

## *Bicornet's Murder Case*

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A rival of the Paris Figaro, envious probably of the superior prosperity of that famous though not most reliable of journals, tells with much unctiousness the following story of one of its reporters:

News was received at the Figaro office of the commission of a horrible crime. Bicornet, which may be accepted as French slang for our national "Johnny Fresh," was dispatched in red-hot haste and a cab to the scene of the tragedy. All the Figaro reporters travel in hacks. It looks big, and the Hack Companies take it out in advertising.

"A woman has been assassinated here?" he demanded of the porter, visibly impressed by his visitor's dignity and the equipage.

"Yes, Monsieur, I suppose you are a member of the police come to investigate it."

"Do I look like an idiot? I am a reporter. Here is my card."

"Very good, sir. Will you give yourself the trouble to ascend to the third floor? The Commissioner was here an hour ago and will be back again to-day."

"My friend, the Commissioner may do whatever he — pleases. I am Bicornet, whose superior keenness has so often vexed and stunned the police. Only wait and you shall have some revelations that will make your hair curl."

"Ah!" The awe-stricken porter thought as he salaamed till his nose scraped the floor, "these newspaper men are the devil!"

"How quickly the vulgar recognize a superior mind," Bicornet murmured, and forgetting himself, ascended to the fourth floor instead of the third. He knocked. A nurse opened.

"I want to see your mistress," he said.

"She is in bed."

"Parbleu! In the state she is in I don't expect to see her dancing a hornpipe. Observe this card. It licenses me to enter anywhere. I am Bicornet."

"Holy Virgin!" murmured the terrified maid. "It is a detective? What have we been doing now?"

And she permitted Bicornet to pass. He raised the curtains. A half-naked woman, as old and withered as a dime-novel hag, sat up in bed and screeched.

"The devil!" exclaimed Bicornet, "you are not dead then?"

"Thieves! Rape! Murder!" yelled the woman.

“For God’s sake, hold your tongue! You’ll raise the house.”

“Assassin! Fire! Help!” howled the maid.

“Here! Here! What the burning blazes is all this?” demanded a ferocious individual with a red nose and a bludgeon, entering. “What are you doing to my auntie?”

“Nothing, I give you my honor! Not for millions would I injure her. I am Bicornet—Bicornet, the celebrated reporter, whom nothing escapes.”

“Then you had better escape from here,” growled the ferocious person, with violence. “Hang you, what do you mean, you blasted penny-a-liner, scaring old women to death like this, before their wills are made?”

And he kicked, actually kicked, the celebrated Bicornet out of the room, whence he tumbled downstairs, upsetting the porter’s wife in the open door of a room where, extended on a bed, was a rigid form covered with a sheet.

“Aha! This is the victim!” he cried, hauling out half a ream of paper and a bundle of pencils. “You are in charge of the corpse?”

“Yes, Monsieur,” responded the porter’s wife, murmuring to herself. “He must be the *Juge d’instruction*. He has just that haughty air.”

Now the *Juge d’instruction* is an official who is neither fish, flesh or fowl in French criminal law. He is a functionary who, without being either judge, detective, or policeman, is still invested with supreme powers for the preliminary investigation of crimes. It is upon his report that the higher powers decide, and by them the lesser officials are mainly guided in their movements. So, when she addressed him by that title, Bicornet cunningly tapped his nose.

“I will not deceive her,” he thought. “She will cackle easier, and tell more of the truth. Now then, my good woman—”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ahem! How did this thing occur?”

“A man last night assassinated this unfortunate woman and carried off all her valuables and jewelry.”

“So then it is a case of theft, and at the same time assassination.”

“Yes, M. le Juge. (Aside.) Heavens how quick he is!”

“Did you see the assassin?”

“No, M. le Juge. But at three o’clock he rang my bell, and I drew the hall-string and let the door open without leaving my lodge.”

“The crime, then, was committed before three. Was the unfortunate woman in the habit of receiving calls from robbers and assassins?”

“It is impossible, sir.”

“Therefore, the probability is that her murderer was a stranger to her. So; this dagger still sticking in the wound denotes that she came to her death by a sudden stroke from a deadly weapon with a sharp blade. Was the door of the room forced?”

“It was, M. Le Juge.”

“He must, therefore, have broken it open. I see it all now. The criminal sprang the lock of the outer door?”

“Yes.”

“He came through this little passage?”

“It is the only way he could come.”

“He opened the door of this inner chamber?”

“There is no other chamber to open but this.”

“Tut, tut! Let me follow my clew, will you? If you interrupt me every minute I can’t begin to carry out a serious inquiry. Aha! What do I see. The imprints of muddy feet on the floor. I must measure them. Such tracks are frequently of much value in a search.”

“But, M. le Juge, they are the footprints of the Commissioner and his men who examined the corpse this morning.”

“The deuce they are! So these are their marks, you say?”

“And beside, sir, your own boots are muddy!”

“Woman! You are a confirmed enemy of justice with your clacking tongue. Be silent! Help me to make up this bundle, will you?”

And, assisted by the portress, Bicornet packed up every scrap of paper, photograph and other light movables, along with the ensanguined dagger and the bloody robe of the dead woman.

“By the Lord!” he chuckled, “I’ll show them at the office that Bicornet understands his business, I will. I say, madame—”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you like to go to the theater?”

“I dote upon it, M. le Juge.”

“Well, here is my card. I may call for more information. And that you may not forget me, here is a ticket for a gallery box at the Francais.”

“What a queer Judge!” said the portress to herself, as M. Villemessant’s representative vanished; “so affable and condescending.”

“What a streak of luck?” said that worthy young man as he drove off. [“]Talk about their detectives! Bah! I’ll show them how a bang-up reporter can beat them at their own game.”

Fifteen minutes after the scribe’s departure, the Commissioner of Police returned to renew his investigations.

“Oh, sir?” observed the smirking portress, “you are just too late. If you had arrived a few minutes earlier you would have met the Juge d’Instruction. What a pleasant gentleman he is, to be sure.”

“What Judge do you speak of?”

“One who knows his business, I’ll be bound. Here is his card.”

“Bicornet,” read the Commissioner. “— — — Bicornet. That accursed ass is always upsetting things for us. This now is the seventh case he has spoiled for us this month, — — —. But wait. He carried away the objects from here?”

“As you perceive.”

“Then I think we have him.”

Shortly afterward, while Bicornet was enjoying in his own apartments, the relaxation earned by his bright journalistic feat, a policeman entered.

“M. Bicornet?”

“It is I.”

“I want you.”

“You what?”

“You are under arrest.”

“Are you an idiot!”

“No, sir.”

“But on what charge?”

“Murder. There are the evidences of your crime – the property of the murdered woman. You’d better come along quietly now, or I’ll club the skull off you.”

Bicornet went. He spent a night in the lockup. When he was released he tendered his resignation to the Department of Crimes and Accidents, and is now reporting the markets.

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