

Mademoiselle Jabirouska, The Modern Messalina

The archives of the police of Paris furnish us with the details of a most extraordinary narrative, the authenticity of which is unquestioned, and which we think will somewhat startle our numerous readers. For many years M. de la Reynie had discharged to the satisfaction of the public, the duties of lieutenant-general of the police, when suddenly a most remarkable panic was produced throughout Paris, by the unaccountable disappearance of several individuals.—During a period of four months, 26 young men of from 17 to 20 years of age had disappeared, leaving their families inconsolable for their loss. Mysterious and contradictory rumors were circulated in regard to the matter in the Faubourg St. Antoine, which had been deprived in this manner of four or five young men, the sons of respectable citizens.

The Duke of Gevres communicated the circumstance to the king, who, when the lieutenant of police had been ordered into his presence, expressed his indignation and regret in the strongest terms at the continued repetitions of a practice which was undoubtedly followed by the violent death of the victims, as none of them afterwards reappeared. LaReynie in despair at the rebuke and distress of his sovereign, returned with a desponding heart to Paris. On arriving there, he sent for one of the officers of his establishment, named Lecoq, a man of considerable adroitness and address, and one who had been of service to his superior, on many difficult and trying occasions.—Lecoq appeared, and M. de la Reynie explained to him his embarrassment, described the dissatisfaction of the king and made such promises of recompense, that Lecoq, elated at the prospect, and sympathizing with the general anxiety to discover a clue to the mystery, exclaimed, “Enough, sir. I see that, in order to get you out of this scrape, I must not shrink from the example of the patriarch who would have sacrificed his own son on the altar. But give me eight days, and at the end of that time I trust I shall be able to render you a satisfactory account of this matter.”

Lecoq did not explain himself further; and La Reynie, who regarded him as his better angel, dismissed him with a gesture, which signified that he gave him the most unlimited powers to carry his object into effect. At this time it was common among the police of Paris to communicate with one another by mute signs—a sort of telegraph, the key of which was confided only to a limited number of the initiated. Lecoq was not married; but he had a natural son, on whom he lavished all the tenderness of his nature, and whose education he had himself superintended. The youth was called by his companions l’Eveille (Wide-awake.) He was about 16 years old of a fine and handsome exterior, and bore himself more like a man of 25, than a mere lad. L’Eveille, whose real name was Exupere, received from the bounty of his father all that could flatter the vanity of a young man. His appointments were of the first order, and his graceful person was set off with clothes of the most costly and fashionable manufacture. But he was permitted to venture out but little, Lecoq knowing too well to what dangers fine young men were exposed in the streets of Paris; and, in all his promenades, he was dogged by the spies of his affectionate father.

On the day of the interview between La Reynie and Lecoq, the latter, on returning home, shut himself up with his son. The conference was long, and a few hours afterwards the neighbors were more than ever struck with the appearance of l'Eveille, as he left the house of his parent, in his most brilliant attire. L'Eveille, in addition to the beauty of his person, was gifted in an eminent degree with keen perceptions, courage, prudence, and knowledge of the world. The secret conversation which he had held with his father had roused his ambition; and he had readily seen how much honor and profit would accrue to him, if he could aid in the unraveling, for the benefit of the lieutenant of police, the mystery of the disappearance of so many young men. Having, consequently, attired himself as became the son of wealthy parents, he promenaded the fashionable streets, the quays, the Tuilleries, and the Palais Royale.

Lecoq had conjectured that the young men, whose disappearance had excited so much sensation, had fallen into the snare of some intrigue of gallantry; and that the bait by which they were decoyed had been a pretty woman. He had also foreseen that, in exposing his son to an encounter with this female, whoever she might be, he ran the risk of subjecting him to a similar fate; but l'Eveille had been duly placed upon his guard, and his father relied much upon his tact, prudence, and self-possession.

On the 5th day the young dandy, in all the bravery of his new attire, was walking in the Tuilleries, when he encountered a female of extraordinary beauty, who passed quite near him. She walked by herself, but seemed to be followed, at a respectful distance by a sort of governess. The age of the young lady might be from 22 to 25. She was elegantly dressed, and her air and figure presented a model of grace. L'Eveille eyed with interest her delicately rounded figure and spirited features. His glances were not lost; and looks of unequivocal tenderness were exchanged for his own. The presentiment came over him that he was on the road to an adventure. "Can this be the girl," he asked himself, "for whom I have been watching?" To reassure himself, he slackened his pace, and went on again, and then returned, and finally sat himself down on one of the banks facing the Champs Elysees.

He had not been long in this position, before he saw the elderly female, who accompanied the young lady, stroll towards him, and, after making one or two turns, seat herself on the bank by his side. Salutations were at once interchanged, as politeness demanded. Conversation ensued, and our hero, who now began to suspect that the game was in his own hands, inquired of the governess who was the young lady she accompanied.

"Ah, sir," replied she, "the history of my mistress is almost a romance."

"A romance!" repeated l'Eveille. "You interest me. Your mistress then, is—"

"Yes, sir," replied the duenna, with a confidential air; "my mistress is indeed that interesting young person whom all Paris yet talks about; and, since the public voice has informed you who she is, I will not pretend to make any mystery of her story."

“Proceed, proceed,” said l’Eveille; and he approached nearer to the governess.

“You must know, my dear sir, that the father of my mistress was a distinguished Polish prince, who came to Paris expressly with the view of ruining the reputation of a young tradeswoman of the *Rue Saint Denis*. It was in consequence of a bet, as we afterwards learned which he had made in his own country. The profligate noble won his bet. He degraded the object of his deception. My mistress was born. At the sight of his child, the Polish prince, rallying the better part of his nature, burst into tears, and fell at the feet of his victim. ‘I will go,’ he exclaimed, ‘and prostrate myself before my sovereign. He will consent to our union. Believe thy lover, who swears it. Adieu!’ He departed, and was never seen afterwards. The common rumor was, that he was assassinated by brigands. You perceive, young man, how heaven, sooner or later, avenges outraged virtue. The Polish monarch having become informed of the unworthy conduct of the prince, desired to make all the reparation in his power. He sent couriers to Paris. Alas! The young tradeswoman of the Rue St. Denis was no more; but the daughter, sir, survived—the daughter whom you saw walking before me, and whom the Polish monarch had made sole inheritress of the state of the prince, her father; and my mistress is at this day, one of the wealthiest heiresses in Paris. Happy he who shall espouse her!”

“Happy, indeed, he who can make himself acceptable,” said l’Eveille with a sigh.

‘Ha! Young man, to make oneself acceptable, it is only necessary to try.’”

“And how is one to do that?”

“For a lad of spirit, such as you appear to be, you ask singular questions. Good day, sir.”

“One word more,” he exclaimed, playing the passionate lover to admiration, considering he was a *debutant* both in the art of the police, and of Cupid—one word more, I conjure you.”

The governess who had risen, again seated herself. It was now the turn of l’Eveille to speak. He assured the governess, with the most perfect coolness and consummate ingenuity, that he was the son of a physician, a wealthy citizen of Mans, and had been sent to Paris to attend lectures at the University. “It is ten days,” said he, “since I have been in this country. My father spared no money to enable me to make an appearance. I have 200 pistoles in my purse, a costly chain to my watch, rings on my fingers, and egad! I mean to let the people see that a man may be a man of parts, and yet have money to spend, and know how to spend it, too. Ha! ha! ha!”

“Ha! ha! ha!” responded the old woman. She chuckled both from pleasure and from pity; took the hand of l’Eveille and said, “You have completely won my heart, and I entertain for you a real affection. I will prove it. Listen! My mistress has just seen you. You struck her fancy, and she persuaded me to find out who you were. I am charmed that she has made so good a choice. This evening be at the great porch of the church of St. Germain-l’Auxerrois; there I will meet you, and, from all appearances, bring you favorable news.

With this conversation they separated. L'Eveille, hastened to rejoin his father, and apprised him of all that had taken place. Lecoq shared the hopes and suspicions of his son; but amid the prospect of success, his parental tenderness awoke the latent fear of his heart. He trembled at the peril which the young man was about to encounter; and, to diminish it in a degree, he gathered together the agents of the police, explained to them briefly the nature of the duties required of them, and above all, besought them to keep as near as possible to his son, but not, however, in a manner to defeat the success of his enterprise. Finally, he put himself at the head of the detachment, that nothing should go wrong which might have been prevented by his superintendence.

As soon as it was dark, l'Eveille, more splendidly attired than ever, presented himself at the place appointed. As the gates of the church were closed, an old woman, poorly habited and hooded, issued from the porch, and casting furtive glances around her, soon recognized l'Eveille, and made signs to him to follow.

"I should have hardly recognized you," said the young man. "What habiliments?" "They are those of prudence, my son," was the reply. "I would not like to be found out by the numerous admirers of my mistress, who, enraged at not being able to gain me over to their interests, are so many spies upon my very steps.—Heaven preserve us! Our house is surrounded by these coxcombs, as a hive is by bees. But come, let us make haste and by way of precaution, let me put this bandage over your eyes. It is a delicate attention, which is practiced by all our young Parisians, whenever they attend their lady-loves in this manner. Consent for I am sure Mademoiselle Jabirouska (for that is the name of her you go to see) will be flattered by the compliment, and thank you for it, my handsome friend."

"No, no," said l'Eveille, in reply to this invitation, "I will put on no bandage."

"Well, come along then," said the old woman, anxious to bring the affair to a conclusion, "I will not let my mistress be angry."

They walked on, the female keeping some paces ahead of the young adventurer, while the spies of Lecoq followed cautiously in the rear. The matter appeared to be in the train of successful accomplishment. They passed thro' the streets of l'Arbre Sec and La Monnaie—traversed by a circuitous route those of Betizy, Lavandieres, Tauvaises Paroles, Deux Boules, and Jean Lambert, and finally came to a stop in Orfeyres street, which is not the least hideous in this dark and infected quarter of the city.—The house before which they rested was of sufficiently respectable appearance, but the old woman intimated to l'Eveille that her mistress did not take up her residence there constantly, but as it belonged to her, she had thought [it] proper to receive him there—whereupon she said she would apprise the young lady of the arrival of her gallant. The old reprobate departed, and l'Eveille remained with a firm heart, waiting for her return. His father, to encourage him—although he himself shook with agitation—crossed the street, and silently pressed his hand. He had hardly parted from his son, when the old woman returned, and renewed her entreaties that the young man would permit her to bandage his

eyes; but being unable to vanquish his objections, she introduced him without more altercation into the fatal mansion. L'Eveille was well armed. He advanced through the profound darkness, half mistrusting lest he should be suddenly attacked. But no enemy presented himself; and the young adventurer soon found himself in a magnificent apartment lighted with wax candles and splendidly furnished.

A sofa, covered with crimson velvet, and ornamented with letters of gold, occupied one side of the room, and upon this sofa reclined, in a most graceful *dishabille*, the daughter of Prince Jabirouska, Mademoiselle Jabirouska. At the sight of the stranger, she arranged, with a hand sparkling with brilliants, the floating folds of her open robe, saluted the young man with a gracious smile, and dismissed the duenna with a nod.—Poor l'Eveille was quite enchanted. The view of this beautiful girl completely fascinated him. The youthful spy, the crafty son of Lecoq, all at once forgot the part he came to play. He, who intended to entrap, was himself entrapped. As he gazed in speechless wonder on the bright creature before him, she rose hand presented him with her hand, which he covered with kisses. Their eyes met, and each understood the burning intelligence they conveyed. L'Eveille was but mortal, and he soon lost all consciousness of danger, as well as all recollection of the object of his enterprise.

In the meantime, the father was in the street with his attendants, waiting impatiently for the concerted signal, which was to be the notice for their entrance into the house. Not hearing any signal, he finally made one himself, by firing off a pistol. Even under the blandishments of Mademoiselle Jabirouska, the young l'Eveille started at the sound. The noise recalled his energies, and brought him to himself. Shortly afterwards the prince's daughter withdrew; and l'Eveille profited by her absence to examine the chamber. He attempted to unfold a screen, but the leaves seemed nailed together. He shook them forcibly, when one of them fell and revealed a high and secret closet, where, ranged upon twenty-six plates of silver, lay the heads of 26 young men, dissected, and preserved in a manner as astonishing as it was frightful. Here was a spectacle for the voluptuary! He approached the window; but, in the excitement of his terrified fancy, he saw, through the glass, other trunkless heads fix upon him their flaming eyes. With hands clasped, hair on end, and features paler than those around him, the appalled youth sank upon his knees.

At this moment the window was broken through with a loud crash, and the elder Lecoq, followed by the agents of the police, rushed into the apartment. Alarmed at the silence of his son, and believing him to have been assassinated, the father had bravely forced an entrance into the accursed mansion by means of a scaling ladder. This opportune temerity was the means of saving, in effect, the life of l'Eveille, for, immediately upon the noise made by Lecoq and his attendants in entering the chamber, Mademoiselle Jabirouska, escorted by four ruffians, armed to the teeth, hurried into the apartment. The police were, however, too numerous for them. Resistance was useless, and the four bandits, as well as the girl, their accomplice, were immediately put into irons and confined. After a close examination of the building, no other inmate was discovered.

Now for the explanation of this remarkable narrative. An association of malefactors was formed, all who had been doomed to the gibbet or gallows. The chief of the band had

organized his plan as follows:—A woman whom he had encountered in his travels served as a lure for the young men who were abducted. These unfortunates, after having been enticed to their ruin by this modern Messalina, who appears to have been a sort of monomaniac in the indulgence of her passions, were delivered over to the assassins, who, having put them to death, separated the head from the body. The latter was sold to the students of anatomy while the head, having been prepared and embalmed, was valuable at that time in Germany, in the pursuit of a science which has since become somewhat fashionable—we allude to the science of which Gall and Spurzheim were the principal propagators.

The Government were apprehensive of the effect of the divulcation of such a series of crimes. They adopted prompt measures for the condign but secret punishment of the culprits. The wretches were hung; and the alarm which had been raised in Paris by the abduction of so many promising young men gradually subsided, and was forgotten.—

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Waukesha [WI] County Democrat July 3, 1860;
Trempealeau [WI] Representative, July 6, 1860;
Bennington [VT] Banner, August 3, 1860;

as "A Story from the French" in
The Bay City [Green Bay, WI] Press, August 8, 1860;
Watertown Democrat [IA], August 16, 1860;

as "A Strange Story" in *Racine Weekly Advocate* July 18, 1860;

as "The Syren of Paris" in the *Cecil Whig* [Elkton, MD], March 9, 1861;

as "A Story of Paris" in *The Daily Milwaukee News*, August 25, 1864;

as "The Bath of Blood" in *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, March 23, 1874;

as "A Polish Princess' Appetite" in the *Logansport [IA] Daily Star*, March 18, 1874;

as “A Polish Princess’ Penchant” in Fort Smith [AR] *Weekly New Era*, March 25, 1874;

as “Twenty-Six Heads” in *Reno Evening Gazette*, June 5, 1888;

This story appears to be based on an actual case from the archives of the police of Paris that was included in a French publication, “Anecdotes of the French Police” by M. Peuchey and reported in America newspapers in an article titled “Lady Guilfort.”