

THE CRIME OF THE BOULEVARD

BY JULES CLARETIE

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CHAPTER I.

"Where does Bernard live?"
"At the passage to the right. You, that house which you see with the grating and the garden behind it."
The man to whom a passerby had given this information hurried away in the direction pointed out. Although gasping for breath, he tried to run, in order to more quickly reach the little house at the end of the passage of the Elysee des Beaux Arts. This passage, a sort of cul-de-sac, on either side of which were black buildings, strange old houses and dilapidated storehouses, opened upon a boulevard filled with life and movement, with people promenading, with the noise of tramways, with gaiety and light.

The man wore the dress and had the bearing of a workman. He was very short, very fat, and his bald head was bared to the warm October rain. He was a workman, in truth, who worked in his concierge lodge, making over and mending garments for his neighbors, while his wife looked after the house, swept the staircases and complained of her lot.

Mme. Moniche found life hard and disagreeable and regretted that it had not given her what she promised when, at 18, and very pretty, she had expected something better than to watch beside a sailor bent over his work in a concierge's lodge. Into her life a tragedy had suddenly precipitated itself, and Mme. Moniche found that day something to brighten up her afternoons. Entering a moment before the apartment occupied by M. Rovere, she had found her lodger lying on his back, his eyes fixed, his arms flung out, with a gasp fixed on his throat.

M. Rovere had lived alone in the house for many years, receiving a few mysterious pensions. Mme. Moniche looked after his apartment, entering by using her own key whenever it was necessary, and her lodger had given her permission to come there at any time to read the daily papers.

Mme. Moniche hurried down the stairs. "M. Rovere is dead! M. Rovere has been murdered! His throat has been cut! He has been assassinated!" And pursuing her husband out of the door she exclaimed:

"The police—go for the police!"
This word "police" awakened in the tailor's mind not the thought of the neighboring commissary, but the thought of the man to whom he felt that he ought to appeal, whom he ought to consult. This man was good little M. Bernard, who passed for a man of genius of his kind at the Elysee and for whom Mme. Moniche had often received coats and remodeled trousers.

From the maidens in the Boulevard de Clichy, where Mme. Moniche lived, Bernard's house was but a short distance, and the concierge knew the way very well, as he had often been there, but the poor man was so stupefied, so overwhelmed, by the sudden appearance of his wife in his room, by the revelation which came to him as the blow of a fist by the horrible manner of M. Rovere's death, that he lost his head. Horrified, breathless, he asked the first passerby where Bernard lived, and he ran as fast as he could in the direction pointed out.

Arrived at the grating, the worthy man, a little confused, stopped short. He was very strongly moved. It seemed to him that he had been cast into the agony of a horrible nightmare. An assassination in the house! A murder on the Boulevard de Clichy! He broad daylight, just over his head, while he was quietly repairing a vest!

He stood looking at the house without ringing. M. Bernard was no doubt, breakfasting with his family, for it was Sunday, and the police officer, meeting Mme. Moniche the evening before, had said to him: "Tomorrow is my birthday."

Moniche hesitated a moment. Then he rang the bell. He was not kept waiting. The sudden opening of the grating startled him. He pushed back the door and entered. He crossed a little court, at the end of which was a pavilion. He mounted the three steps and was met on the threshold by a little woman, as rosy and fresh as an apple, who, napping in hand, greeted him.

"Hi, M. Moniche!"
It was Mme. Bernard, a Burgundian woman, about 35 years of age, trim and coquettish, who stepped back so that the tailor could enter.

"What is the matter, M. Moniche?"
Poor Moniche rolled his frightened eyes around and gaped out. "I must speak to M. Bernard."

"Nothing earlier," said the little woman. "M. Bernard is in the garden. Yes, he is taking advantage of the beautiful day. He is taking a group."

"What group?"
"You know very well photography is his passion. Come with me."

And Mme. Bernard pointed to the end of the corridor, where a person gave a glimpse of the garden at the rear of the house. M. Bernard, the inspector, had passed his three daughters with their mother about a small table, on which coffee had been served.

"I had just gone to get my napkin when I heard you ring," Mme. Bernard said.
Bernard made a sign to Moniche not to advance. He was as plump and as red as his wife. His mustache was red, his double chin smooth shaven and rosy, his eyes had a sharp, cunning

look, his head was round and closely cropped.
The three daughters, clothed alike in French style, were posing in front of a photographic apparatus which stood on a tripod. The eldest was about 12 years of age, the youngest a child of 5. They were all three strangely alike.
M. Bernard, in honor of his birthday, was taking a picture of his daughters. The ferret who from morning till night tracked robbers and malefactors in their hiding places was taking his recreation in his damp garden. The sweet idyl of this hidden life repaid him for his unceasing investigations, for his trouble and fatiguing man hunt through Paris.

"There," he said, clapping the cap over the lens. "That is all. Go and play now, my dears. I am at your service now, Moniche."

He shut up his photographic apparatus, peeling out the tripod from the deep soil in which it was imbedded, while his daughters joyously ran to their mother. The young girls stood gazing at Moniche with their great blue eyes, piercing and clear. Bernard turned to look at him, and at once divined that something had happened.

"You are as white as your handkerchief, Moniche," he said. "A murder?"
"A murder, yes, M. Bernard. M. Rovere—you did not know him?"

"He was an original, a recluse, and now he has been assassinated. My wife went to his room to read the papers."

Bernard interrupted him brusquely: "When did it happen?"

"Ah, dame, monsieur, I do not know! All I know is my wife found the body lying on his back, his eyes fixed, his arms flung out, with a gasp fixed on his throat."

"Still warm?"
These words struck Bernard. He recoiled a moment. Then he said:

"Come, let us go to your house."

"Yes, I will take it."

He unfurled his camera from the tripod. "I have three plates left which I can use," he said.

Mme. Bernard, who was standing at a little distance, with the children, looked at her skirt, perceived that the concierge had brought important news. Bernard's smiling face had suddenly changed. The expression became serious, his glance fixed and keen.

"Art thou going with him?" Mme. Bernard asked as she saw her husband buckle on a leather handbag.

"Yes," he answered.
"Ah, mon Dieu! My poor Sunday, and this evening! We are not to go to the little theater at Montmartre this evening!"

"I do not know," he replied.
"You promised. The poor children! You promised to take them to see Closerie des Genets."

"I cannot tell. I do not know. I will see," the little man said. "My dear

"You are as white as your handkerchief, Moniche," he said.

Moniche, today is my fortieth birthday. I promised to take them to the theater, but I must go with you."

Turning to his wife, he added: "But I will come back as soon as I can. Come, Moniche, let us hasten to your M. Rovere."

He bled his wife on the forehead and each little girl on both cheeks, and strapping the camera in the handbag, he went out, followed by the tailor. As they walked quickly along Moniche kept repeating, "Still warm—yes, M. Bernard, still warm."

CHAPTER II.
Bernard was quite an original character. Among the agents, some of whom were very odd, and among the devoted subalterns this little man, with his singular mind, with his insatiable curiosity, reading anything he could lay his hands on, passed for a literary person. His chief sometimes laughingly said to him:

"Bernard, take care. You have literary ambitions. You will begin to dream of writing for the papers."

"Oh, no, M. Morel! But what would you? I am simply amusing myself."

This was true. Bernard was a born hunter. With a superior education in literature, passing his life in working on documents and in deciphering manuscripts. The son of a dairyman, brought up in a Lancastrian school, reading with avidity all the daily papers, attracted by everything mysterious or curious, he had, in Paris, having accomplished his military duty, he ap-

plied for admission to the police bureau, as he would have embarked for the new world, for Mexico or for Tonga, in order to travel in a new country. Then he married, so that he might have in his checkered existence, which was dangerous and wearying, a haven of rest, a paradise of peaceful joy.

So he lived a double life, tracking malefactors like a bloodhound and cultivating his little garden, where he devoted old tools for which he had paid a few sous at some book stall. He read and pored in old old leaves, rebanding them himself and cut clippings from papers. He filled his round, bald head with a mass of facts which he properly classified, put into their proper places, to be brought forth as occasion demanded.

He was an inquisitive person—a very inquisitive person indeed. Curiosity filled his life. He performed with pleasure the most fatiguing and repulsive tasks that fell to the officer's lot. They satisfied the original need of his nature and permitted him to see everything, to hear everything, to penetrate into the most curious mysteries—today, in a dress suit with white tie, carefully glancing over the shoulder at the opera to discover the thief who took opera glasses, which they sent to accomplices in Germany to be sold; tomorrow going in ragged clothes to arrest a murderer in some cutthroat den in the Glaciers.

M. Bernard had taken possession of the office of the most powerful bankers, seized their books and made them go away with him in a cab. He had followed, by order, the intrigues of more than one fine lady, who owed to him her salvation. What if M. Bernard had thought fit to speak? But he never spoke, and reporters came out wasted from any attempt at an interview with him. "An interview is silver, but silence is gold," he was wont to say, for he was not a fool.

He had passed his life at spiritual sciences and attended secret meetings of anarchists. He had occupied himself with occult matters, consulting the magicians of chance, and he had at his tongue's end the list of conspirators. He knew the true names of the famous breakers who shuffled cards as one counts about under an assumed name. The gambling halls were all familiar to him. He knew the churches in whose dark corners associates assembled to talk of affairs, who did not wish to be seen in their shops or upon their balconies.

Of the millions in Paris he knew the secrets of this whirlpool of humanity. Oh, if he had ever become prefect of police, he would have studied his Paris not at a distance, looking up statistics in books, or from the windows of a police bureau, but in the streets, in wretched lodgings, in hovels, in the asylums of misery and of crime. But Bernard was not ambitious. Life suited him very well as he found it. His good wife had brought to him a small fortune. He had found that he had all the power he wanted—the power, when occasion demanded, of putting his hand on the shoulder of a former minister and of taking a murderer by the throat.

One day a financier, threatened with imprisonment in Mazas, pleaded him very much. Bernard entered his office to arrest him. He did not wish to have a row in the bank. The police officer and banker found themselves alone, face to face, in a very small room, a thick carpet, which stifled all noise.

"Fifty thousand francs if you will let me escape," said the banker.

"A hundred thousand!"
"The pleasure is very great, but it is a pleasure."

"Then the count, very pale, said, 'And what if I crack your head?'"

"My brother officers are waiting for me," Bernard slightly replied. "They know that our interview does not promise to be a long one, and this last proposition, which I wish to forget like the others, would only aggravate, I believe, if it became known, M. le Comte's case."

Two minutes afterward the banker went out, pale, and with a head that followed him with a heavy head. The banker said to his employees, in an easy tone: "Goodbye for the moment, messieurs. I will return soon."

It was also Bernard who, visiting the Bank Haute-Faiteaux, said to his chief, M. Morel, something very serious, taking place there.

"What is it, Bernard?"
"I do not know, but there is a meeting of the bank directors, and today I saw two servants carry a man in there in an invalid's chair. It was the Baron de Chavigny."

"Well!"
"Baron Chavigny, in his quality of ex-senator of the second empire, of ex-president of the council, an ex-commissioner of industrial exhibitions, is grand cross—that is to say, that he cannot be pursued only after a decision of the council of the order. And then, you understand—if the Bank of Haute-Faiteaux demands the presence of its vice president, the Baron de Chavigny, paroled, half dead."

"It means that it has need of a thunderbolt!"
"The grand cross, monsieur. They would hesitate to deliver up to us the grand cross."

"You are right, Bernard. The bank must be in a bad fix, and you are a very keen observer—the mind of a literary man, rather."

"Oh, rather a photographic eye, M. Morel—the habit of using a kodak!"

Then Bernard passed his life in Paris. Capable of amassing a fortune in some Treloche agency if he had wished to exploit, for his own benefit, his keen observing powers, he thought only of doing his duty, bringing up his little girls and loving his wife. Mme. Bernard was amazed at the astonishment of her husband when related to her and very proud that he was such an able man.

M. Bernard hurried toward M. Rovere's lodgings, and Moniche trotted

along beside him. As they neared the house they saw that a crowd had begun to collect.

"It is known already," Moniche said. "Since I left they have begun to collect."

"If I enter there," interrupted the officer, "it is all right. You have a right to call any one you choose to your aid, but I am not a magistrate. You must go for a commissary of police."

"Oh, M. Bernard!" Moniche exclaimed. "You are worth more than all the commissaries put together."

"That does not make it so. A commissary is a commissary. Go and hunt for one."

"But since you are here—"
"But I am nothing. We must have a magistrate."

"You are not a magistrate, then?"
"I am simply a police spy."

Then he crossed the street. The neighbors had gathered about the door like a swarm of flies around a bonfire.

"Yes," added Moniche. "M. Bernard needs a magistrate."

A rumor had spread about which brought together a crowd animated by the morbid curiosity which is aroused in some minds at the sight of a mystery and attracted by that strange magnetism which that sinister thing, "a crime," arouses. The women talked in shrill tones, inventing strange stories and incredible theories. Some of the common people hurried up to learn the news.

At this moment Bernard came up, followed by the concierge, a couple stopped at the door and a tall man got out, asking:

"Where is M. Morel? I wish to see M. Morel."

The chief had not yet been advised, and he was not there. But the tall young man suddenly recognized Bernard and laid hold of him, pulling him after him through the half open door, which Moniche hastened to shut against the crowd.

"We want a magistrate," Bernard said to the concierge, "or the crowd will push in."

Mme. Moniche was standing at the foot of the staircase, surrounded by her lodgers, men and women, to whom she had laid hold of him, pulling him after him through the half open door, which Moniche hastened to shut against the crowd.

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ella. He bent over and studied it thoroughly.

M. Rovere seemed living in his tragedy. The pale face, with its pointed and well-trimmed gray beard, expressed in its fierce immobility a sort of menacing anger. This man of about 60 years had evidently died, cursing some one in his supreme agony. The frightful wound seemed like a large red coral, which had burst through the end of which was wet with blood.

But what struck Bernard above everything else, arrested his attention and glued him to the spot was the look, the extraordinary expression in the eyes. The mouth was open, as if to cry out; the eyes seemed to make some one out, and the lips about to speak.

They were frightened. These traits were wide open, as if transfixed by fear or fury.

They seemed fashionable, starting, ready to start from their sockets. The eyebrows above them were black and bristling. They seemed living eyes in that dead face. They radiated a kind of struggle, of a man struggling with the forces of immobility, as when they gazed upon the murderer, eye to eye, face to face.

Bernard looked at the hands. They were contracted and trembled, in some obstinate resistance, to have clung to the neck or the clothing of the assassin.

"There ought to be blood, under the nails, since he made a struggle," said Bernard, thinking aloud.

And Paul Rodier, the reporter, hurriedly wrote: "There was blood under the nails."

Bernard returned again and again to the eyes—those wide open eyes, frightful, terrible eyes, which in their fierce depths, retained within them the image or phantom of some nightmare of death.

He touched the dead man's hand. The flesh had become cold, and rigor mortis was beginning to set in.

The reporter saw the little man take from his pocket a sort of rusty silver ribbon and unroll it and heard him say Moniche to take hold of one end of it. This ribbon or thread looked to Paul Rodier like brass wire. Bernard prepared his kodak.

"Above everything else," murmured Bernard, "let us preserve the expression of the eyes."

"Close the shutters. The darkness will be more complete."

The reporter assisted Moniche in order to hasten the work. The shutters closed, the room was quite dark. Bernard began his task. Counting off a few steps, he selected the best place from which to take the picture.

"Be kind enough to light the end of the magnesium wire," he said to the concierge. "Have you any matches?"

"No, M. Bernard."

The police officer indicated by a sign of the head a match safe which he had noticed on entering the room.

"There are some there."

Bernard had with one sweeping glance of the eyes taken in everything in the room—the fastenings, the pictures moved from their places; the pictures hanging on the walls, the mirrors, the bookcases, the cabinets, etc.

Moniche went to the mantelpiece and took a match from the box. It was M. Rovere himself who furnished the light by which a picture of his own body was taken.

"We could obtain no picture in this room without the magnesium wire," said the agent, as calm while taking a photograph of the murdered man as he had been a short time ago in his garden. "The light is insufficient. Well, I say, 'Go!' Moniche, you must light the wire, and I will take three or four negatives. Do you understand? Stand there to my left. Now! Attention!"

Bernard took his position, and the porter stood ready, match and wire in hand, like a gunner who awaits the order to fire.

"Go!" said the agent.

A rapid, clear light shot up and suddenly lighted the room. The pale face seemed livid, the various objects in the room took on a fantastic appearance; this sort of tempestuous apoplexy, as Paul Rodier hastily inscribed on his writing pad, "Picturessque, bizarre, marvelous, devilish, suggestive."

"For the third time in this weird light the visage of the dead man appeared whiter, more sinister, frightful, the wound deeper, the gash redder, and the eyes, those wide open, fixed, tragic, menacing, speaking eyes—eyes filled with scorn, with hate, with terror, with the ferocious resistance of a last struggle for life, immovable, eloquent—seemed under the fantastic light to glitter, to be alive, to menace some one."

"That is all," said Bernard very softly. "If with these three negatives—"

He stepped to look around toward the door, which was closed. Some one was raining ringing blows on the door, loud and impetuous.

"It is the commissary. Open the door, Moniche."

The reporter was busy taking notes, describing the scene, sketching it, drawing a plan for his journal.

It was, in fact, the commissary, who was followed by Mme. Moniche, and a number of curious persons who had forced their way in when the front door was opened.

The commissary, before entering, took a comprehensive survey of the room and said in a short tone: "Every one must go out. No one must enter."

There arose an uproar. Each one tried to explain his right to be there. They were all possessed with an irresistible desire to assist at this sinister investigation.

"But we belong to the press."

"The reporters may enter when they have shown their cards," the commissary replied. "The others—no." There was a murmur from the crowd.

"The others—no," repeated the commissary. He made a sign to two officers who accompanied him, and they demanded the reporters' cards of identification. The commissary of course was rebuffed, protested, growled and declaimed against the representatives of the press, who took precedence every where.

"The Fourth Estate!" shouted an old man from the foot of the staircase. He lived in the house and passed for a correspondent of the institute. He shouted furiously. "When a crime is committed under my very roof, I am not even allowed to write an account of it, and strangers, because they are reporters, can have the exclusive privilege of writing it up."

The commissary did not listen to him, but those who were his fellow sufferers applauded him to the echo. The commissary shrugged his shoulders at the hand clappings.

"It is but right," he said to the reporter, "that the agents of the press should be admitted in preference to any one else. Do you think that it is easy to discover a criminal? I have been a journalist, too—yes, at times. In the Quartier occasionally. I have even written a piece for the theater. But we will not talk of that. Enter, enter, I beg of you, and we shall see." And elegant, amiable, polished, smiling, he looked toward M. Bernard, and his eyes asked the question: Where is it?

"Here! M. le Commissaire."

Bernard stood respectfully in front of his superior officer as a soldier carrying arms, and the commissary in his turn approached the body while the curious ones, quietly kept back by Moniche, formed a half circle around the pale and bloody corpse. The commissary, like Bernard, was struck by the haughty expression of that livid face.

"Poor man," he said, shaking his head. "He is superb, superb. His reminiscence of the dead Duke de Guise in Paul Delarocche's picture. I have seen it also at Chantilly, in Gerome's celebrated picture of 'The Duel du Pierrot'."

Possibly in speaking of his thoughts the commissary was talking so

He touched the dead man's hand.

That the reporters might hear him. They stood, notebooks in hand, taking notes, and Paul Rodier, catching the names, wrote rapidly in his book: "M. Desbriere, the learned commissary, as above, as well disposed toward the press, was at one time a journalist. He noticed that the victim's pale face, with its strong personal characteristics, resembled the dead Duke de Guise in Gerome's celebrated picture, which hangs in the galleries at Chantilly."

CHAPTER IV.
M. Desbriere now began the investigation. He questioned the porter and postman, while he studied the salon in detail. Bernard roamed about, examining at very close range each and every object in the room as a dog sniffs and snouts about for a trail.

"What kind of a man was your lodger?" was the first question.

Moniche replied in a tone which showed that he felt that his tenant had been accused of something.

"Oh, M. le Commissaire, a very worthy man, I assure you."

"The best man in the world," added his wife, wiping her eyes.

"I am not inquiring about his moral qualities," M. Desbriere said. "What I want to know is, how did he live and whom did he receive?"

"Few people. Very few," the porter answered. "The poor man liked solitude. He lived here eight years. He received a few friends; but, I repeat, a very small number."

M. Rovere had rented the apartment in 1888. He installed himself in his room, with his pictures and books. The porter was much astonished at the number of pictures and volumes which the new lodger brought. It took a long time to settle, as M. Rovere was very fastidious and personally superstitious, the hanging of his canvases and the placing of his books. He thought that he must have been an artist, although he said that he was a retired merchant. He had heard him say one day that he had been consul to some foreign country—Spain or South America.

He lived quite simply, although they thought that he must be rich. Was he a miser? Not at all; very generous, on the contrary, but plainly he shunned the world. He had chosen their apartment because it was in a retired spot, far from the Parisian boulevard. Four or five years before a woman, clothed in black, had come there—a woman who seemed still young. He had not seen her face, which was covered with a heavy black veil. She had visited M. Rovere quite often. He always accompanied her respectfully to the door when she went away. Once or twice he had gone out with her in a carriage. No, he did not know her name. M. Rovere's life was regulated with military precision. He usually held himself upright. Of late sickness had bowed him somewhat. He went out whenever he was able, going as far as the Bois and back. Then, after breakfasting, he shut himself up in his library and read and wrote. He passed nearly all his evenings at home.

He never made us wait up for him.

To be Continued.

A Strong

Statement

But a True One Regarding the Wonderful

Merits of

Dr. Chase's