

Anastasie Jouvin

A STORY OF THE SECOND EMPIRE

It was a glittering morning in March—one of those mornings upon which all Paris turns out of bed, as if by common consent, and the streets, boulevards and parks are thronged with joyous humanity, while the Champs Elysées are all aglow with color, and the puppet shows and peripatetic venders of refreshment do a roaring business—this before the *déjeûner à la fourchette*.

It was in the gorgeousness of the Empire. The frown of Napoleon III. made sovereigns uneasy; his smile filled them with rapture. Eugénie's receptions at the Tuileries were gradually in-drawing even the haughty and defiant denizens of the Faubourg St. Germain. "Lou-lou," as the Prince Imperial, poor lad, was familiarly named, was just emerging from his theatrical nursery-days, and how theatrical they were!

The boy, in babyhood, was prigged up in a grenadier's uniform—for was not "*mon fils, tête d'armée!*" the injunction of the dying Napoleon at St. Helena? When he went out to drive in his nurse's arms, she was flanked by an admiral's widow, bearing the sonorous title of "*Gouvernante des Enfants de France,*" and two other ladies of quality sat facing her, with their backs to the horses. A guard rode at the door next to the Imperial child. This equipage was drawn by four blood horses, and driven by postilions in green and gold liveries. A pair of outriders, splendidly mounted, preceded to clear the road, and enveloping the turnout was a squadron of lancers, in showy uniform. *Mouchards*, stationed along the avenues through which the Prince rode, somewhat rudely pushed back those who ran to stare at the great spectacle, and aroused the passions of malice and sharp-toothed envy. In the Bois de Boulogne, where the nurse, a full-breasted Burgundian, descended for a walk, she was more like a captive than anything else.

The *gouvernante*, the two ladies, and Miss Shaw, the English *bonne*—sent over to Paris by Queen Victoria—the guard, and four dismounted soldiers, kept guard over her. Two lancers were inside the alley, sent in to beat the woods.

The reign of *gouvernante* and governess continued until the Prince was nine years old, when the ladies were disbanded, to be replaced by a tutor and two aides-de-camp.

His tutor was the son of a Comtois peasant. His name was Monnier. He was honest, good, rude, kind and learned. The method he followed was to attach himself as closely to his pupil as his shadow, and never stir a step without giving him a short, improvised lecture on the properties, history, nature, uses, etc., of the objects presenting themselves to his notice.

Twice a week Monnier stipulated that he was to spend his evenings with his mother—an illiterate countrywoman, with a deep fund of natural good sense and shrewdness. She wore muslin caps and cotton gowns, and talked *patois*.

Monnier induced the Emperor to let him take the Prince to breakfast with the *gargotes* of the Faubourg, frequented by masons and street-sweepers. This was to show him how the work of the world was done, and what wretches had to bear, and bore—without repining. With one of these breakfasts this narrative opens.

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It was on a bright March morning of the year 1868 that Lou-lou, on foot, attended by Monsieur Monnier, turned out of the Tuileries into the Rue Rivoli, and passing down into the garden of the Louvre, struck the Place de la Concorde.

The Prince Imperial stopped a moment opposite the obelisk which marks the spot where the beautiful head of the ill-fated Marie Antoinette fell beneath the bloody knife of “Mère Guillotine,” as the Reds fiendishly termed the instrument of death, and his Imperial Highness, after receiving a hundred-word lecture on the terrible subject from Monsieur Monnier, turned to the right up the Rue Royale.

“Who is that man in the fez?” asked Lou-lou, pointing to a balcony upon which a gentleman of swarthy complexion, and whose raven locks were partly concealed by a fez, lazily leant, while sending puffs of cigar-smoke into the delicious atmosphere of that bright March morning.

“That is the brother to the Viceroy of Egypt.” replied the tutor.

“What is he doing there? What place is that?”

“That is the Mouton Club. He has not been to bed yet.”

“How do you know?”

“How do we know everything that goes on at the Tuileries?”

The lad stopped.

“Why did he not go to bed last night, monsieur?”

“Because he preferred to lose his health by sitting up.”

“Did he sit up from choice?” demanded the boy, for he was a brave sleeper.

“Yes, to play cards; and he lost last night and this morning his entire estate on the Nile, valued at eighteen million francs. But shall we not move on?”

They stopped in the flower-market at the Madeleine, where Lou-lou purchased two moss-rose buds, one for himself and the other for his tutor.

Then they ascended the steps of the church and entered, the lad sprinkling himself with holy water and dropping reverently upon his knees, not on a *prie-dieu*, but on the tessellated pavement.

The lad, having finished his orisons, passed out at the door to the left of the grand altar; and when the pair had gained the *trottoir*, Monnier led the way along the Boulevard des Italiens, Lou-lou stopping ever and anon to gaze into the glittering shop-windows, or at the caricatures exhibited on the kiosks under the trees that were now bursting into leaf of luminous green.

In passing the Grand Hotel he was recognized by two Englishmen—‘Arrys out for a week in “Paree”—who chose to mob him, until his tutor, in order to shake them off, called a hackney-carriage, ordering the driver to the Place de la Bastille, then, as now, the heart of the “Red” quarter.

“We will breakfast in a military *café* this morning, *mon prince*.”

“Oh, by all means!” cried the lad, whose military proclivities were growing with his growth and strengthening with his strength.

“Here we are, then!” observed the tutor, turning into a street known as Le Petit Cordon, and which was subsequently literally blown to atoms by the Versailles troops when they were cutting their way to the Buttes de Chaumont.

This *auberge* of the *barrière* boasted a sign—a gigantic and very crimson lobster drawing off a glass of still redder wine, with the words “*A toi*” underneath.

The room into which they penetrated was low-ceilinged, white-plastered and gaudily decked, as are the low *guinguettes* of Paris. The apartment was long, and had its walls adorned with laurel wreaths, strips of tri-colored paint, and vividly-colored medallions of the Guards of the Third Empire, but of the Emperor or Empress there was no effigy.

The floor was bare and well-polished; the air full of tobacco smoke, wine fumes, brandy odors and an overpowering scent of oil, garlic and *pot au feu*.

Nearly every table was occupied by representatives of a branch in the service. Pipes were smoked, barrack slang, camp slang, *barrière*-slang were chatted volubly.

Monsieur Monnier, espying a table in a distant corner, made for it, and had motioned his pupil to a seat, when a young girl suddenly came forward and exclaimed, in a low tone:

“Can I have a place at this table?”

Monsieur Monnier looked up.

She was of the middle height, still in her teens, ivory-complexioned, black-eyed, black-haired and square-jawed.

Her dress was almost *distingué*, while her manner was self-possessed and free from everything approaching either levity or vulgarity.

Lou-lou stood up, true gentleman that he was, and offered her his chair.

“Not *yours*,” she quickly said.

Monsieur Monnier now rose and offered his, which the girl sank upon with a grace that was charming to behold.

“Order your breakfasts,” she observed. “I shall take nothing but some radishes, a cup of chocolate and a roll.”

Monsieur Monnier cast a warning look at his pupil, who was evidently upon the point of inviting the young lady to breakfast.

The girl ordered her frugal *déjeuner*, and, taking a cheap newspaper of the *quartier* from her pocket, commenced to read while she occasionally dipped her crisp roll into the rich brown chocolate.

The young prince was as hungry as a lad of his age ought to be, and made fearful havoc upon a savory omelette, followed by a cutlet.

This he washed down with a red wine that almost caused him to make a grimace every time he tasted it, even though well watered.

It was while he was deeply engaged that the girl, placing the open-paged newspaper between him and his tutor, leaned over and addressed the latter:

“You are wrong to take that boy here.”

Monnier glanced sharply at her. She was deep in the columns of the two-sous paper.

“I take my son everywhere.”

“Son! Bah!”

She never raised her eyes.

The tutor remained silent.

“Get out of this at once!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that *he*”—with a slight jerk of her head in the direction of the Prince Imperial, “is *not* safe here.”

Monnier smiled, as he looked round at dragoons, hussars, artillerymen and zouaves.

“Don’t look too suddenly!” continued the girl, in a very low tone, her face on her newspaper. “There are five men at a table yonder. They followed you from the Place de la Bastille; they are the worst characters in the *quartier*, in Paris—in France. They regard regicide as a sovereign virtue. One of them is of the Orsini gang. I tell you, you are not safe.”

“But you make a mistake. I am but—”

“Pierre Monnier, and he is—shall I proceed?”

“’Tis enough, mademoiselle. I grant that you recognize us, but that there is any danger, surrounded as we are by his Imperial Majesty’s faithful soldiers, is simply arrant nonsense.”

“Do not look. These men are watching your every motion. They have taken Mère Guichette into their council. She is a tigress. Leave, I say!”

But Monnier only smiled, and, despite another warning from the girl, quietly finished his breakfast.

“You see, mademoiselle,” he half-whispered, as he paid the modest bill, “your fears were groundless.”

“Bah! You only see the surface of the current. I see below it.”

“If mademoiselle has any information to con—”

“What does monsieur take me for—a *mouchard*?” drawing herself up in such magnificent scorn that the other almost quailed beneath it.

“Mademoiselle has the interest of the Empire at heart?”

“Yes.”

“Will mademoiselle honor me with her name?”

“No.”

“I can have it if I want to.”

“Take it that way, if you will.”

And the girl, springing to her feet, walked out of the *auberge*.

“What is the matter with mademoiselle?” demanded Lou-lou.

“How should I know, sir?”

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Monsieur Monnier mentioned his adventure to General Fleury, who related it to the Emperor.

“Find out who she is, and let Filon represent Majesty,” said Napoleon III.

Who is Filon?

He was a man who so closely resembled the Emperor that the Guard has been turned out to present arms as he passed into the Tuileries. Eugenie herself mistook him on one occasion for her Imperial husband. Filon was driving with a very beautiful woman in the Bois de Boulogne, and there was a scene in the private apartments consequent upon the mistaken identity, for it sometimes suited the Imperial lady to play jealous.

Filon was a necessity to the Secret Service of the Empire. It was Filon who went to the opera when Orsini bombs were threatened, while the real Simon Pure remained snugly in the Tuileries till the dangerous moment had passed.

It was Filon who attended reviews and the laying of foundation-stones whenever the *mouchards*, or spies, brought in word that the “Red” was dangerous.

Filon received troublesome visitors, and many hundreds—nay, thousands—in France today, who imagine that they have had speech with the Emperor, will never know that it was Filon who represented his Imperial Majesty.

The secret was pretty closely kept. Generals Fleury, Canrobert and MacMahon held it Monsieur Rouher and half a dozen tried men were intrusted with it, and it worked admirably.

It is a matter of uncertainty to the present moment—save with two—that it was Filon who sat beside the late Emperor of Russia on that Summer day when his life was attempted by the Pole while *en route* to the Exposition.

So when Napoleon III said, “Let Filon represent,” General Fleury knew exactly what to do.

Filon possessed the drooping lids and the waxed mustaches so well known ten years ago.

“Monsieur Filon,” observed Fleury, “I have a little affair for you.”

“What is it?” demanded Filon, who had come to the cabinet of the private secretary to receive instructions for the day.

It should be observed that he always arrived muffled up to the chin, and walking dead lame, the mustaches loose and fluffy; in a word, totally different in appearance to the individual who subsequently, as the case might be, emerged from the cabinet as the Emperor.

Fleury touched a bell.

“Send to the Pavilion l’Horloge for Monsieur Monnier.”

The discreet clerk silently withdrew, and in a moment or two the Prince Imperial’s tutor glided in.

“Monsieur Monnier, will you have the goodness to ‘coach’ Monsieur Filon on the subject of that young girl at the *auberge* in the Bastille *quartier*. Step into the window—your conversation will not then disturb me. Thanks.”

The two moved into a deep embrasured window that gave upon the gardens, already a flame of hyacinth, tulip and polyanthus blossoms.

Filon asked many questions, especially as regards the appearance of the girl, and ten minutes completed the interview.

“Well?” exclaimed General Fleury, as the tutor disappeared.

“I think I know the young lady.”

“Good.”

“I’ll find out all about her today, and commence operations to-morrow.”

“Is it a case of playing Majesty?”

“It may be.”

“Any danger?”

A shrug of the shoulders is the reply.

“By-the-way, Monsieur Filon, you will attend the opening of the dry-dock at Chanlaumieux on Monday. We have reason to fear that cursed Lotonian and that gang. Be here at one forty-five. *Au revoir.*”

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Two days after the foregoing interview Monsieur Filon sauntered down the Avenue de la Reine Hortense, and entered the Pare Monceaux.

These grounds, which formerly belonged to the domain of Monceaux, or Mousseau, part of the lordship of Cluny, were purchased by Philip of Orleans, father of Louis Philippe, in 1778 and laid out in a style intended to be entirely novel, differing both from French and English established notions.

This intention was carried out with considerable success, and the park became one of the most fashionable resorts of the *beau monde*. The Revolution converted the park into national property. At the Restoration it again became the property of the House of Orleans. After having been employed in 1848 for the National *ateliers*, it eventually came into the possession of the city, and has since been transformed into a charming promenade for carriages, riders and foot-passengers. It cannot, of course, vie with the Bois de Boulogne, the Buttes Chaumont or the Bois de Vincennes, but it possesses a piquancy all its own, and, being within the precincts of the city, is much frequented at all hours.

Monsieur Filon puffed his Victoria Reina, a cigar manufactured on a pet Cuban plantation for the smoking of his Imperial Majesty, Napoleon III., and casting a leisurely glance around him, advanced to an iron rustic bench upon which he seated himself.

“She was here yesterday at this hour,” he muttered. “The chances are that she will come back today. Our Parisian women are very conservative on the subject of when and where in connection with their open-air amusement.”

He took a copy of the *Figaro* from his pocket, and, humming an air from Offenbach’s latest, lazily scanned its contents.

It should be mentioned that he wore his coat-collar up to his ears, and that the mustaches were in the rough, not needle-pointed.

To behold him seated there, the casual observer would set him down as a well-groomed citizen, who had descended from his “apartment” to inhale the mild March air, for March was lamb-like on this particular morning, and violets were peeping from behind luminous green leaves in shaded nooks.

Monsieur Filon had just cleaned out the front page of his newspaper, when a young lady sauntered past him.

She was richly attired in a blue cloth overcoat—not exactly an ulster, they were not yet invented—trimmed with the richest sable. Her hat was as piquant as her gloves, and her shoes were as coquettish as Cinderella’s.

“Aha!” chuckled Filon, “here she is. *I* thought so.”

Apparently, he continued the earnest perusal of his paper, but one eye followed the movements of the lady, who stopped every now and then to gaze at a tulip or hyacinth, or an apace.

“That fur tippet is too much for you, *ma petite*. You will be constrained to sit down, remove it from your neck, and take a good pull at this delightful morning air. *I* thought so,” he added, with a chuckle, as the girl, partly removing the fur from her neck, sank on a wooden garden-chair.

Monsieur Filon was at the other side of the greensward.

“The seat next to her is empty. I had best secure it at once.”

Assuming a lameness which might mean a bullet won at the Crimea, or a twinge of the gout earned by too deep potations of English port, Filon limped round the grass-plot, and, with a carelessness that did honor to his powers as an actor, hopped over to the vacant chair, and, after nursing his leg a little, reopened the *Figaro*.

The young lady by this time had leant back on her chair, extending her coquettish barred shoes out from her as far as her dainty feet could thrust them, and with hands folded round an umbrella handle, and eyes that gazed dreamily into the park, seemed to enjoy the *dolce far niente* [with] the lazy *abandon* of a lotus-eater.

There were very few people in the park, as it was just the hour when Parisians are preparing for their *déjeuner à la fourchette*, and sunning themselves in the markets or on the Boulevard.

Monsieur Filon, pretending to be very much tickled with an article in the *Figaro*, commenced first to chuckle, and then to laugh outright.

The young lady took no more notice of his movements than if he had been seated on a bench in the market-place at Marseilles.

Monsieur Filon read the paragraph half-aloud. It ran:

“The Prince Imperial, attended by his tutor, Monsieur Monnier, breakfasted, a few mornings ago, amongst the ‘Reds’ in a *cabaret* well-known as the head-quarters of the leaders of the now happily extinct party. It speaks well for the Empire that the heir to the Imperial throne can move about this once most unsafe quarter of the capital without the slightest fear of molestation.”

Filon flung a side-glance at the young lady; she was calmly cutting out a monogram with the high heel of her *piquante* little shoe.

By an adroit movement, he suddenly twisted his mustaches into needle-points, lowered the collar of his coat and drooped his eyelids. Then he coughed once or twice.

The young lady languidly turned her head and indulged in a half-smile.

“Well, mademoiselle, permit me to offer you the *Figaro*,” observed Filon, touching his hat.

“Thanks, monsieur; but I never read a newspaper.”

“Never?”

“Pinafore” had not yet been perpetrated, so she really could have had no object in saying, “No, never.”

“Then mademoiselle lives out of the world.”

“Mademoiselle does nothing of the sort,” retorted the girl, with a light laugh. “It is because mademoiselle is so much in the world that she needs no newspaper I hear everything,” she added—“I mean the best of everything.”

“Mademoiselle is much to be envied.”

The young lady shrugged her shoulders with that *chic* only known to a Parisienne.

Napoleon III had a trick of tapping the side of his boot with his cane, while the lids were drooped in the direction of the boot.

The girl now laughed outright.

Filon turned an inquiring look upon her.

“Admirably done!” she gayly cried. “Worthy of the Comedie Française. What an actor you are, to be sure! But you seem to have but one *role*.”

Filon remained silent from astonishment.

“You are Monsieur Filon,” the girl said. “For a second or two I mistook you for the Emperor.”

“What if you are mistaken?” recovering himself.

“Bah!” and she shrugged her shoulders.

“Mademoiselle doubts?”

“Mademoiselle does not doubts; and if monsieur will show the small scar on his left cheek which Louis Napoleon—”

“I give you up, my sweet mademoiselle,” laughed Filon. “I thought I would have a little fun. They say I *do* somewhat resemble the Emperor.”

“So the poor citizens of Lamboyall thought on Friday last. Ah, Monsieur Filon, I know a great deal more than you imagine.”

“So I perceive, mademoiselle: and now, as you know *me*, perhaps you will kindly reveal your *incognito*?”

“It is not at all necessary, Monsieur Filon.” And, dropping a very graceful courtesy, she wished him “*Bon jour*,” and trotted off on her high heels.

“She is a very charming young lady; but as to endeavoring to conceal her identity from *me*—aha!”

Taking a pinch of snuff, Monsieur Filon rose from the bench and followed her, but at a respectful distance.

As he passed out of the park gate, he encountered one of the special private detectives.

“Do you see that lady?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Follow her. Find out who she is—all about her.”

“I know who she is and all about her, monsieur.”

“Who is she, then?”

“She is Mademoiselle Anastasie Jouvin, the chief of the female detective staff of Her Majesty the Empress.”

“Ah,” said Monsieur Filon, as he walked away, “what a fool I must appear! How His Majesty will enjoy this.”

Then, shrugging his shoulders, he hailed a *fiacre*, and ordered to drive to the Palais Royal.

“A breakfast at Véfours is the only thing to counteract the stupidity of this morning.”

Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours, February 1884