

GOOD NIGHT.

Good night! Landward, the sun has set behind the hills, Basking the skies with gold; Seaward the white-capped wavelets ebb and flow.

Good night! A dreamy languor fills the silent air, Success of color and stars, As fades the day with all its duties o'er, And schemes with memories rife, Of friends who once though dead, are so no more.

Good night! The shades of a departed day are past, The stars shine out and gleam Upon the moonlit sea—the silent earth The quiet habitations, as they seem Like us, to wait the coming morrow's birth.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

It was in 1844, a stifling hot summer-day, when I decided to accept Balzac's invitation to visit him at his fantastic house in the Rue Basse, at Passy. It was half-past seven when I entered the dining-room, where Balzac was finishing his dinner. Opposite him was seated a man with a bovine countenance, intellectual forehead and animal lower face, solid, perplexing and of an unusual character. His hair, now gray, gave evidences of having once been red; his eyes, once blue, were now a wintry gray. His whole person was complex, rude but subtle.

Taking up a great hot-house peach as he spoke, Balzac said: "Let me introduce Monsieur Vidocq."

At this name famous in police annals, I remembered Balzac's detective character, "Vautrin." Balzac held in high esteem men of Vidocq's profession and reputation—spies upon families and upon the public safety. He admired the divination of the subtle minds that have a sixth sense for following on the track of a criminal with the slightest clue, with no clew at all—men seized with a nervous trembling, like the hydrocane on the rock which covers a water-spring a hundred feet below the surface of the ground. They cry out: "The crime is there. Dig for it, it is there!"

Balzac arrogated a good deal of this rare intuition to himself. And, indeed, he possessed it, but made use of it to track the passions to the heart, when crimes are prepared before they enter the world of reality to become the prey of police genius.

"You take a great deal of pains, Monsieur de Balzac," said Vidocq, apropos of nothing, "to invent stories out of your imagination when reality is right at your elbow."

"Do you still believe in reality?" said Balzac. "I should never have thought you so fresh. Let me tell you about the real. We novelists make it. You see this fine peach? I call that the real peach. Nature's peach that grows wild, the one you would probably call real, is small, sour, impossible to eat. The one I hold is the result of a hundred years of cultivation, studies in pruning, in soil, in grafting; we eat it, and our palate, and our heart are made glad. Such as it is, we may say we made that peach. Same process in my writing. I create a reality in my novels as the orchardist creates it in his peaches. I am a book-gardener. Every time a man has come to me with: 'I have a superb subject for a novel for you, Balzac,' when I came to examine into it I never found anything worth while. If there was a dramatic event, the details, which are everything, were completely lacking; on the other hand, when there were crisp, juicy details, there was no central event. Same old peach simile. A story is made—it doesn't grow."

"I am going to tell you a story that I have just been reminded of," said Vidocq, "and you shall tell me at the end whether the completeness of it doesn't refute your theory. I was on duty one night, about ten years ago, the police headquarters, about it was a freezing winter night. My colleagues and I were round a white-hot stove, roasting chestnuts, and momentarily expecting a call from the prefect. It was nearly one o'clock at night, when I saw two wavering shadowy objects pass the glass door of the waiting-room. I opened the door, saw two women, and asked them where they were going. The lady for it was easy to see that the two were mistress and maid—replied shortly, and without looking at me, that she wished to speak to the prefect. She was in ball costume, but just the way she was dressed perplexed me. The flowers in her hair looked as if they had been thrown there, her hair itself was disordered, and under her rouge—for she was rouged, though she was extremely young and pretty—she was deathly pale. I thought she must be mad, or temporarily beside herself, for she had a kid boot on on foot and a white satin slipper on the other.

"Just as I was going to tell her that it was impossible to see the prefect at that hour, the guard opened the door of the ante-chamber and let her in. This left the maid on the staircase. I asked her to come into the room with my men, where the stove was, she consented. Although not as temptuously dressed as her mistress, she was quite as demoralized. Her trembling was not all due to the cold. I have studied all sorts of emotions, and hers was fright. She was in such terror that it was contagious. I never saw such fear in my life—it was ghastly; and yet I could see that she was a woman of firm commanding character. Although given her a seat by the stove, she jumped up every minute and went to the window, where she would rub off the fog from the pane with her half-gloved hand and look out. Once I looked out over her shoulder. I saw that she was looking at the carriage she had come in, and it was not a hired conveyance of any kind, but the rich and solid establishment that belongs to a great house. Her horses, eyes, lamps and all. I heard the maid murmur, with an indefinable accent of relief, 'He's asleep,' but whether it referred to the coachman or some one inside the carriage I could not possibly make out.

"Now, what was going on in the Prefect's room all this time? This: 'The prefect after a hard day's work, had given orders that he was not to be awakened till daylight—and his word was law. Hearing this from the guard, the lady asked when the Prefect might be seen. She was told at eight o'clock in the morning. The lady wrung her hands and sprang impetuously toward the Prefect's door, but met the iron arm of the guard—Papa Caron was his name—much amazed he was at the vigor of the assault from such a delicate antagonist. The more the lady begged, the more Papa Caron said it would be ruin and loss of place for him to wake the Prefect when the Prefect said he was not to be waked.

"What compensation will make that ruin good to you?" cried the lady, excited to frenzy. "Will this? Will this? And as she spoke she undid, or rather burst with one wrench, the heavy pearl necklace she wore, took off her diamond bracelets with the same violence, put them all pell-mell into the astonished guard's hands, and said: 'Now go!'

"Twenty thousand francs in pearls and diamonds were too much for the guard, yet he went reluctantly, for the Prefect had the irritable nerves of a man exposed fifteen hours out of the twenty-four to the complaints and petitions and demands for justice of the public. His awakening was a terrible affair. One more Papa Caron returned to the lady with 'Impossible!' for an answer. This time she promised him on her honor and with the simple air of one speaking the truth that she would get him a pension of four thousand francs, to be continued to his family after his death if any punishment fell upon him for urging her suit with the leonine Prefect. This time she sent in her name in a sealed envelope. The Prefect read it and leaped a foot.

"While I dress!" he said. "It was the beautiful Countess Helene de B——, a star of the citizen court, a star of the first magnitude, one of the great ladies of the reign of Louis Philippe's reign, one of those who carried the life and death of Cabinets in the folds of their sweeping trains.

"Of course the Prefect attempted to veil his astonishment under abject apologies for having kept her waiting, but she did not allow him to finish his first sentence. She began to speak herself, a bluish pallor creeping about her lips. 'A great misfortune has happened to me,' she murmured in a stifled voice; 'you cannot imagine what it is.' She stopped gasping for breath, then, with a violent effort at self-control, she repeated, eagerly: 'You will save me! You will save me! You will save me!' and rushed to the window, but as the office looked out on a different street from the waiting-room, she did not see the carriage and uttered a piercing scream. The Prefect's explanation calmed her, and she recommenced her talk with the same painful interruptions as before.

"My husband, whom you know, has been absent eight days in Bordeaux on business connected with a disputed will. All Paris knew this, and the Prefect also; he nodded, and the Countess continued, in a hollow and distressed voice, that during his absence she had been called upon by a person—a young man, she added with an effort—whose acquaintance she had made at the Austrian Embassy. She reproached herself for imprudence in receiving him at such a time, because the Count, her husband, was of a jealous disposition, and had already noticed the young Hungarian's attentions. 'He was a Hungarian officer,' she said parenthetically, always speaking of him in the past, which considerably bewildered the Prefect. Although she had not encouraged his visits, she continued, he persisted in calling on her more frequently in her husband's absence than before. At last he insisted on leaving the opera with her, accompanying her home, and coming in to chat a few moments. This had all been wrong, because the world might have ascribed the proceeding, and because a frightful occurrence had been the result of the fatal weakness. She had a letter from her husband the day before, setting his return from Bordeaux for the following night, at three o'clock in the morning—the morning following that very night of which she, Countess Helene de B——, was passing the latter half at the police headquarters.

"I see, said the Prefect gravely; 'your husband returned, surprised the Hungarian officer in your parlor, his jealousy was aroused, and you have found to tell of some crime, or to warn me of an impending duel?' 'My husband has not come yet,' said the Countess; 'his train gets in at three, and it is not two o'clock yet.' 'Then no one is wounded; no one dead?' cried the Prefect.

"She came close to him and whispered with rigid lips: 'There is a dead man in my carriage, down stairs. M. de Karlisen, the Hungarian officer, while calling upon me this evening after the opera, died in my parlor, and his corpse is in my carriage.' 'Murdered?' cried the Prefect. 'No; struck down by an apoplectic stroke as he sat by my side. Is it not horrible that when I long to grieve for a dead friend I must only think of my reputation and a censorious world? Now, help me. There is a dead man in my carriage! What shall I do? You must have a thousand resources,' said the Countess, mingling the authority of the woman who commands with the authority of the woman who implores.

"Many resources, but nothing for just this case," said the Prefect, however, was longing to aid the poor lady, who was enduring tortures with super-human courage. He rang the bell, saying as he did so: 'There is but one man in Paris who can deliver you from this delicate position. Are you willing that he should make a third in our counsels?' 'If you answer for his discretion,' said the Countess, 'I will do it.' 'I was the man,' said Vidocq, pausing magnificently. 'When I answered the bell, he continued, 'the Prefect told me the story, concluding with the words: 'Vidocq, you must get rid of the body.' 'What do you say to having the body found at daybreak on the highway, wounded in two or three places? He is found, his purse and valuables are gone, he has been murdered by rob-

bers, Grand commotion for twenty-four hours. Investigation by the police—fruitless—eight days afterward everything forgotten.' 'Enough!' cried the Countess, who had hidden her face in her convulsed hands. 'No stabs on that body! I will not have it! No!'

"Then how would it be if the body should disappear from the world as if it had never existed?" said I. "'Never to be found again?'" "'No, burial, then?'" "'I'm afraid not.'"

"Just how would you make it disappear?" "'Oh, madam, don't try to know.'"

"I will not hear of your second plan either," said the Countess, decidedly. "'Madam,' said I, 'I have but one more plan; but to carry that out I must know how many of your people know of this young man's visit to you this evening.'"

"Only Honorine, my maid," said the Countess earnestly. 'It was like this; Monsieur de Karlisen was telling me an amusing story; he was laughing very heartily; I had turned my head away, but noticed that his laughter had ceased suddenly. Seconds passed by. Astonished at the transition from exaggerated gaiety to profound silence, I turned, rose from my arm-chair and approached the sofa, where he was sitting. His face was horribly distorted. I discovered that he was dead. I shrieked and fell. See, I cut my forehead. Honorine came running in, revived the carriage driver, and he was but a few hours from Paris, and that something must be done. She thought of the Prefect, and arranged everything with immense presence of mind. Every one was asleep. We two carried the body down into the court, opened the carriage-house and put the dead man in the carriage, then woke up the coachman and told him to drive us to the corner of the Rue de la Sainte-Chapelle. He is a good German, has only been in Paris a month, and is not inquisitive. He got the carriage out of the carriage house and harnessed up. Meantime I went to get on a ball dress, in case I should find my husband home on my return, Honorine devising where I should say I had been. I had to dress alone, Honorine had to be with the coachman most of what a toilet made! Only here I discovered that I had on one kid boot and one satin slipper. I crept down stairs. All was in readiness. Honorine and I got into the carriage and we three came here together.'

"That was the story she told. It made the chills run over me. 'Madam,' said I, 'just one thing more. Where does M. de Karlisen live?'" "She gave me the street and number. 'Now,' said I, 'I promise you that without wounds, without mysterious disappearances, and without compromising him in the least, the remains of M. de Karlisen shall be at his home in his room, and in his friends' hands, in about a quarter of an hour. Your story has inspired me with the idea of the means to employ.'

"Ah, what gratitude of mine can ever be so great as the service you are doing me!" she murmured, wringing my hand. It was the proudest moment of my life. Vidocq passed his hand over his eyes. "Take some cognac," said Balzac. "No," said Vidocq, "later. Just now I do not need anything." He continued his story:

"There was no time to lose. The Countess promised the royal favor to the Prefect, and we left the private office. We went down stairs and stopped for the maid who had been left in the waiting-room. 'Everything is going well, Honorine,' murmured the Countess; 'but courage for all is not over yet.' 'Decidedly all is not over! I signaled to one of the inspectors to join us, and, telling him the whole story in a few words, told him, also, what we would do if the Countess's coachman was still asleep—we would take the body out of the carriage. As we crept down the street we got a bad fright from hearing some one singing a rude song, but it turned out not to be the coachman, who slept peacefully on.

"Run and tell the ladies they may come," said I, my cold I put between my fingers while I lifted out the body. He was a magnificent man—five feet eight or nine, splendid torso, beautifully dressed. I laid him in the shadow of the parapet which guards the Quai des Orfèvres. I saw the two poor women coming. The agent and I had to literally lift them into the carriage. Their future looks around for it were distressing.

"No violence!" repeated the Countess for the last time. I banged the door of the carriage, swore lustily at the sleeping coachman that his mistress had been ready to start for the past quarter of an hour, and away they whirled to the Rue Bellechasse.

"The agent and I went back to the place where I had laid the body of M. de Karlisen. We picked it up between like two drunkards supporting a third. We went to Pont Neuf—a central point where no one can tell where the man he meets there came from. Of course it was of the first importance that no one should be able to guess where M. de Karlisen had passed the night. It was a short walk to get there, but I would not take it again under the same conditions for a good deal. Once opposite the Place Dauphine, we waited for a cab to pass by. As soon as one drew near we began to sing a drinking song and gabbled as German a gibberish as we could muster, staggering about with our ghastly burden.

"Hullo, coachman," said I, when the cab came up, 'will you accept a fare? We have neither the time nor the steady legs to get our friend home.' Without waiting for the Jehu's answer, we opened the cab door, shoved in the body, and called out the address, 'Rue Saint-Florentin, first house to the right.' 'We had given him five francs. The thing was done. As for the sequel, this is the way the papers told it next morning:

"A rich and noble stranger, M. de Karlisen, sole heir of one of the oldest Hungarian families, had a fatal apoplectic stroke last night while driving to his home in the Rue Saint-Florentin. He had taken a hired cab, and the honest cab-driver, as soon as he perceived the frightful accident, which the chances of his calling had brought to his notice after in vain attempting to arouse the druggists whose establishments he passed on his road, at last delivered the body to the servants at M. de Karlisen's residence on the Rue Saint-Florentin.

"The papers had something more serious the next day: 'To-morrow at the Church of the Madeleine, the funeral services for the repose of the soul of M. de Karlisen will take place. His friends are requested to be present, as the body is to be cremated, and all religious ceremonies will be finished at the church, beginning at noon.

"Nothing had transpired in the meantime to indicate that any unpleasant incident marked the return of the husband, and on account of his relations with the Austrian Embassy the Countess appeared at Karlisen's funeral in deep mourning, masking strange thoughts under her conventional dignity. She returned to her home never to leave it. She languished from that day, and soon died of hypertrophy of the heart. Nobody was forgotten, however. Papa Caron, the man on duty in the Prefect's ante-chamber that strange night, received a big sum of money; Honorine a little property at Vilvorde, where she lives to this day; and I received this magnificent ring. Look, it's worth two thousand francs. During one of these representations he heard a Frenchman in the box next to him talking some people how much the prima-donna looked like the Countess Helene de B——; 'a great lady,' he added 'very well known in Paris. Her husband poisoned her on suspicion of her infidelity, although the world supposed she died of a decline.' He gossiped on in a way that must have been distressing to the Count, who, however, waited for himself. What a relief it was to find the door of the box, passed in his card, with a place and hour of meeting written on it, bowed, went back to his own box, and heard out the opera. He was known to be an expert swordsman. Swords were the weapons chosen for the duel. They met, and after a few passes, the Count literally threw himself upon his adversary's sword. He had committed suicide by another man's hand. My story is finished."

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