

Trapping a Tartar

by Marion Powell

Mrs. Lascelles was the model of a jealous wife—she never went to bed till her husband was safe and sound in his room, and she invariably searched his pockets to see if they contained anything contraband. She was so very pretty that she might have been perfectly easy, for certainly few could approach our fair heroine in personal appearance. She had been married about seven years, and had done her best to annoy her husband in every possible shape, so far as the fair sex was concerned. In every other respect she was a treasure—she hated flirts, and boldly denounced them all, both male and female, as something worse than fools in intellect, and something still infinitely worse in morals.

Having brought her husband a good fortune, she felt that independence so unpleasant to husbands when a woman plants her back against her marriage certificate and defies her legal lord and master.

Lascelles, who was really very fond of his wife, was a lawyer in excellent practice and repute; his sole sorrow was that absurd suspicion, which destroyed his mental peace, and sometimes seriously interfered with his profession. This she had carried to such an extent that he had really contemplated advertising that no young or pretty clients would be attended to in consequence of the sensitiveness of his wife.

Their drives in the Bois de Bologne were the most amusing things in the world. When Madame Lascelles saw a carriage approaching which held any of the fair sex, she would appear to close her eyes all but a little corner, out of which she looked with all her soul. But time is insufficient to describe the numerous methods the fair Julie Lascelles had of plaguing her husband out of his life. Sometimes a client would call upon him at his house, whereupon the suspicious dame would plant herself at the key-hole, and greedily drink in every word that passed between them. She cross-questioned his clerks, way-laid his messengers, and, in fine from becoming the delight of his life, she was his *bete noire*. It was in vain that he affected a holy horror of every other woman in the world. She declared these assurances to be all hypocrisy, and given with the sole intention of deceiving her.

Their household was composed of the homeliest females that could be scraped together. A menagerie of orang-outangs [orangutans] would compare favorably with their batch of domestic servants. Jokes were made by his friends upon this specialty of his, and when the International Fair was being organized, *Charivari* gravely proposed that the household of M Lascelles should be sent as a specimen of all that was hideous in the world of Beauty.

Mons. Lascelles was sitting in his office one morning when a note was handed to him. His *garçon* said that a lady closely veiled had left it. He was accustomed to receive so many letters from ladies, that he opened it with great equanimity. Despite his coldness, what man of thirty-five could be insensible to such a *billet* as this:

“My friend, I am a woman of great sensitiveness and impulse. I have seen you—I love you. Caesar’s triumph was not more immediate than yours. I saw you, and I loved. You see, *mon amie*, that I abbreviate his dispatch. I shall die, if I do not tell you to your face, how inextricably

my happiness is bound up with you. Listen—I am married to a man who adores me, but I love you—love *you* only. You are not human if you are insensible to my homage. If you are, I die. I know where you live. I have seen your wife, although I have not the honor of her acquaintance. I will be in a carriage at nine this evening, at the corner of Rue St. Honore. Approach the driver, and whistle thrice, gently. Then say, ‘Vendome.’ If he replies, ‘St. Cloud,’ open the carriage door and you will find Marguerite. Do not speak to me till we arrive at our destination, which I will leave you to select.

“Adieu, *mon amie!* I only write the truth, when I add, I love you truly and tenderly.”

Lascelles turned the note over, looked at the seal, which was a Cupid escaping from a cage, held the paper up to the light, while a quiet smile stole over his sedate countenance.

After a few minutes reflection, he put the billet into his pocket, and walked to the office of his friend Marc. Caussidiere, the chief of police.

“*Mon cher* Lascelles!” exclaimed that genial and colossal person, “what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?”

“A most important service—not so much for me as for society.”

“Ah! you interest me! Proceed.”

“I need not remind you, *mon cher* Caussidiere, of the recent mysterious disappearances; for instance, Monsieur Guerin, some eight months since, the Chevalier de [xxx]gars not over three months ago, and not three weeks since Lieu. Lassierre. Now, I think I have found a clue to this mystery.”

“You delight me,” said the chief of police.

“Yes; here is a letter I have received from some unknown person—it seems to be in a woman’s handwriting, but the real sender may be a man—as I strongly suspect it is. Now, I do not intend, my dear Marc, to be another mysterious disappearance, and me I want you to assist me in caging this beautiful decoy bird who has lured so many to their ruin.”

After some private conversation, with which it is not necessary to make the reader acquainted, Lascelles returned to his office, having arranged with the chief of police the programme of the evening.

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Upon his return to his house that evening, he found his wife was quite indisposed. She was in her own *boudoir*, reclining on a lounge. Annette, her favorite maid, was sitting on a low ottoman at her feet, reading to her mistress a charming romance, wherein the lover is really for once the husband.

She lifted her eyes languidly as Lascelles entered the apartment, while he gently raised her hand and kissed it, expressing his regret that business of great importance called him away

immediately after dinner. He rose, and when he had partaken of a slight repast, he went to renew his apologies to his wife for his unavoidable absence. Upon entering his wife's *boudoir*, Annette met with raised finger and hushed voice, saying, "Madame is asleep."

Her husband expressed the profoundest sorrow, and said, "Should she awake, tell her I will return in an hour."

So saying, he descended the stairs, and hastened to the rendezvous.

The letter was no hoax—there was the carriage—Lascelles gave three low whistles—the driver descended from his seat. "Vendome," said Lascelles, in a low voice. The man opened the carriage, let the steps down, and Lascelles, the next minute, was by the side of a lady closely veiled.

"I am here," said he, "as you told me." The fair unknown pressed his arm, but was silent. They drove along for some short time in silence. At last Lascelles put his head out of the coach and said, "stop here." Raising the gloved hand of the mysterious lady to his lips, he gallantly kissed it, and opening the carriage door, descended. When he had gained the pavement, he said:

"My dear madame, permit me to ask you to descend from the carriage. I have prepared a pleasant little entertainment, which, I hope, will prove an agreeable surprise for you, and raise me in your estimation."

The lady bowed, and descended in silence.

The house she entered was a very handsome one in the Rue St. Honore.

"Will madame ascend the stairs to that room on the left?"

Not perceiving that Mons. Lascelles had left the house, the lady entered the room; it was empty.

She took a seat and looked around the room; it was neatly, almost elegantly furnished. Ten minutes passed. She became impatient. Going to the door, she found it was locked. "That is strange!" said she to herself, "but here is a bell; I will ring."

In a few minutes the door was unlocked, and a man in the garb of a policeman entered the room.

"What does madame require?" said he, bowing respectfully.

"Where is the gentleman who came with me?" inquired the lady.

"He has left."

"Left!" ejaculated the lady, "it is impossible!"

"It is true, for all that," rejoined the official.

"Did he know I was waiting here for him?"

“Certainly,” returned the other, with a grave smile.

“Are you sure of it?” eagerly asked the lady.

“Quite. He left immediately after making his affidavit.”

“His affidavit! To what?” inquired the lady.

“To the charge against you.”

“The charge against me—you are mad! There is some strange mistake in all this!”

“The chief of police is not the habit of making mistakes.”

“The chief of police!” almost screamed the lady.

“Yes, madame, you are here, in our custody, charged with trying to seduce Mons. Lascelles, which you know is a misdemeanor.”

“It is quite a mistake; you must let me go; I must see Mons. Lascelles.”

“Madame, it is my painful duty to tell you that you are a prisoner. As for going to see Mons. Lascelles, that is unnecessary; he will be here tomorrow at ten o’clock, when he will appear to prosecute the charge against you. I presume you are aware there have lately been several mysterious disappearances of married men. It has long been the suspicion of the police authorities that they have been inveigled away by means of ladies who have appointed assignations with them, for it is not every gentleman who has the incorruptible virtue of Mons. Lascelles.”

The lady stomped her foot with rage. “I demand to be liberated—of all events do me the favor of [sending] to Mons. Lascelles and tell him I must see him immediately.”

“Madame, our orders are imperative. So indignant was he that any one should try to supplant his wife in his heart, that he said, ‘I am resolved to fulfil the duty I owe to society and Madame Lascelles.’”

The lady walked the room like a caged tigress.

“You will permit me to write to him?” she said angrily.

“Madame, the ends of justice cannot be compromised; what you have to say to the prosecutor must be said in court, publicly, tomorrow morning.”

“Impossible! I must see him. It is as much for his sake as mine!”

The official shook his head. After a pause, the lady said, “I must then see the chief of police; he is a particular friend of my husband.”

“And have you a husband? Alas! madame, this aggravates this offence.”—And the honest official seemed ready to weep.

“Do me the favor of sending the chief to me.”

The official bowed, and left the room. When he had gone, the lady gave way to her rage.

“Was ever woman in such a terrible predicament? The chief of police, although a friend of my husband, does not know me!—and they are so accustomed to be told falsehoods, that he will not believe me.” As she said those words to herself, the chief entered the apartment.

“Madame, in compliment to your sex, I have obeyed your wish, although it is not customary for me to have private interviews with prisoners.”

“I am obliged to you,” replied the lady, “will you favor me with your attention?”

“Certainly.”

“As you are an intimate friend of my husband, I have the less hesitation in asking you.”

The chief bowed and smiled.

“You must know, Mons. de Caussidiere, that by way of a joke, to test, in fact, the fidelity of my husband, I played him a trick.”

“How very wrong to play tricks upon your husband,” observed the chief with a quiet smile.

The lady continued: “I, therefore, sent him a letter in a disguised hand, and signed to it a feigned name, asking him to meet me. As I changed entirely the style of my dress, and wore the thick veil you see I have now on, he did not know me, but has driven home and given me into your custody.”

As she said these words, she raised her veil, and disclosed the face of Madame de Lascelles.

“What you say may be true; but madame will pardon me if I require proof of this strange story. A lady to make love to her own husband is unheard of since the days of Cyrus the Great. To doubt their fidelity is not so incredible; indeed I have known several cases myself of that in my own experience. But what do you require of me, madame?”

“Why, release me, and send me home to Mons. Lascelles.”

The chief elevated his eyebrows as he ejaculated. “*Sacre!* It is not usual to send a prisoner to the house of the prosecutor.”

“But I am his wife; even now he is in the greatest distress of mind at my mysterious disappearance. Oh! Monsieur, he is so fond of me, that he will go mad if he is kept in suspense as to my fate.”

The chief of police gave a broad grin as he said, "In that case he will come to me to report your disappearance."

At this minute an officer entered the room. "A gentleman wishes to see you about the disappearance of his wife."

"If his name is Lascelles, show him into this apartment."

The next minute Mons. de Lascelles confronted his wife.

We need not pursue the story in detail further. The wife was so charmed with her husband's fidelity, that she forgave him the temporary annoyance he had put her to, of an hour's imprisonment; and it may be mentioned, as a proof of her complete triumph over jealousy, that her domestics are not now selected for their qualifications of antiquity and homeliness.

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