

## *A French Detective's Story*

I was stopping at the hotel Windsor in the Rue de Rivoli, Paris.

One morning I was smoking in the colonnade, when a tall, elegantly dressed gentleman asked permission to light his cigar by mine. I saw at a glance that he was a Frenchman, although his English was nearly perfect.

“Have you heard the news?” he inquired.

“No.”

“Is it possible? Why, all Paris is alive with it at this moment.”

“What has happened?”

“The Countess de Manville, the fairest of the fair, was found murdered in her bed last night, her bureau broken open, and ten thousand francs missing from it. Ah, it was terrible! There were marks of fingers on her throat; the brute who did the deed effected his entrance through the window of her chamber, near which, unfortunately, was a tree, planted years ago by the grandfather of the countess. Little did he imagine the terrible use that would be made of it.”

“This is bad news. How any man could murder a woman thus is more than I can imagine.”

“Ah, monsieur, if you had ever seen the countess you would wonder still more. She was beautiful – beautiful as an angel,” he added, stroking his whiskers with an unmistakable vanity. “I knew her well.”

“Indeed!”

“Oh, yes. There are in Paris few popular women unknown to me.”

His manner now was decidedly conceited, and I felt disgusted with him. My coldness evidently repelled him, for he soon left me. Afterward I heard from other accounts of the tragedy.

Among the details of the affair was one that peculiarly impressed me, and which my first informant had not spoken of – an oversight that surprised me, as the occurrence he had not mentioned was of a kind which would be most apt to strike the fancy.

Upon the throat of the countess, the murderer, in throttling her, had left a mark from a ring he wore – the impression of a chariot wheel with a star in the center.

“This,” said my latest informant, “may lead to the discovery of the murderer. Jean Mosqueau is already visiting jewelers’ shops to find out from which and by whom a ring with the chariot wheel device was purchased.”

“Who is Jean Mosqueau?”

“What, monsieur! Have you not heard of Mosqueau, our famous detective? Although his courage is well known you would not, to look at his fair, quiet face and delicate form, believe he could fight a gnat.”

A week later I was on board the steamer, bound from Calais to Dover. Among the passengers I beheld one whose face had a familiar look. I was not long in recognizing this person as the one I had seen in front of the Hotel Windsor, and who had first informed me of the murder of the countess. – He was certainly a very handsome man although his conceited air was a blot on his good looks.

He moved languidly hither and thither, now and then turning his brown eyes admiringly upon the pretty lady passengers, while stroking his whiskers with one hand, upon the middle finger of which was a superb diamond ring.

I am of a rather suspicious nature, which, combined with a lively imagination, has often led me into singular errors. Now a strange impulse moved me to advance and hold out my hand to a man whom I involuntarily disliked from the first, in order that I might have a chance to glance at his ring. – Somehow the idea had possessed me that I should discover a chariot wheel device upon the glittering bauble.

The stranger did not at first recognize me. He soon did, however, and frankly extended his left hand, which was not the one containing the ring.

My brain fairly reeled; the man’s behavior was conviction of my suspicions.

“The other hand, if you please,” I said, in a low, stern voice.

“Monsieur will excuse me, if he pleases. My other arm is lame with rheumatism.”

He beheld me glance at the half-hidden ring, and I was sure I saw him start and turn pale, while, at the same time, looking much surprised. He, however, opened his right hand, as if perfectly willing for me to shake it if I chose. Then I had a good look at the ring, and felt ashamed of my suspicion. The device on it was a common heart, which certainly bore no resemblance to a chariot wheel.

After a little general conversation to recover my self-possession I turned away, resolving in future to have a better opinion of my fellow-creatures.

The stranger’s good looks seemed to attract the attention of the ladies. One especially modest looking little thing, attired in black, kept directing furtive glances at the stranger. Finally she glided so close to him that in turning he brushed against her. An apology, smilingly received by the little lady, a remark about the weather on the part of the gentleman, and the two were soon conversing with animation. – Meanwhile the burning cheek and bright eyes of the fair one seemed to betoken that she was well pleased with her companion, whose air was now more

conceited than ever.

“I am afraid that we shall have a storm,” she remarked, pointing toward a dark cloud, upon which the captain of the boat was anxiously gazing.

“We may; but do not feel alarmed, madam.”

With an air of nonchalance he pulled a red cigar case from his pocket, asked his companion if she objected to smoke and being answered negatively, opened the case. Then he started, and quickly returning this to his pocket, he pulled forth another of blue color.

“How many cigars do you smoke in a day?” inquired the lady, evidently amused at the sight of two cases.

The other colored, and it struck me that his voice faltered slightly, and his hand trembled, and he made some laughing report.

Soon the storm came pouring down upon us. We were midway in the channel, so that we caught the full force of the sea and gale. Both were terrible. The sea swept the boat, which lay so far over that her machinery was soon damaged so that they could not work. The wind, screaming like a demon threw her over still further.

Suddenly we observed the sailors endeavoring to loosen the long boat on the davits astern. Meanwhile there was an ominous grinding, smashing noise under the counter. The truth could not long be concealed—we were sinking.

The ladies screamed; the passenger lost his self-possession, and ran wildly about. Meanwhile the cool behavior of the little lady in black contrasted very strangely with the agitated demeanor of those around her. There she stood, calm and immovable, her bright, steel-blue eyes fixed upon the handsome stranger, of whom she did not lose sight for a moment.

“Keep quiet, ladies and gentlemen,” sang out the captain. Keep quiet; don’t crowd around the boat so. There will be room enough in it for all; and besides there is a schooner coming to our assistance,” pointing toward a vessel coming toward us before the wind.

There was, however, a panic among those addressed. The moment the boat was lowered into it they scrambled, and among them the handsome stranger. A huge sea coming along, roaring like thunder, parted the tackles, tearing the boat from the steamer before either the lady in black or I could enter it. The handsome passenger, losing his balance, fell over the gunwale, and, being unable to swim, wildly threw up his arms.

I acknowledge that I was so engrossed with the perilous situation of my companion and myself—now the only two left aboard the steamer—that I paid little attention to the drowning man. The steamer was, in fact, going down fast—was already nearly engulfed in the stormy waves, her heated and half-submerged boilers hissing as the steam came gushing out like the spout from a whale. I was advancing to throw an arm around the little lady, fearing to see her

washed away, when, quietly and coolly motioning me back with one hand, she seized a coil of rope and threw the end to the handsome stranger. He caught it, when turning to me, the lady requested me to help haul the man aboard. I complied, marveling at the love and devotion thus shown by a woman toward an acquaintance of an hour.

His power over the female sex must be great, I thought. He is conceited, but not without reason. This idea flashed clearly across my mind, in spite of my danger. The schooner, however, was now quite near, and I had every reason to believe we should soon be picked up.

I was right. We were all taken aboard the schooner, the handsome passenger with the rest. Then, the lady in black, quietly pulling forth a revolver, pointed it at the head of him whom she had rescued.

“Out with that red cigar-case;” she said sternly. “I would like to see what monsieur carries in it.”

“Why, why!” stammered the man, “what is it—”

Before he could say another word the little amazon, thrusting her disengaged hand in his pocket, pulled forth the red cigar-case, and on opening it a ring dropped to the deck. The ring she picked up, and, holding it before us all, exclaimed:

“I have found it at last. The jeweler assured me it was the only kind of device in all Paris—a chariot wheel. This is the murderer of Countess de Marville!”

The handsome passenger stood as if frozen to the deck, making no resistance as the lady in black slipped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists.

“By what right,” he then stammered “do you—”

He paused, as the other threw off her dress and false hair, revealing the person of a man, with delicate, girlish features.

“I am Jean Mosqueau, the detective, and I robbed the waves of this rascal that the scaffold might not be cheated.”

There is a little to add. The main proof having been obtained, other proofs, on the prisoner’s trials, were brought forth, showing him guilty beyond a doubt.

Long before his execution his name was ascertained to be Louis Bossenan—a noted adventurer and gambler, who, however, by cool effrontery and a winning address, backed by his good looks, had been enabled to move among the first circles of Parisian society.

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