

An Extraordinary Story of a Female Blue Beard—Fascinations and Crimes of a Beautiful Fiend

An extraordinary tale, gravely told by Peuchet in his *Memoires Tires des Archives de la Police*, has just been made the subject of a drama at one of the boulevard theaters, under the title of *Syrene de Paris*. At the time when M. de la Reynie was Lieutenant-General of Police under Louis XIV, a great sensation was caused at Paris by the mysterious disappearance of not fewer than twenty-six young men, aged from seventeen to twenty-five, belonging to noble or wealthy families. Among the common people the report was spread that the young men had been murdered by a foreign princess, in order that she might take baths of their blood to cure herself of a liver complaint! The matter at last became so serious that Louis XIV complained of it to M. de la Reynie, and the latter consulted one of his ablest agents, named Lecoq. This person at once suspected that the young men must have fallen into some snare set for them by female charms, and he employed a natural son of his own, a handsome and intelligent young man, to try and discover the mystery.

This young man, whose name was Exupere, was sent, splendidly dressed, every day, to the Tuileries, the Place Royale, and the Luxembourg, which were then the places of fashionable resort. At length he saw in the Tuileries a young lady of marvelous beauty, attended by an aged female, and his looks expressed his admiration. She seemed far from displeased, and at length her attendant, accosting him, said that she was a Polish princess of the name of Jabirouska, immensely rich, and that as she was much struck by him, she would perhaps allow him to visit her. The young man declared that he had conceived a violent passion for the lady, and after some conversation the attendant told him that if at nine o'clock at night he would present himself in front of the church of St. Germain l' Auxerrois, she would meet him and take him to her mistress. The young man of course told Lecoq of this, and in the evening the latter caused several of his men to be placed in such a way as not to lose sight of Exupere, and in the event of his incurring any danger, to be able to render him assistance.

At the appointed hour the young man was at the rendezvous, and the woman joined him there. She wanted to bandage his eyes, but he refused to let her do so. She then led him by various obscure streets to the Rue des Orfevres, and there introduced him into a small house, near the Chapel Saint Eloi. After walking along a dark corridor the young man was introduced into a sumptuously furnished room, in which he found the foreigner. She received him so kindly that he entirely forgot to give Lecoq outside a signal which had been agreed on. After a while the lady retired, and the young man, proceeding to examine the room, found behind a screen a glass case in which were twenty-six men's heads, each placed in a silver dish and each so skillfully embalmed that it retained the appearance of life! He started back with horror; but at the same moment a whistle outside was heard, being the signal of Lecoq, and in a few seconds after the windows were forced open, and that officer and his men, who had ascended by ladders, jumped into the room.

The *soi-disant* princess, hearing the noise rushed into the apartment, followed by four ferocious-looking bandits, but the police were strong enough to arrest all five. The bandits were in due time condemned to death and executed. As to the female, she turned out to be not a Pole, but an English woman, who is stated in Peuchet's account to have enticed the young men to her house

to satisfy her passions, and had them murdered in order to rob them. She also was condemned to death, but escaped in a strange way. The King spoke of the affair to his brother Monsieur, to the Chevalier de Lorraine, and some other high personages. The Chevalier suggested to the prince that it would be amusing to sup with so singular a criminal. Monsieur at first objected, but at last consented. By means of a blank *lettre de cachet*, the Prince caused the woman to be given up to some persons sent by him, on the pretext that she was conveyed to another prison.

He had her, however, carried to a country house, some miles across the country, where he, the Chevalier de Lorraine, and M. d'Effiat were waiting to receive her. The whole four supped together. At length Monsieur, having seen enough of her, suggested that she ought to be sent back to the Bastile; but his companions proposed in stead that she should be conveyed either to London or Brussels and set at liberty. The good-natured prince consented and went away. The two nobles passed the night in an orgie with the woman, telling her that the next day they would convey her out of the country; but instead of trusting to them, she thought best to save herself; so, plying them well with drink till they were overcome, she locked them in, and escaping, was seen no more. The governor of the Bastile, on learning that the woman had been got out of his custody by a trick of the King's brother, though the best thing he could do was to pretend that she was dead, and he accordingly had a *proces verbal* drawn up to that effect.

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