

A Night Adventure

From the French of Gozlan

About half-past seven in the evening, toward the Fall of the year 1844, two men were seated at table—Balzac the host, Vidocq the guest.

Said the latter: “M. de Balzac, why do you tax your imagination for fiction when you can get reality, before your eyes, close to your ears, under your hand?”

“You believe in reality? I’m delighted. I did not imagine you so innocent. ’Tis only we novelists who create reality and make it visible. Whenever any one comes to me with ‘M. de Balzac, I’ve got a splendid subject for you,’ I know before hearing it that it’s worthless. If the subject is good there are no details; if the details are excellent there is no subject. No reality—only half a fact.”

“But I can give you one.”

“Complete?”

“Complete.”

“Ah!”

And Vidocq commenced: “On the 11th of December, 1834 or 35, a fearfully cold night, I was on duty at the Prefecture de Police. The room in which my colleagues and myself were stationed opened on to the staircase leading to the offices of Monsieur le Préfet. The glass in the upper part of the door was rendered almost opaque by the condensed moisture which had settled on it; but about 1 o’clock I noticed two shadows flit past, and opening the door I saw two women, a lady and her servant, the former dressed in full evening costume. This puzzled me. What could a lady want, one hour after midnight, with the Prefect of Police? Strangely dressed, too; the flowers in her hair put in at hap-hazard; her hair hardly even looked as if it had been combed, and beneath her rouge (for she had used some, although she was very young and marvelously beautiful) her face was ghastly pale. But what struck me as being the most extraordinary in this strange toilet was that, while on the one foot she wore a black boot, the other was protected by a white satin skipper.

On asking what brought her there, the lady, without even stopping or looking round, answered curtly that she wanted to speak to Monsieur le Préfet, and before I was able to reply that he could not be seen at such an hour of the night, the door of the Magistrate’s apartment was opened and the lady entered; it was closed again immediately, and the servant, thus left alone on the staircase, accepted my invitation to come into the room I had just left. Although her dress was not as strange as that of her mistress, she was equally excited, and in the few words she spoke in answer to me I noticed a nervous trembling which was not caused by cold alone.

“But let us see what was taking place meantime in the Préfet’s apartments. After an exceptionally heavy and fatiguing day’s work, he had gone to bed at midnight, giving strict orders that he was not to be awakened till 8 o’clock on any pretext whatever; and such orders were never known to be disobeyed. The *huissier*, astonished that both the sentinel and the porter had allowed these two women to enter, desired to know the object of the lady’s visit.

“To see Monsieur le Préfet.”

“Impossible.”

The lady stormed, entreated, threatened; but all in vain, till at last, tearing of her pearl necklace and diamond bracelets, she thrust them excitedly into Père Caron’s hand, crying:

“Ten thousand francs—twenty thousand—I don’t know, more or less. But now, go!”

He went; how could he resist? Timorously he set about his task, and at last succeeded; while the Magistrate, irritated and savage at being thus disturbed, sprang up in bed with a sudden bound.

“Scamp! scoundrel!” he stormed. “What were your orders?”

“A—a—a lady, Sir,” stammered the unfortunate *huissier*.

“Well, even them?”

“Most urgent and important reasons, Sir.”

“A lady—at this hour and in such weather! Let her go to the devil!”

“The lady knows Monsieur le Préfet?”

“Of course—who doesn’t? But sufficient; I want to sleep; and the next time you disobey my orders you march. Now go.”

The *huissier* retired crestfallen; but the lady was not to be discouraged. “He must not be allowed to fall asleep again,” she urged. “Run back at once”—

“No, madame,” interrupted Père Caron. “I should lose my place, and I have a wife and children to support.”

“Is that all?” cried the lady. “If you lose your post through me I promise on my honor that you shall have an annuity of two, three, four thousand francs settled on you and your family. Take these, as earnest;” and handing him two thousand francs in notes, she continued. “Tell Monsieur le Préfet that to-morrow, at the Tuileries, Louis Philippe, King of France, will thank him for what he does for me to night.”

The words “King,” “Tuileries,” “four thousand francs annuity,” whirled through Caron’s head as he again confronted his master, whose rage this time was almost uncontrollable.

“What is the woman’s name?”

“She has not told me, Monsieur.”

“Fool that you are! go and ask at once; and if this business be not finished in three minutes you pass the rest of the night in the cells.”

The lady, however, would not disclose her name, and the *huissier* gave himself up for lost; but the Préfet, struck by this strange persistence of a nameless lady, who dared to promise the King’s gratitude, felt that the case must be an extraordinary one, and at last decided to give way.

“If the lady won’t give her name, ask her then to send it under seal,” was the result of his deliberations.

With a deep-drawn sigh of relief the strange visitor acceded to this request, and inclosed her card in a sealed envelope. The Préfet started up in astonishment when he saw the name, and after a second glance to assure himself that he had read aright he turned to Caron:

“Show the lady into my private office—quick! and with the greatest deference.”

It was the Countess Hélène de B—. one of the most remarkable women of Louis Philippe’s reign, distinguished by her beauty and elevation of mind; one of those women who, rightly or wrongly, were considered to carry in the folds of their dresses the fate of Ministries—nay, even war or peace.

The Préfet, on joining the Countess, attempted to excuse himself, but the lady gave him no time for explanations, for her case was too pressing to allow of formalities. Her voice broken and quivering, she thus addressed him:

“Sir, I have come to you because—because a dreadful misfortune has happened to me, such as no other woman had ever known—so dreadful, you can form no idea. Monsieur, save me! You can—you must,” she gasped with a despairing cry. “You know that my husband left for Bordeaux a week ago?”

The Magistrate inclined his head, and the lady, after making a great effort to subdue the involuntary tremor in her voice, continued her story: During his absence she had been visited by a person, a young man, whom she became acquainted with at the Austrian Embassy. Her husband, whose passions would sometimes border on a delirious frenzy, had noted the attentions of this Hungarian officer, who, although she did not encourage him, would continue his visits during her husband’s absence, sometimes even late, very late, in the evening. That very evening M. de Karls (such was the officer’s name,) would insist on seeing her home, much against her will, for her husband’s return was to be expected every hour; and then occurred that fatal event.

This word let loose the flood of sorrow so long pent up, and the Countess, losing all control over her feelings, buried her face in her hands and sobbed forth passionately:

“He was my lover, my love; yes, for six months I had been his mistress.”

This confession placed the Magistrate more at his ease. He knew now what was wanted—saw exactly what had happened—at least he thought so: unexpected arrival of the husband, surprise of the lovers, duel already fought or to be fought, and the lady flying to him for his assistance in order to thwart her husband’s revenge—or at least to prevent the scandal from becoming known. But he was wrong. Her husband had not even come back, asserted the Countess.

“Then what is this dreadful misfortune?” asked the Préfet ironically. “No one wounded—no one killed?”

“Neither killed nor wounded, do you say, Monsieur le Préfet? Wounded there is none as yet; but dead there are two—first, myself, (for I shall never survive this,) and then he, who is now in my carriage.”

“In your carriage?”

“Yes—M. de Karls; he died two hours ago in my house, and his corpse is now below in my carriage.”

“At your hours?—assassinated?—a corpse?”

“No, no; not murdered, thank God! He died from a sudden rush of blood to the head while he was with me—with me! Oh! it is horrible, terrible, that I should have to think of my reputation—my honor, my worldly name, of that world that will soon know all, of my husband’s honor—when I would be alone with my sorrow, my tears, and the dear one who is dead! But no, that cannot be; and to you I have come for help. You can—you must assist me.”

“How, Madame, how? My resources are not infinite. A case so unparalleled—what can I do?”

“You must!” cried the Countess, rising and speaking with the authority partly of a powerful and influential woman, partly of one who implores, “till you have devised some means I do not leave this place. Surely you—of the Secret Police”—

“It is impossible, Madame, impossible!”

“In three hours my husband will be here.”

The Préfet rose and rang the bell. “There is but one man in Paris, nay, I might say, in the world, who can save you, and I have called him. Will you confide in him?—tell him all?”

“You answer for his secrecy?”

“Yes.”

“Then let him come.”

As soon as I entered the room the Préfet addressed me brusquely: “Vidocq, a great personage, died suddenly, a few hours ago, at Madame’s house.”

“Very good, M. le Préfet; we will say he died a sudden death.”

“Madame’s husband is away, but returns to-night.”

“At what hour?”

“Any moment.”

“Then we may as well say he has returned.”

“Just as well. The body of the young man is below in Madame’s carriage,” continued the Préfet.

I waited, listening.

“Vidocq.”

“M. le Préfet.”

“You must get rid of the man for us.”

“Which one? Husband or lover?”

“The dead man,” said the Préfet curtly.

I understood well enough, but the joke was too much for me. “Then,” I said, “that will be a more difficult affair. It’s easy enough to get rid of a living man; but a dead one—ah! But let me see; you wish me to spirit away, before daylight, the corpse in Mme. la Comtesse de B.’s carriage?”

The lady started. “You know me?”

“I have that honor, Madam. Now, there is one way of getting rid of this corpse.”

“And that is?”

“What do you say, Madame, to the body being found in the streets this morning, about three or four o’clock, pierced with several dagger wounds?”

“Assassinated?”

“Yes, Madame. Three stabs in the stomach and one in the heart; it shall be well done. The body is found; noting on it, not even watch or rings—murdered by thieves. Great excitement for twenty-four hours; inquest, which will end in nothing, and in a week the whole affair forgotten.”

“Murdered!”

“But since he is dead, Madame, where is the crime or wrong to stab him?”

“Enough!” cried the Countess, her face buried in her hands; “enough Monsieur, enough. Horrible, horrible—it can never be—never!”

I could not understand her; but some people are delicate, you see. What can one do?

“Then what do you say, Madame, to the body disappearing suddenly from the face of the earth, so that even the most rigorous search should fail to recover it? It should never be found.”

“Never?”

“Never.”

“Then there would be no burial?”

“Burial, Madame, burial? Ah! if Madame desires the luxury of a burial, my plan is useless.”

“But how would you hide it?”

“That is my business.”

“Oh! no—I must know.”

“Believe me, Madame, you had better not. Does the surgeon show his saw to the patient whose limb he is going to amputate? Nay, Madame, do not seek to control my actions, let me choose my own expedients; what can it matter so long as you are set free? and therefore, Madame, tell me if my second offer is accepted.”

“No.”

On receiving this sharp and decided answer, I took my hat and moved toward the door; but on seeing this, the Countess gave a quick, sudden cry of pain that made me turn round involuntarily, and in doing so I caught the Préfet’s eye. He signed to me to remain.

“Oh! Monsieur,” exclaimed the Countess, “imagine some other means, I conjure you. My life and my honor are in your hands.”

Had it not been out of respect for my chief, I should have disregarded the lady's scruples altogether, and have caused the body to be thrown into the Seine, with a hundredweight of stones fastened to it. As it was, I saw that I was master of the position, and thus addressed the Countess:

"Madame, if I am to do anything for you, tell me everything that took place to-night, or else I can promise nothing. When the disease is mortal, you must hide nothing from the surgeon."

"Then—if it must be—M. Karls wrung from my weakness yester-evening, permission to stay a few instants with me after the opera."

"For the first time since the death of your husband?" I asked.

"The first time, Monsieur; but why that question?"

"Because your people will suspect nothing; they will only be astonished."

The Countess continued: "The drawing-room was so warm that I was obliged to make Honorine, my maid, open the door of my bedroom so as to equalize the temperature a little. To open the windows was out of the question, for you know how cold it is to-night. What with the heat, the tea, and the conversation, M. Karls became so troubled and excited that he at last asked permission, either to retire or to be allowed to lay aside his coat, for he felt as though he was choking and short of breath. I allowed him to take off his coat, and having done so, he sat down again on the sofa, and began to relate, with greater animation even than before, a ridiculous accident which had happened to an actress while she was before the audience. Suddenly he was silent; I ask him to continue; no answer. I beg. I insist—still the same silence. At first I thought he was asleep, but, on reflection, this sudden transition from noisy hilarity to so deep a slumber appeared so strange to me that I left my seat to look at him more closely. His face was horribly drawn; his eyes thrown up; the corner of his mouth almost touching his ear. He was dead. I screamed and fainted, cutting my forehead against the sofa-foot as I fell. Honorine rushed in, and although one of us was dead and the other senseless, she never lost her presence of mind for a moment; with one glance she sees the danger of the position, and never was danger more vast, more real, for my husband was on his way home—between Etampes and Paris—and would be with us in three hours. As soon as she had brought me to my senses, she pushed the sofa close to the window, and covered the corpse with the falling curtain. Something must be done, but what could I do?—everything fell to her. She had often heard me speak of the Préfet of Police, and decided that we must tell him all without losing a moment, and, profiting by the fact that every one else in the house had gone to bed, carry the corpse between us down-stairs, place it in the carriage, and then waken the coachman. While he was harnessing the horses I must dress myself in evening costume, so that if my husband should arrive at home before me, I might say I had just returned from a soiree. From whose? Honorine decides everything, for I am too bewildered to do aught but look on; but the poor girl had not foreseen the greatest difficulty. Oh, the horrible task! the difficulty, nay, almost impossibility, of dressing a body from which all life has fled. It fell, it slipped, it almost floated away. The arms, stretched out and still, refused to pass through the sleeves, and when we forced them in it was hideous to hear the horrible cracking and snapping of the joints. And the boots! Oh! nothing can be compared with this sacrilegious toilet. And then we had to carry him down-stairs, avoiding the slightest noise lest we should rouse the

porter; when we had placed him in the carriage, Honorine went to wake the coachman, and stay with him while he put the horses to, lest he should discover our secret, and I—I had my ball costume to attend to. How I did it I know not; I took ribbons, jewels, bracelets, rouge, flowers, anything that came under my hand. What took place afterward I can hardly say. As soon as I heard the noise of the carriage-wheels I ran down-stairs, got in with Honorine, and drove here.”

Such was Madame de B.’s account, told with a decision, a calmness and courage that made my blood run cold—ay! even mine—Vidocq’s.

“Madame,” I said, “one more word.”

“More,” she murmured between her teeth, which were closed together with a force that threatened to break them, “what more can you want?”

“M. Karl’s address.”

“What, is that necessary?”

“Indispensable.”

She gave it me.

“Now, Madame, in a few minutes I hope to have finished my task successfully.”

“And how? No stabbing, no dreadful disappearance.”

“None whatever, since you wish it so. Everything will be done in the most simple manner, your reputation uncompromised, and M. Karls’ body treated with as great respect as though it was under his father’s roof. In a quarter of an hour the corpse will be in M. Karls’ own room, and you, Madame, will, in five minutes, be in your own carriage, free from the dreadful burden it now contains.”

“Ah, Monsieur! how can I thank you? How can my gratitude equal the service you do me?”

She shook me by the hand as though she would crush it to pieces; it was one of the finest moments of my life.

Although I spoke with such assurance to the Countess, I will not deny that I was not without uneasiness, and intimated to the lady that we had done with the Préfet’s private office, and that our next scene of action would be in the street.

Before leaving the room she turned round to the Magistrate, and pressing her hand closely to her heart, she bade him trust in her as he would in God. To Père Caron, who was waiting with lights in the antechamber, she spoke in passing:

“You shall not be forgotten, Monsieur; all that I have promised shall be done.”

Descending the grand staircase, I stopped at the door of the room where I had left the servant, who now joined us with the delight of a prisoner set free.

“Honorine,” said the Countess, “all goes well, but we have yet to finish.”

“Ah! yes—to finish.”

While the two went on a little in advance, I called out to one of the most intelligent inspectors, and told him, as concisely as I could, what had to be done.

The coachman was asleep, and the principal object in view was to get the dead body out of the carriage without his knowing what had taken place. But how to do so if he should be awake?

“We shall see,” said the officer: “we shall soon see.”

“If he does not sleep,” I answered, “he must sleep.”

“Of course he must, one way or another.”

“The devil!” I cried; “not the other way—no, no.”

Following the two women, we crept along in the shadows of the houses. The driver was fast asleep.

“While the officer ran back to tell the ladies they might advance, I opened the carriage door, got out the dead body, and placed him at full length in the shadow of the parapet which runs along the Quai des Orfevres, wedging him firmly with a couple of stones, for the pavement was sloping. He was a magnificent man, six feet or six feet one, at least; fair, elegant—and such clothes, such linen! All this was done in the twinkling of an eye. The two ladies had now arrived, but they could hardly crawl along; they were worn out, and more like shadows than human beings and could not even get into the carriage without assistance. Such fright, such terror in their downward looks, as they took their places without uttering a sound!

“Monsieur,” said the Countess to me, seizing my arm with a force that left the imprints of her nails; you promise me that the body shall not be outraged?”

“I swore, Madame, that in a quarter of an hour M. de Karls should be in his own bed; he will be there.”

And bowing to the ladies, I closed the door with a terrific bang, and then jumping upon the wheel, I woke the coachman.

“You sleepy scoundrel,” I cried, “can’t you hear the ladies? They’ve been calling out to you to start for more than a quarter of an hour.”

“All right, all right,” he muttered, gathering up the reins. “Where to? where to?”

“Home, of course, you idiot—Rue Bellechasse.”

The carriage dashed off at full speed, the horses feet striking fire from the stones in their mad gallop; a few minutes later, and all was quiet.

Without the loss of time, I led the inspector to the place where I had put the dead man, and, raising him up, we placed his arms within our own, and carried him away as though he was dead drunk; but, although we were both strong men, it was with the greatest difficulty that we could keep from slipping as we made our way to the Pont Neuf. My idea was this: Pont Neuf is a vast thoroughfare, into which all the principal streets empty themselves, and where it is impossible for any one to say with certainty from which part of Paris the wayfarer may have come. From the city—from the Faubourg St. Germain—from the Grève—or from the Faubourg St. Jaques—he cannot say. I further intended to throw off the scent any ulterior search as to where M. de Karls had passed the night; hence my choice of the Pont Neuf. As soon as we arrived opposite the Place Dauphine, I decided to stop and wait for the first passing cab; and any one who knows Paris can easily imagine that we had not to wait long. As soon as we heard the sound of wheels, I told the inspector to imitate the singing of a drunken man, and to do so as well as he could in a German jargon. I had hardly given the order, when he burst forth in splendid style with an Alsatian drinking song, in which I joined as heartily as one could wish, and in such a manner that the approaching cabman could not fail to think us both intoxicated. As soon as the cab came within a few yards of us I cried out, “Here, my man, can you take this gentleman home; we’ve neither time, nor are we sober enough, to do it ourselves?” Without waiting for an answer, I opened the door and thrust in the dead body, not being very particular, you may imagine, whether he was seated comfortably or not, and banging the door to, gave the driver five francs for his journey, and told him the address: “Rue St. Florentin, first large house on the right; and look alive.” And he did, while we struck up our song again, as two drunken men will when they part from a companion.

The trick was done.

When the cabman got to his journey’s end he was not at all astonished to find his fare fast asleep; but experiencing very great difficulty in awakening him, he began to think something must be wrong, and rang the bell fiercely. The door was opened; the porter and his wife came out, recognized M. de Karls at once, although his face was still more drawn and disfigured, and in a few moments the whole household was up, in a dreadful state of dismay and consternation. The driver, examined by M. de Karls’ valet, told all he knew—the gentleman was completely drunk when he was put into the cab on Pont Neuf by two other gentlemen hardly less intoxicated, who went off singing as soon as they had put him in; that was all—everything

The dead man was carried upstairs to his room and laid on his bed—so that I had kept my word to the Countess; while next day the papers mentioned the unfortunate death of M. de Karls, a young man of noble family, who was seized with apoplexy while going home in a cab. What took place on the Countess’ return home I cannot tell you, for I never heard; but a few days after, she was obliged to attend the funeral service in the Madeleine, owing to the Count’s official

relation with the Austrian Embassy. What a torture it must have been to her? Obligated to appear calm and indifferent, not daring to weep or to pray, while her whole soul went out in sorrow to the beloved dead.

She returned home, and never again left her house alive; her sorrow turned to melancholy, then to depressed languor, then came illness, doctors, and lastly death. She lived in her love—that dead, she died too. *Que voulez-vous?* But she had not forgotten her promises. Caron received secretly a large sum of money; the servant, independent for life, now lives at Villeverde on property of her own; nor was I overlooked—this splendid diamond was my reward, and I would not part with it for millions—no, nor tens of millions—it is riveted to my finger.

The Count left Paris, and, after years of travel in all parts of the world, he retired to Dalmatia, where he had large estates, and settled at last in Trieste. Lonely, melancholy, visiting no one, he had only one pleasure—the opera; music alone seemed to have the power of lightening the burden of sorrow he bore with him wherever he went.

One evening he heard his wife's name mentioned by a French tourist, who was in the adjoining box; the gentleman was describing to his companions the extraordinary likeness between the prima donna and the Countess of B—, a lady formerly well-known in Paris, who, suspected by her husband of being faithless, was poisoned by him, although it was given out that she had died of consumption. He further entered into other details of the most painful description to the Count, who at the end of the act knocked at the door of the adjoining loge, formally handed his card to the talkative tourist, and bowing low, returned to his own place, where he quietly remained till the end of the opera. On the card both time and place were fixed for the morrow, swords being the weapons chosen by the Count, whose reputation as a fencer was known both far and wide.

After wounding his adversary slightly and disarming him two or three times, the Count suddenly threw himself, perfectly uncovered, on his opponent's sword, which transfixed his heart. He had wished to commit suicide by another man's hand; and thus my story ends.

After a slight pause, Balzac spoke: "I do not like that finish; it is not equal to the rest; there is something wanting. I should have desired—in fact, if the Count knew nothing of the death of M. de Karls, in his house, on his sofa, at the feet of his wife, and he could not know that unless the Préfet, you, or Honorine, had been indiscreet enough to"—

"No, no," protested Vidocq, interrupting; "no one has spoken a word, no one. I tell you today because I have a right to do so, since the only persons who could complain are both dead."

"Then," continued Balzac, "this duel, this suicide by the hand of another, as you call it, is not sufficiently justified. Were I to take this domestic drama as a groundwork, and relate it after my own fashion, I would seek, invent, imagine a better conclusion—one more logical and complete. Not that I disagree with the kind of death chosen by the Count, which is not only possible but true—nay, very true in its originality; but still—and I come back again to the old fault—the Count knew too little to justify his great despair. So you see, after all, that your story is not complete, as you thought—it wants something, and something very important."

“Dame!” answered Vidocq, somewhat staggered by Balzac’s triumphant manner, “if it is not complete, it is not far from it. I did not intend it as a lesson in literature for you; no, my idea was a more modest one than that, and originated in this manner; on my way here I took a cab, and, as I was stepping in, I recognized in the coachman the cabman of the Pont Neuf.”

“Strange!”

“Not at all; cabmen don’t generally get promoted to colonelcies—they die cabmen. The sight of him called forth the old recollections, and I determined to amuse myself by telling you this portion of my life, thinking that perhaps you would be able to turn it to account.”

“You say this cabman brought you here?” asked Balzac, who had not heard a single word of Vidocq’s explanation, “did you take his number?”

“Why should I?”

“You—you great—”

“Great what?”

“Anything you like.”

“But why should I take his number? He’s at your door, waiting for me.”

The man was sent for immediately, and Balzac, in great glee, filled all the glasses within reach. Soon the clatter of sabots was heard on the stairs, and in another moment the cabman entered. When he had tossed off the drink prepared for him, with the remark that he could not refuse as the day was so thirsty. Vidocq commenced:

“If I’m not mistaken, I engaged you the other evening on the Pont Neuf?”

“What other evening?”

“Don’t you remember? There were three of us singing?”

“Ah! I take up so many of that kind. When was it?”

“About ten or twelve years ago,” answered Vidocq.

“You call that the other evening?”

“Well, more or less—we were just opposite the statue of Henry IV., about four o’clock in the morning. Can you remember now?”

“No, that does not tell me anything; that has happened to me a hundred thousand times.”

“I gave you five francs for your fare.”

“Ah! that doesn’t happen so often. Still, I can’t think—ten years ago!”

“The person who got in went to Rue St. Florentin!” he cried.

“Yes,” continued Vidocq: “a large house—and when you got there you had a surprise. What did you find?”

“A dead man!” said the driver, with another start; “is that what you wanted me to say? But was it you that made me that present?”

Vidocq laughed, and the cabman getting angry he quieted him with one of those looks that Martin used to quell his lions with.

“Then,” said the coachman, “if it was you, you own me two francs.”

“How’s that? I gave you five.”

“I don’t deny it, but look at the trouble. Besides, it took me more than an hour, and I was engaged by the distance, and not by the hour.”

“But why did you not get your money at the house?” asked Vidocq.

“Ah! servants are such thieves; they wouldn’t give me a farthing. However, I went to Rue Bellechasse.”

“Rue Bellechasse!” cried the astonished listeners, whose turn it now was to be startled.

“Yes, to a Countess or Duchess of—confound it, I forgot the name.”

“And why did you go there? Who told you?”

“Well, you see, I found a little pocket-book in my cab next morning, and it could only have belonged to the dead man.”

Vidocq and Balzac exchanged a meaning glance at this revelation.

“What did you find in the pocket-book?” asked Balzac, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

“A letter addressed to the Countess, or Duchess, Rue Bellechasse—that was all. Oh! no bank notes, no, no! or I should have returned them. But I wanted my two francs, as I told you, so I went to the hotel and gave the letter to a gentleman and lady who were just getting into their carriage. “Two francs,” I said. The gentleman with white hair, whose breast was covered with

crosses and orders, took the letter and read it. He turned as white as the paper itself, but told the footman to pay me, and so I got the two francs.”

“There,” cried Balzac, triumphantly, “the history is complete now. The letter tells the husband all—that M. de Karls was the wife’s lover. The scene in the theatre at Trieste proved to him that the world knew it also, and then he determined to kill himself. Yes, the history is complete now.”

New York Times, April 21, 1872

The Bloomfield Times [New Bloomfield, PA], May 21, 1872

The New Republic [Camden, NJ], June 15, 1872