

## THE JANDIDIER MYSTERY A FRENCH STORY

### I

A very short time ago, that is yesterday, about four o'clock in the afternoon, all the Quartier de Marais was in an uproar. It was said that one of the respectable merchants in the Roi de-Sicile has disappeared, and all the efforts to discover him had proved fruitless. The strange event was discussed in all the shops in the neighborhood; there were groups around the doors of all the greengrocers, and every moment some terrified housewife arrived, bringing new details. The grocer at the corner had the best, freshest and most correct intelligence, having received it from the lips of the cook who lived in the house.

“So,” said he, “yesterday, after dinner, our neighbor, Monsieur Jandidier, went to his cellar and was never seen again; disappeared, vanished, evaporated.”

It occasionally happens that mysterious disappearances are heard of, the public get excited, and prudent people buy sword canes. Policemen hear these absurd rumors and shrug their shoulders. They are familiar with the other side of these closely embroidered canvasses. They search into the matter and find, instead of artless falsehoods the truth; instead of romances, sad stories. Yet, up to a certain point, the grocer in the Rue Saint Louis told the truth.

Monsieur Jandidier, manufacturer of imitation jewelry, had really not been home for twenty-four hours. Monsieur Theodore Jandidier was a very tall, very bald, man, about fifty-eight years old, with sufficiently good manners, who had amassed a considerable fortune in trade. He had an income from stocks of twenty thousand livres, and his business brought him about fifty thousand francs. He was beloved and esteemed by his neighbors, and justly so for his honesty was above suspicion, his morality austere. Married late in life to a poor relative, he had made her perfectly happy. He had an only daughter, a pretty graceful girl, named Terese, whom he adored. She had been engaged to the oldest son of the banker Schmidt—of the firm of Schmidt, Gubenheim & Worb—Monsieur Gustave; but the match had been broken off, no one knew why, for the young people were desperately in love with each other. It was said in the circle that Schmidt senior, who, as was well known would skin a flint, had required a dowry far beyond the merchant's means.

Warned by public rumor, which constantly increased, the commissary of police went to the home of the man who was already called the victim, though no exact information had been received. He found Madame and Mademoiselle Jandidier in such transports of grief that it was with the utmost difficulty that he could gather the truth. At last he learned the following particulars:

The evening before, Saturday, Monsieur Jandidier had dined with his family as usual, but did not eat with much appetite, having, he said, a violent headache. After dinner he went to his warehouses, gave some orders, and then entered his office. Returning home at half-past six, he told his wife he was going to walk. And he never appeared again. Having carefully noted these particulars, the commissary of police requested permission to see Madame Jandidier a few minutes alone. She made a sign of assent, and Mademoiselle Therese left the room.

“Pardon, madame,” said the commissary of police, “the question I am about to address to you. Do you know whether your husband had—I again ask your pardon—any connection outside of the house?”

Madame Jandidier started up; anger dried her tears.

“I have been married twenty-three years, monsieur; my husband has never returned home later than 10 o’clock.”

“Was your husband in the habit of going to any club or cafe?” he continued.

“Never; I wouldn’t have allowed it.”

“Did he usually carry valuable papers about with him?”

“I don’t know; I attend to my housekeeping, and don’t trouble myself about business matters.”

It was impossible to get any further information from the poor wife, who was bewildered by grief.

Having accomplished his business, the commissary of police thought it his duty to say a few words of commonplace consolation to the poor woman. But when he went away, after making inquiries in the household, he felt very anxious, and began to suspect the existence of a crime. That very evening one of the most skillful detectives, Retiveau—better known in the Rue de Jerusalem as Maitre Magloire—was put on the track of Monsieur Jandidier, provided with an excellent photograph of the merchant.

## II

The very morning after Monsieur Jandidier had disappeared Maitre Magloire presented himself at the Palais de Justice to report to the magistrate who had charge of the matter.

“Well, Monsieur Magloire,” said the magistrate, “so you have discovered something?”

“I’m on the track, monsieur.”

“Speak!”

“To begin with, Monsieur, Monsieur Jandidier didn’t leave his house at half-past six, but at seven precisely.”

“Precisely?”

“Yes. I got my information from a clock-maker in the Rue Saint Denis, who is sure of the fact, because Monsieur Jandidier, while passing his shop, took out his watch to compare it with the clock over the door. He had an unlighted cigar in his mouth. On learning this circumstance I said to myself, ‘I have him! he’ll light his cigar some where.’ My reasoning was correct; he entered a shop in the Rue de Temple, where he is well known. The woman remembered the circumstance because, though he always smoked sou cigars, he bought London ones.”

“How did he appear?”

“He seemed very thoughtful, the shopkeeper told me. It was through her I learned he often went to the Cafe Ture. I went in and was told he had been there on Saturday evening. He appeared depressed. The gentleman, the waiter told me, talked all the time about life insurance. At half-past eight o’clock our man left the cafe with one of his friends, Monsieur Blandureau. I instantly went to this gentleman, who told me that he walked up the boulevard with Monsieur Jandidier, who left him on the corner of the Rue Richelieu, pleading a business engagement. He was out of sorts, and seemed troubled with the darkest presentiment.”

“Very well, so far,” murmured the magistrate.

“On leaving Monsieur Blandureau I went to Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, to ascertain from somebody in the house whether Monsieur Jandidier had any customers or friends; there was only his tailor in the Rue Richelieu. I went to this tailor. He saw our man on Saturday. Monsieur Jandidier went to his shop after nine o’clock to order a pair of pantaloons. While his measure was being taken he noticed that one of the buttons on his vest was ready to fall off, and asked to have it sewed on. He was obliged to take off his overcoat to permit the little repair to made, and as at the same time he took out the contents of the side-pocket, the tailor noticed several hundred-franc bank notes.”

“Ah! that is a clue! He had a large sum of money with him?”

“Not large, but considerable. The tailor estimated it at twelve or fourteen hundred francs.”

“Go on,” said the examining magistrate.

“While his vest was being repaired Monsieur Jandidier complained of sudden illness, and sent a little boy out to look for a carriage. He had to go to see one of his workmen who lived a long distance off, he said. Unfortunately, the little fellow had forgotten the number of the carriage. He only remembered that it had yellow wheels and was drawn by a large block horse. This afforded a clue. A circular sent to all the livery-stable keepers put me on the track. I learned this morning that the number of the carriage was 6,007. The driver, on being questioned, distinctly remembered having been stopped about nine o’clock on Saturday evening in the Rue Richelieu, by a little boy, and having waited ten minutes in front of the Maison Gouin. The description of his face suited our man, and he recognized the photograph.”

Maitre Magloire stopped; he wanted to enjoy the approval he read in the magistrate’s face.

“Monsieur Jandidier,” he continued, “was really driven to No. 48 Rue d’Arras Saint Victor, where one of his workmen lives, a man named Jules Tarot.”

The manner in which Maitre Magloire pronounced this name was intended to arouse, and did arouse, the attention of the magistrate.

“You have suspicions?” he asked.

“Not exactly; but these are the facts. Monsieur Jandidier dismissed his carriage at the Rue d’Arras and went to Tarot’s room about ten o’clock. At eleven the employer and workman went out together. The workman did not return till midnight, and here I lose track of my man. Of course I didn’t question Tarot, lest I should put him on his guard.”

“Who is this Jules Tarot?”

“A worker in mother-of pearl; that is, a man who polishes shells on a grindstone, to give them a perfect lustre. He is a skillful fellow, and helped by his wife, to whom he has taught his trade, can make a hundred francs a week.”

“They are in easy circumstances, then.”

“Oh! no, they are both young; they have no children, they are Parisians; and, zounds, they amuse themselves. Monday always squanders all the other days bring.”

### III

Two hours after Maitre Magloire’s report, several police-officers went to Jules Tarot’s lodgings to make a search. At the sight of them the worker in mother-of-pearl and his wife turned paler than corpses and were seized with an attack of nervous trembling that could not escape the practiced eye of Maitre Magloire. Yet, the most careful search having failed to discover anything suspicious, they were about to withdraw, when the detective saw Tarot’s wife anxiously watching a cage that hung near the window. This was a ray of light. In an instant Magloire had taken down the cage. Twelve hundred-franc notes were found between the boards of the floor. This discovery seemed to crush the workman, while his wife began to utter terrible shrieks, protesting that she and her husband were innocent. On being arrested and taken to the police station they were questioned by the examining magistrate that very day. Their answers were precisely the same. They acknowledged that they had had a visit from their employer on Saturday evening. He seemed so ill that they had offered him something to take, which he refused. He had come, he said, on account of an important order which he proposed that Tarot should undertake, hiring his own workmen. Tarot and his wife replied that they could not do it for want of means. Then their employer said: “Never mind, I’ll furnish the money,” and instantly put twelve hundred-franc notes on the table.

At eleven o’clock Monsieur Jandidier asked his workman to show him out of the house; he was going to the Faubourg Saint Antoine. And, in fact, Tarot accompanied him to the Place de la Bastille, crossing the Constantine Bridge and walking along by the river.

The magistrate asked both husband and wife the very natural question:

“Why did you hide the money?”

They made the same answer. Hearing on Monday morning of Monsieur Jandidier’s disappearance, they were seized with terror. Tarot had said to his wife:

“If it is known that our employer came here, that I crossed the bridge and walked along, by the river with him, I shall be compromised. If this money were ever found in our possession we should be lost.”

The wife then wanted to burn the notes, but Tarot prevented it, intending to return them to the family. This explanation was reasonable and plausible, if not probable, but it was only an explanation. Tarot and his wife were still detained in custody.

#### IV

A week after the magistrate was in the utmost perplexity. Three new examinations had not enabled him to form an opinion. Were Tarot and his wife innocent? Or were they simply marvelously clever in maintaining a probable fable? The magistrate knew not what to do, when one morning a strange rumor reached his ears. The house of Jandidier had just stopped payment. A detective who was set to work brought back the most startling news.

Monsieur Jandidier, who had been considered so wealthy, was ruined, utterly ruined, and for three years he had sustained his credit only by means of various expedients. He had not a thousand francs, and notes falling due at the end of the month amounted to sixty-seven thousand, five hundred francs. The cautious merchant speculated in stocks. The magistrate had just learned these particulars when Maitre Magloire appeared, pale and panting for breath.

“You know, monsieur?” he cried, from the threshold.

“All!”

“Tarot is innocent.”

“I believe him so; and yet that visit—how do you explain that visit?”

Magloire shook his head sorrowfully. “I am only a fool,” said he, “and Lecoq has just proved it. Monsieur Jandidier spoke of his life insurance at the Cafe Ture. This was the key to the affair. Jandidier was insured for two hundred thousand francs, and French companies don’t pay in case of suicide. Do you understand?”

#### V

Thanks to Monsieur Gustave Schmidt, who will marry Mademoiselle Therese Jandidier next month, the house of Jandidier has not gone into bankruptcy. Tarot and his wife, restored to liberty, have been established in business by this same Monsieur Gustave, and no longer go pleasuring on Mondays. But what became of Monsieur Jandidier? A thousand francs reward to whoever will give news of him.—*From the French of Emile Gaboriau.*

*Freeport Daily Bulletin*, December 3, 1877

*The Forest Republican* [Tionesta, PA], December 5, 1877

*The Franklin Gazette* [NY], December 7, 1877

*The Abbeville* [SC] *Press and Banner*, December 12, 1877

*The Centre Reporter* [Centre Hall, PA], December 13, 1877

*The Eaton* [OH] *Democrat*, January 17, 1878;

*The Highland Weekly News* [Hillsborough, Highland County, OH ], May 9, 1878  
*The Cambridge [MA] Chronicle*, July 13, 1878

This story was originally published as “Une Disparition” in the collection *Le Petit Vieux Des Batignolles* by Emile Gaboriau in Paris in 1876 and then in London 1884.