and selling drugs and medicines; one day, she appeared at the castle 'Satorin,' (the reader will remember that this was the abode of the mother of the girl,) and got admittance to the presence of the Countess. She really told her much of the past, and a great deal about her future. The Countess made her, and the charming girl whom she had taken with her, a handsome present, and dismissed them. The old woman died, two days afterwards, and Judith, not knowing what to do, and wishing to break off her connection with the gypsies, went to the Countess who had so kindly received them. She told her her sad story, and the Countess, moved with compassion, took her into her service, and treated her more as her own child than as a servant. Under such kind care, the girl soon became a handsome young woman, and her beauty attracted the attention of all visitors, who were struck by her amiable and polite manners.

Several months passed in that way, when, one day, the captain of police, Jaromir Ubrik, called on the Countess Satorin, and told her, with a careworn expression on his face, that he had not succeeded in finding her daughter, that he had given up the persecution of the gypsies, and that they had to trust to accident for the discovery of the lost treasure.

The Countess could not conceal her grief, and was loudly weeping, when suddenly the door was opened, and Judith entered, with a message for the Countess. As soon as she had left the room, Jaromir asked who this beautiful girl was, upon which the Countess told him what she knew about her. 'If that is the case, Madame, that gypsy-girl is your lost daughter!' exclaimed Jaromir.

The girl was summoned into the presence of her mistress, and Jaromir said to her: 'Miss Judith, can you tell me whether you have been all your life with the gypsies?'

'No, sir,' replied Judith; 'my parents were Jews; I was kidnapped, by the gypsies, when I was eight years old, and they kept a strict watch over me, as they were afraid that I would escape them.'

'Do you know the name of your father and mother?' asked the captain.

'Yes, sir; my father's name was Isah Gerson, and my mother, Sara,' was the reply.

Now the captain was satisfied that he had found, at last, what he so zealously had been tracing for many a year. In his joy, he jumped up, took the astonished girl by the hand, led her to the Countess, and exclaimed: 'Here is your child.'

After mother and child had looked, for a while, into each other's eyes, their arms were opened, and hearts beat again in unison, which had been so cruelly separated for many a year, and that by the fault of the mother; they wept hot tears of joy.

Jaromir left mother and child, for the moment, alone, and we refrain from describing the bliss of this first meeting.

Count Satorin soon afterwards died, in St. Petersburg, leaving all his property to his son, Alexander Satorin, (really the son of Jaromir,) and his castle Satorin to his wife. Now no obstacle was in the way for the recognition of her daughter; she made her the heir of all her property, gave her the name of Elka, and Alexander now was informed of his real birth. As, however, the Countess did not wish to alter the last will of her husband, and as she saw, to her great delight, that Alexander and Elka loved each other, she heartily gave her consent to their union, from which Barbara Ubrik, the heroine of the story, was the fruit."

Thus far, the detective Masilewski had received his information from the journal of the captain, Jaromir Ubrik, who had since died, and now he was left to ferret out the further trace of Barbara.

"Before proceeding further with the narrative, the reader will allow me to explain why I, as the detective, did not apply, at once, to the convent, which probably seems to him the best and shortest way. I, however, had good reasons for not doing so: first, I was afraid that, by applying to the bishop for admittance to the convent, and authority to search it, suspicion would be aroused, and means might be found to either transport the girl to another convent, or even deal worse with her; in the second place, I was not very sure, yet, that my informant had not duped me, and a detective is generally very much afraid of ridicule. When the reader sees my further course, he will certainly feel satisfied that I pursued the right and very judicious course.

Let us now continue the thrilling story of the incidents which Masilewski discovered, in his search after the facts of the illegal detention of Barbara Ubrik. We will give his story categorically as he told it before the tribunal of Cracow, on the 21st of July, 1869.

It is as follows:

"After I had discovered, by means of the diary of the captain of police, Jaromir Ubrik, the parents of Barbara, it was not a very difficult matter to trace her out, myself, and I soon discovered the following facts: In 1830, the Polish insurrection broke out, and the father of Barbara, who had taken an active part in the revolt, was banished to Siberia, where he soon died, leaving his wife, Elka, behind, with three daughters, one of whom was our heroine, Barbara. She soon made the acquaintance of a priest, who was her confessor, and Pater Gratian (this was the name of the holy father) soon knew how to so entangle her heart and feelings, that she resolved to say farewell to this wicked world of ours, and pass the remainder of her days under the severe rule of the order of the Carmelites. Her mother objected in the most decided manner, but Barbara

used all means of persuasion, and at last succeeded in receiving consent to a step which would have for her the most fatal results. Three hundred and fifty thousand florins, her part of the fatherly inheritance, came into the possession of the convent, and Barbara was accepted as a novice, under the name of Sister Barbara. Pater Gratian was her confessor, and after she had been for half a year in the convent, she was accepted as a sister, under the name of 'Sister Jovita.'

The convent of the Carmelites consisted of one abbess and thirty-four sisters, mostly young ladies from noble families, whose parents had been ruined by the revolution of 1831. We can easily conceive that these ladies, accustomed to luxury and elegance, were eager to load all the dirty work on the shoulders of the young sister; Jovita could not bear such humiliating work, and complained to Father Gratian, and begged him for his assistance and protection. The father promised to interfere in her behalf, and soon he obtained, from the abbess, consent that Sister Jovita should take the place of Sister Bibiana, who was ill, and had the supervision of the garden in her charge. Father Gratian was very much pleased with this arrangement, as he had now an opportunity to see the beautiful girl, undisturbed, every day.

The abbess requested Father Gratian to explain to Jovita her new duties, but ordered him not to take her confession in the gardener's house, but, as she had been wont, in the open cell, or in the confession-box of the convent church; besides that, she plainly told him that he should not walk so often in the garden, as she was afraid that his presence would disturb the sister in the performance of her duty. Father Gratian did not heed this command, but visited the beautiful gardener every morning, and now commenced to hold regular conversations with her, on the '*spiritual* marriage' of the convent; he led her so skillfully into his views, that the young nun was astonished, and replied that if she had known all this, she would never have forsaken the world; to which the priest replied: 'That is exactly what I, and many other priests and nuns would have done, if we had known; but now that we are once in it, we must be satisfied with our fate, and try to take the best side of it.' With such skillful sophisms, he soon succeeded in corrupting the mind of Jovita, and we will soon see how well he plucked the fruits of his crime. By such conversations, the duties of Jovita were neglected, and, not long after, she had to submit to her first punishment, for neglect of duty. While the other sisters were sitting at the supper-table, Jovita had to strip her dress, and scourge herself with a lash, loudly praying in the meanwhile. This first punishment was the real commencement of the days of suffering of the poor Jovita, and even Father Gratian, notwithstanding his good will, could not protect her against further punishments. Before Jovita entered the convent of St. Theresia, one of the youngest sisters, Zitta, had been his paramour, which did not prevent his love-connection with the Abbess Ludwina. When, now, Zitta saw that she was neglected by her lover, on account of the beautiful eyes of Jovita, she hated her, and we can readily conceive that, when the abbess died, and Sister Zitta was elected abbess in her stead, the poor Jovita had to feel all the wrath of jealousy of her superior. Several times, she was ordered to strip herself of her clothing, and to apply the scourge with such severity that she often swooned away; at last, the sisters, not being able to look at such outrageous cruelty, and feeling a pity for the poor young sister, threatened the abbess to complain of her actions to the vicar-general of the order. Father Gratian, who had regained her favors, advised her not to mind their threatening, and to threaten them with a judgment of the arch-bishop.

Sister Jovita had become very ill, and was unable to perform the hard duties which were required of her; for that reason, Father Gratian advised the abbess that, as Sister Emerentia, who had in charge the medicine store attached to the convent, was very old, and nearly blind and deaf, Jovita should be her assistant. The abbess readily consented, and Jovita entered, at once, upon her new duties. The apothecary had a great many customers, as the people believed that the medicines of the convent were of much more avail than all the worldly preparations combined. Our heroine soon acquired great skill in the preparation of the prescriptions, and, as she liked it, she soon regained her health, and her good looks returned.

A young man came, every day at the same time, to the drugstore, and always required the same medicine. Jovita soon observed that, while she was preparing the prescription, the eyes of the young man were ardently fixed on the handsome apothecary, and when her black, fiery eyes met his, a red hue colored his cheeks, and the greatest confusion was visible in his bearing. She longed to know something more about the handsome student, and when he came again, she inquired after the patient. The young man replied that his mother, when she heard that her husband had been shot by the Russians, and that his property was confiscated, had been taken by a fearful disease—consumption. Jovita now asked more in particular about his family, and soon discovered that her family, during the insurrection, had been most effectually assisted by his, therefore she wrote, at once, a letter to her mother, requesting her to take the poor woman under her protection, and asked the student to forward it to its address. The mother of Jovita fulfilled her wish, and the poor widow experienced the greatest kindness of Mrs. Elka Ubrik. This circumstance increased the love of the young student, the more so as he observed that he was not indifferent to her; at last he confessed his love to her, and, at the same time, complained that, alas! his love was hopeless. Jovita tried to console him, as well as time and circumstances allowed her to, and she longed, every day, for the appearance of the student, in the drug-store. It did not escape Father Gratian's notice that Jovita, since her acquaintance with the student, had grown cooler to him, and even in the confession-box, she showed her aversion to him, by not answering to questions which he proposed to her, and his suspicions were awakened that she had a new lover. However, he did not know who the happy mortal was. At last, Jovita was discharged as assistant in the drug-store, and employed in the church of the convent; she had been in this new employment for a few days, when, to her great surprise, suddenly the student appeared, and told her that he had joined the order, and was employed, like her, in the church. The loving couple now had free intercourse with each other, until they concluded to escape from the convent, and to live together peacefully in a far-off land.

The student had soon obtained the assistance of a few friends, who promised to support him with a paltry sum of money. In the meanwhile the mother of Jovita had died, but, for reasons which we will relate hereafter, the abbess, who knew of the death, had kept it secret from Jovita. By this sudden death Jovita would have been enabled to dispose of a considerable amount of money, as her sisters willingly would have given up a part of the inheritance to her, if they had known that Jovita intended to escape from the convent. It is true, her mother had disinherited her; not, however, because she hated her, but because she was afraid that this new part of the inheritance would fall to the convent, as the former had done. However, in her last hours she had blessed her unhappy child, and expressed the hope that she would be given back to the world. The rage of the abbess at seeing that this rich inheritance did not stiffen the treasury of the convent, caused her to be silent on the death of the poor nun's mother.

When Jovita secretly applied for money to her family, her letters were refused, for this reason: they now knew in the convent that Jovita had nobody in the world who cared for her, for they had contrived to turn the hearts of Jovita's sisters from her. The abbess Zitta, with the assistance of Father Gratian, had written anonymous letters to them, which they imagined were coming from their sister, and which tended to make them despise her, as she confessed in them her ardent criminal love, etc.

Jovita, thus left alone by her family, and the student's friends failing to keep their word, they failed to accomplish their design, and Barbara had, from this time forward, not only to suffer from the cruelties of the abbess, but also of Father Gratian and the sisters. One of the sisters even endeavored to take her life, Jovita being the innocent cause of much trouble in the convent.

One day, when Jovita was in the garden, one of the nuns caused a heavy flower-pot to fall down from a balcony, under which Jovita was standing. It failed to hit her, but Jovita, knowing very well that the falling of the pot was not accidental, but a base attempt on her life, was deeply grieved at so much cruelty, and, arrived at the gate of the garden, she swooned, and was carried to her cell by Sister Bibiana. It was reported to the abbess that Jovita was prostrated in her cell again, as Sister Euphrosina had accidentally dropped a flower-pot, and that Jovita now maliciously claimed that the sister had attempted to kill her.

Father Gratian insisted upon it that the abbess should apply to her a punishment of thirty days for this base slander, but the abbess refused. Soon the trial to escape was discovered, and the father succeeded this time in accomplishing his designs.

"Gentlemen," continued Mr. Masilewski, "I am now going to report a crime, which makes even me shudder, though having seen the most revolting crimes accomplished almost under my very eyes; a crime for which Heaven claims revenge; a crime which is almost too obnoxious to be told. I confess, that when the poor girl told me her sad story, tears started to my eyes, and, even now, my voice almost refuses to continue with my report." Saying this, he threw a glance, full of hatred and revenge, on the Father Gratian, who was sitting in the bench of the accused, and pointing at him, he said: "That man, gentlemen, sitting there, robed in the garments of the church, which he disgraces, is unworthy to be called a man; he is lower than a brute; he is lower than a hyena—that beast only sucks out the blood of a human being; he, the priest, sucked out the reason of a fellow-being—but let me continue. I am not here to condemn, but to report; therefore excuse me; my feelings overmastered me.

"When the trial to escape was discovered, Jovita and Father Gratian had a fearful scene together; she accused him of having seduced her, taking advantage of her innocence, and that the child which she bore under her heart was his. Gratian, furious at hearing such plain language, struck her in the face, at which the poor nun swooned, and was brought, senseless, to her cell. He reported to the abbess that Jovita was sick again, and declared that he suspected that this frequent illness was only a pretence to be free from work; that he knew of a way to discover whether his assertion was true, and that, if the abbess would allow him, he would prepare a medicine for her, which would surely prove the facts. The abbess consented, and the father went to a drug-store in the city, and secured, under pretence of experimenting, powder of papaver and thyme, which he mixed together, with the aim to deprive her of her reason, and, in that way, make her accusation



against him unbelieving, when the time of her parturition should come. In the meanwhile, the abbess had visited the sick Jovita, and consoled her with the assurance that, in the evening, she would bring her a medicine which would infallibly restore her health. The poor nun readily believed this, and patiently took the infernal compound, when she brought it to her in the evening. Jovita at once fell asleep, and when she awoke, after a long, heavy sleep, her head threatened to break asunder, her temples throbbed, and her blood rushed to her brain. The medicine was continually given, although the victim objected. On the fourth day, the abbess told Father Gratian that the nun really was dangerously ill, and that she was going to consult a physician; the father objected, and requested the abbess to visit, with him, the cell of the nun. She readily agreed, and when they entered the cell, she inquired of the Sister Cordula, who was watching her, how the patient was, at which the sister replied that she often was very rebellious, and that she talked the wildest fancies in her sleep; ‘and,’ added the sister, who was angry at being obliged to sit for days with a delirious woman, ‘she often says very wicked things, and I suppose it would not do any harm to whip such fancies out of her!’ While the sister was talking, Jovita arose in her bed, and seeing the father, she shuddered, and tried to hide herself. The priest went to the bedside, and asked her several questions, to which the poor, delirious woman did not answer, but looked with staring eyes at her seducer, bit her lips, and, at last, bursting out in a fearful rage, she exclaimed: ‘Begone! I curse you! you who have by infernal machinations and sophistry, seduced a poor, innocent girl, who was defenseless and did not know the extent of the crime which she committed in rendering herself to you. Begone! May God curse you, the father of my child!’

Struck with horror, the abbess started back, and looked inquiringly at Gratian, and asked: ‘Is her accusation reality, or do I hear the talk of a lunatic?’

The Sister Cordula threw herself; like a mad fury, on the defenceless nun, and overloading her with insults, she scratched her in the face so that the blood gushed from the severed flesh. Pater Gratian pulled her back, and exclaimed: ‘My God! Sister Jovita is possessed of the devil!’ and turning towards the abbess, he said: ‘but leave this affair with me. I know how to conjure the devil within her.’

The abbess, struck with terror, left the cell, and Jovita was now left in the hands of Gratian, who concluded that, as the medicine had not had the full effect which he had expected, he would accomplish the remainder. For that purpose, he abused and beat the delirious girl in the most outrageous way, spread through the convent the most absurd stories about the devil who was within her, and filled the hearts and the minds of the abbess and the nuns with anxiety and disgust to such an extent that they longed to have her placed in another convent. The required application was made, and soon the order came that Jovita should be transported to the convent of the Carmelites at Cracow. Father Gratian and the Sister Cordula accompanied the sick nun. They traveled in civil attire, and the faces of the ladies were covered with heavy veils; they rode the whole day, and as the evening came, and the coachman declared that the horses were too tired to continue the travel to Cracow, on that day, they concluded to pass the night at the house of a friend of his, who lived at a short distance from the road upon which they were traveling. The travelers were received with the greatest politeness by the honest farmer, who left his own bedroom to their disposition, while he and his family passed the night in the stable. The guests were fatigued from their recent travel, and soon a heavy sleep was enjoyed by Father Gratian and

Sister Cordula, while Jovita, who had refused to undress herself, softly left the bed, took all the garments of the priest and nun into her arms, left the bedroom, went softly down the stairs, opened the door of the house, and now, being alone, in the open air, she threw hat and clothing into a manure-pit which was near the house, and, led by the kindly light of the clear moon, she fled, as fast as her feeble legs could carry, whither, she did not know; she relied upon it that despair would give her strength.”

“I will refrain, gentlemen,” continued the detective, “from following the track of the worthy priest and his accomplice, neither do I wish to relate the absurd story which he told to the abbess of the convent at Cracow, and to the superior of St. Theresia; let it suffice to say that, as the clothing of Gratian and the nun could not be worn without being thoroughly cleansed, no pursuit was possible, and our unhappy heroine was, for once in her life, the pet of fortune. Before I proceed, however, I wish to call your attention, gentlemen, to the fact that, in the meanwhile, the convents in Russian Poland had been abolished, and church property was confiscated to the crown; the monks, priests, and nuns were obliged to leave the convents, and the young student, who was averse to the dress he had adopted for his love’s sake, was at liberty to choose another life. Allow me, now, to introduce the young man himself, who can tell you his own story.”

Hereupon, he introduced Wolcech Zarski, who told the following thrilling story:

“When I had left the convent of St. Theresia, where I had met with the unfortunate, but lovely Jovita, I applied, at once, to Count Satorin, for the position of private secretary, which place, I knew, was vacant. I had been in his service only a few days, when, to my great astonishment, one evening, on entering the room of the Countess, I saw Jovita sitting next to her, on the sofa, and talking with her. As soon as she saw me, she jumped up, and exclaimed: ‘Oh! God be praised! At last, I have you; now all is good!’ The Countess, who saw our hearty embrace, and read the greatest bliss in our eyes, began to feel suspicious that the affair was thus planned by us, and formed the firm resolution not to shelter the escaped nun under her roof, therefore she promised her her protection, but declared that she could not employ her in her house. Scarcely had the Countess told us her opinion, when the door opened, and the Count entered, inquiring after me, and after he had given me his instructions, I besought him to allow the nun to remain in his house, for a few days, that she might recover from her illness, to which he readily consented. Now, I returned to Jovita, and fortunately finding her alone, I inquired how she had escaped from the convent at Cracow, and why she had come thither. She told me her story, and judge of my horror and grief, when I plainly perceived that her mind was disturbed; now she told me her sad experience, with all the pathos of her sweet, lovely voice, and then, again, a wild delirium made her utter the strangest expressions, accompanied by a yelling, shrieking laughter, which pierced my very heart. Now and then, she had bright moments, and what she told me in these moments has been faithfully rendered by Mr. Masilewski, therefore I deem it unnecessary to repeat the sad tragedy. Shortly afterwards, the poor Jovita was seized by such a fit of frenzy that I felt obliged to call in the assistance of the maid of the Countess, and, in her presence, she told the maddest stories; we could scarcely succeed in keeping her in the room, as she was bound to leave at once, and bring her claims before the emperor. After her frenzy had passed, she fell asleep, and we succeeded in laying her in bed, locking her up in her room, I putting the key in my pocket. A few days afterwards, the Count gave me leave of absence for several days, as I told him that I wished to procure a shelter for Jovita, in Cracow; and, the next day, we were on the road to that city.

“We took a short rest at an inn on the road, as the horses were too tired to proceed, and we ourselves were in need of nourishment; judge of my perplexity when, returning to the room in which I had left Jovita in order to speak with the landlord, I learned that the unhappy woman had disappeared. No trace of her could be found, and hoping that she had pursued her way alone to Cracow, I soon went in that direction, but in vain; no trace could be found, and I, thinking that she might have been taken up as a lunatic, and sent to the asylum, went to a Russian physician, introduced myself as Dr. Zenski, and begged him to assist me in procuring admittance to the asylum, which he gladly did; I searched the whole institution, but in vain; Jovita had vanished.

“At that time, I did not know that Jovita had been deprived of her reason by means of the drugs which Father Gratian had furnished, and as I imagined that her fearful calamity was caused by her love for me, my conscience reproached me, day and night, and I thought that I could not better expiate my sin than by again entering a convent of monks of the Carmelites at Cracow. So, after I had spent my leave of absence in vainly searching for the poor Jovita, I returned to the Count, begged him to give me my dismissal, and executed my plan. I entered, once more, into the secluded life of the convent. The master of the novices was very kind to me, and granted me many a favor which he did not allow to others. I attribute his preferment of me to the fact that my theological education” (the reader will remember that Zarski, before he entered the convent, was a student in theology,) “inspired him with respect, and his services and kindness impressed me with love for the good man. But now, gentlemen, I believe that Mr. Masilewski will be kind enough to report the further fate of Jovita, and, if necessary, I will be glad to give my evidence whenever it is required.”

So far, Mr. Zarski had spoken, and as I saw that my turn had come again, I reported the further results of my searches, which I give here, in full, to the reader.

“The sun had scarcely thrown his first pale rays over the landscape, clad in full winter attire, when a priest wandered through the country near Cracow, and suddenly a faint voice reached his ear, and looking around, he saw, in a ditch bordering the street, a woman lying, dressed in black, her head wrapped in a colored shawl. He shook the woman and tried to restore her to her senses. When he had succeeded, the unhappy woman began to complain of the everlasting persecution which she was subject to, and soon he perceived that he was speaking with a fugitive nun. Need I say that this woman was our heroine? The priest demanded a full confession, and as the poor sister saw a man of God standing before her, she did not dare to resist his command, and confessed that she was a fugitive nun, who was being transported to the convent at Cracow.

The priest hereupon told her, that he, as a Roman Catholic priest, was obliged to restore her to the convent, and as all the convents in Poland had been abolished, he told her that he should conduct her to St. Mary at Cracow. Jovita resisted with all her power, but in vain. She was transported to the convent of St. Mary, and here a new series of cruel misfortunes began. Let us follow her into the convent, and look at her sad fate. As soon as the abbess knew that the fugitive had been brought in, she went into council to hear the defense of the unfortunate one. The abbess was attired in the rough, brown dress of the order, and her features accorded remarkably with the severe attire; her eyes flashed lightning at the runaway, who stood tremblingly before her. At her side, the confessor of the convent, Hyzinus, was sitting, reading the documents which were lying before him, while the sister-jailor was eagerly looking out for a new prey. After a short

consultation, and at the suggestion of the Father Hyzinus, the identity of the nun had to be proven, and, for that purpose, she was confronted with the ex-abbess, Zitta, who, after the convents in Russian Poland had been abolished, had entered, as a sister, into the convent at Cracow. Judge of the fearful agony which Jovita suffered when she was thus confronted by her deadly foe.

Father Hyzinus was of opinion that it would be for the best to restore the poor, delirious nun to the world, as she would only be the subject of great care and trouble to the convent. But his noble intention was wrecked by the obstinacy of the abbess, and all he could do was to restrain her from applying the severest punishment to the nun which the rules of the convent prescribed. At last, it was decided upon that the punishment of the third class should be applied. The poor Jovita listened with calmness to her sentence, and kissed the hand of the abbess. The sister-jailor at once ordered Jovita to follow her; Father Hyzinus looked after her with compassion, and hurriedly left the convent, while the abbess followed the jailor to the hall of discipline.”

“And now, gentlemen,” continued Mr. Masilewski, “I have to picture before you a scene, the horror of which surpasses your boldest imagination. I pray you, prepare your pitying hearts for a severe ordeal, for what you now will witness, will make the blood chill in your veins. Let me first describe this hall of torture to you which I saw when I made my investigations. On the bare, yellow walls, nails were seen, on which canes, whips, and other instruments of torture were suspended. In the center of the hall, two ropes were hanging from the ceiling, at the end of which two rings were fastened. The whole hall was lighted by a small window, which was provided with a dark curtain, which only allowed the light to penetrate dimly.

In this hall, the trembling Jovita received the command from the merciless abbess to strip herself of her clothing, and as she hesitated, a sign of the cruel superior brought the sister-jailor at once to the side of the unhappy woman, and she was stripped in the most barbarous manner. Every resistance was threatened with the lash. The poor victim stood, at last, entirely nude, before the gaze of the sisters. Now the sister jailor took a great pair of scissors, and cut off all her hair. Now her arms were put together, and fastened around the wrists in one of the rings, and, at a given sign, the rope was drawn up so far that the victim could just touch the floor with the extremities of her toes. She being thus defenseless, the jailor began to apply the punishment of the third class, that is, she lashed the nude form of the frenzied woman, never minding on what part of the body the flagellation was applied, as the victim, groaning and wrestling in the greatest agony, turned around and around on the movable rope. Three times a day, thirty- six lashes were applied in this way, and that during twelve consecutive days. After the first installment of the punishment had been given, the abbess ordered the jailor to bring Jovita to the convent-prison, which was next to the torture-room; here, clad in a long, penitence attire, she had to live on water and bread, and might, three times a day, prepare herself for new agony. The prisoner was provided with a hard couch, on which the blood-stained limbs of the martyred nun in her penitence dress might rest, a wooden box served for a table, and a small window threw a dim, ghastly light into this abode of misery.

We must be astonished that to such horrible torture the wretched creature did not succumb, or that she was not again subject to fits of frenzy.

After she had gone through her punishment, Jovita was shown a retired cell, which she had to divide with a sister, who continually watched her, and had in charge to report the least misdemeanor. Father Hyzinus was now instructed to make more minute acquaintance with the nun, and to hear her general confession, which lasted three days. In the course of this confession was it that signs of frenzy again were observed.

“Allow me, gentlemen, now to let Mr. Zarski take up the thread of the story, as he is personally concerned here, and is better enabled to give the required evidence.” The court consented, and the monk pictured the following exciting drama:

“I accidentally heard that, some time ago, a nun, who had escaped from Warsaw, had been captured, and was held in the convent of St. Mary, where she had to undergo fearful tortures. The knowledge that my beloved Jovita was once again in the hands of her foes, and lived in the same city with me, almost deprived me of my senses, and from that time I knew no rest. My only thought was now how to let her know that I was near, and how to hear from her.

Owing to my good standing with the master of novices, I readily obtained the consent to call on a friend of mine in the city, who needed my religious assistance. I told him the whole sad story of my love, and he not only assisted me financially, but devised a means of communication between us, of which I had not thought. A laundry woman did the washing for the convent in which I was, and also for that of St. Mary. By inserting short notes in our handkerchiefs, we might hear from each other. I spoke about it with the woman; she at first refused, fearing that if it was discovered she would lose her position, but on my entreaties and reasoning, she consented, and we exchanged a series of letters, all of which I have brought with me, and they will show to you all the sufferings to which the poor Jovita was doomed. I will leave those letters in your possession, gentlemen, and now only give a synopsis of the sad, fearful story which she told me in them. One day it was suspected that Jovita received letters from the outside world, as one of the sisters had seen her reading from a sheet of note-paper; she was aware that she had been discovered, and gave the letter to Sister Agnes, the only one who had pity on her, who concealed it in her bosom. Jovita received, afterwards, a visit from the abbess, who was accompanied by a sister, who laid a complete new attire on the bed, and retired; the abbess ordered Jovita to undress and put on the new attire. To her great disappointment, nothing was found, and the abbess demanded that she should swear to it that she had never received any word from outsiders. Jovita refused to comply with this demand, and the consequence was a new punishment, of the kind which Mr. Masilewski described before.

In another letter, she told me of the last perpetrated crime, and begged me, if possible, to deliver her, and the next time the laundry-woman brought her a note in which I told her that I had made all arrangements to elope with her from the convent during the night, and to flee with her over the frontier, and that a good friend had supplied me with the necessary money.

Shortly after the bell of the convent had announced that midnight had come, a pale woman, clad in a black attire, stood before the small window of her cell, when a soft whistle was heard from outside; this sign was answered by a low coughing. In a moment, a rope was thrown over the wall of the convent; she fastened it around her waist, and, a few seconds afterwards, she was hovering between heaven and earth. But, oh! fatality! the rope broke, and the poor, wretched

woman fell, and bruised her left leg. The rope was repeatedly thrown over again; at last, she had the strength to tie it again around her waist, and this time, she reached the top of the wall, and descending the ladder which was standing on the outside, she reached the open air, and was free. The wagon, which I had ordered to be, at twelve o'clock, near the convent, was not there, and as I was afraid that waiting outside of the convent wall would prove fatal to our escape, I resolved to carry her, who was nearly fainting, into an inn, and wait there for the carriage. I did not dare to remain in the open street. The hostess, seeing that my companion was an escaped sister of the convent, quickly left the house, gave warning of the occurrence at the convent, and soon we were surprised by the appearance of Father Hyzinus. Jovita swooned, and I defended my precious prey like a lion, but in vain; the host assisted Hyzinus against me, and soon I was overpowered, and Jovita carried to the convent. This was the last time I ever saw my love, until the detective confronted me with her."

Mr. Zarski had told his story, and I was now requested to continue, which I did in a few words:

"The convents have their own jurisdiction, and soon Jovita had to appear before the severe tribunal; Father Hyzinus had made up the act of accusation, which read as follows:

'Barbara Ubrik, known under the name of Jovita, is accused of immoral actions, continued disturbances in the convent, manifold irregularities and trespasses on the rules of the convent, even of theft and cunningly plotting crime; she has refused the mercy of baptism, and given her soul to the devil, for which cause she was unworthy of the holy Lord's supper, and by this act she has calumniated God; she has clandestinely broken the vows of purity, in so far that she held a love-correspondence with the novice, Zarski, and allowed herself to elope with him; at last she has offended against the vow of obedience, of poverty, and seclusion, and on the 25th of May, 1848, she has accomplished an escape from the convent.'

According to the rules of the convent, this offense was punishable by death by means of imprisonment; this punishment, however, was deemed too light for the sinner, and the following judgment was brought on paper:

'The criminal has to do three days of expiation of sins in the church, afterwards she will be lashed by all the sisters of the order, and be declared forfeited of her clerical dignity; she herself will be considered as dead, and her name will be taken from the list of the order. At last, she has forfeited the right to the holy Mass and the Lord's Supper, and is condemned to perpetual imprisonment.'

After dinner, the execution of the judgment commenced. The abbess, accompanied by a sister, who carried a white expiation-dress, entered the jail of Jovita. The nun tore the dress from the limbs of the condemned woman, until she stood entirely nude, and then she had to put on the expiation-dress; a rope was thrown around her neck, and she was ordered to leave the cell, with a burning candle in her hand. Arrived at the principal corridor, the nuns were standing in two rows, each armed with a lash; they mocked the poor sister, and spit in her face. She was led, first, to the church, where she had to beg of God and humanity, pardon for her terrible sins; then her dress was drawn over her head, and an iron band fastened around her waist. Hereupon, they went all in procession to the underground cells of the convent, while the sisters were singing a hymn of the

dead. Jovita went ahead with a candle in her hand, and was led by the jailer, who held the rope in her hand, which was tied around the criminal's neck. Now she was led into the room of the dead, where a fearful smell of dead bodies pierced her nostrils; here she had to kneel down, and every one of the sisters applied the lash on the bare limbs of the victim, three times, with such force that the blood gushed from her body. At last, the poor, fainting creature was led in procession to the choir. In the center, a coffin was standing. Jovita was laid in it, while the sisters kneeled, and Father Hyzinus read the mass of the dead, the bells of the convent at the same time announcing, to the outside world, that a holy sister was being interred. After this fearful agony had been gone through, the sisters left the church, and were ordered to retreat into the refectory, and only the jailer and the abbess led the victim to her underground cell, where she had to spend the remainder of her days, none of the sisters knowing where Jovita was held imprisoned."

"And now, gentlemen," continued the detective, "I have come to the conclusion of my report. Before I proceed, however, I must tell you that Father Gratian, who is now sitting in the bench of the accused, had left Warsaw, as soon as the convent was abolished. I followed his trace to Hamburg, where I learned that he had gone to London; here I searched a long time in vain for him, and at last I found him in one of the most deserted streets of London, trading in old books. I first bought some books of him, and soon gained his confidence; one day, I told him that a great book-auction was to be held at Hamburg, and that, as he had a great knowledge of the business, I would handsomely pay him, if he would go with me to Hamburg, to purchase for me. He soon agreed, and once being in Hamburg, I soon obtained leave from the government to arrest him and bring him to Cracow. You may hear from him, yourselves, whether all I have stated regarding him is not exactly the truth.

I found Mr. Zarski in Warsaw; he was the man who had sent the note to me, informing me of the crime perpetrated, and he has been very instrumental in helping me to obtain all the facts.

Now being sure not to have been duped, and having the proofs in my hand, I applied to the attorney-general, for admittance, at once, to the convent; he could not refuse, but laughed at the absurdity of our suspicion. We went, accompanied by him, to the convent, and the abbess declared that she knew nothing about the matter, but as we proved to her that we knew all about it, she told us that Barbara Ubrik had long since died. We insisted upon searching the convent, and could not succeed in forcing her to lead us to the cell before we had threatened to arrest her, and to search the convent from top to bottom. At last, she complied with our command; we were led down, down, deep under ground. At last we stood before a heavy, iron door, which we could only open by using all our strength. The door at last ceded to our efforts, and a fearful stench filled our nostrils, but nothing was to be seen in the dark hole. I told the abbess that we did not want to be misled any longer, and that, if she did not at once comply with our command, I should arrest her. But, lo! at once a human being came creeping from under a heap of dirty, moist straw, and showed signs of life. The poor victim was nude; the straw was so rotten that by her every motion an indescribable stench spread through the cell. I took, at once, an inventory of all that was in the cell, while the abbess was sent for a new attire. After Jovita was dressed, we had to carry her out of the cell, as she could scarcely move; the light of day, which she had not seen for twenty-one years, dazzled her eyesight. Her mind was disturbed, and I had to watch closely, every moment that her mind was clear, to hear the particulars of her sad fate."

“This, gentlemen,” thus I ended my story, “is all I have to tell; further particulars you may hear from the victim herself, who is now in the lunatic asylum, and from the witnesses, who are all here.”

The audience, which had breathlessly listened to the startling accounts given, sighed deeply, and groaning expressed horror at so much cruelty.

The investigation continued for several days, and it was plainly proven that I had not misrepresented a single fact. The court gracefully acknowledged the merits of my research, and that the highest praise was due to the man who had devoted all his energy and time to repair, if possible, an injustice done to a Russian subject.

The Father Gratian was condemned to banishment for life to Siberia; the abbess of St. Mary and Zitta, the former abbess of St. Theresia, had to share his fate; the convent was confiscated, and a part of the wealth belonging to it granted as an indemnification to Barbara Ubrik.

Let us accompany the committee of the court, charged with interviewing Barbara in the lunatic asylum at Cracow. Now and then, there were moments when her mind was perfectly clear, and at such times she gave evidence which so perfectly coincided with the relation of the facts by the detective, that not the least doubt was allowed as to its perfect truth. At other times, frenzy overtook her, and the poor woman, although only forty-one years old, and having traces left of her once wonderful beauty, at such moments, looked eighty years old; her features were disfigured, her jet-black eyes, in which the fire of love had so kindly glistened, now threw daggers at her investigators, and when the name of Father Gratian was pronounced, a groan was heard, like that of a tigress who is robbed of her whelps, and her nails scratched the wooden parts of the bed, as if she wanted to tear him to pieces who had robbed her of the most precious gift of her Creator, reason.

These are the plain facts which came under my observation in working up this sad case. I have neither been partial nor excited while narrating them. I have told them without embellishment or prejudice. It is often our duty to search the facts of a mysterious case, and neither in the search itself, nor in the report of our results, may we save personal feelings. We are the tools by means of which justice is done, and our only reward is found in the punishment of him or her who has wronged humanity by degrading our better feelings to the mere passions of the brute.

Our poor heroine died only a few years after her deliverance. Her system had undergone a too severe shock by the manifold punishments she had to suffer, combined with the poisonous drug which undermined her reason, and followed by an imprisonment of twenty-one years, in a dungeon which neither admitted light nor fresh air, stretching out her poor, nude, mutilated limbs on straw which was only occasionally refreshed, and, of course, was damp. We may safely believe that the nutrition which she received was as little as was necessary to barely support life, and we must be astonished that a human being could undergo so much suffering, and yet not only survive, but even preserve traces of beauty—a remarkable proof, indeed, that her beauty, in youth, must have been worthy of the brush of a Raphael.



McWatters, George. *Detectives of Europe and America*. Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1877.