

# **TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN**

O. Henry



# Table of Contents

<u>TICTOCO, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN</u> .....	1
<u>O. Henry</u> .....	2
<u>CHAPTER I</u> .....	3
<u>CHAPTER II</u> .....	5
<u>CHAPTER III</u> .....	7

# TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

**O. Henry**

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- CHAPTER I
  - CHAPTER II
  - CHAPTER III
- 

A Successful Political Intrigue

## CHAPTER I

It is not generally known that Tictocq, the famous French detective, was in Austin last week. He registered at the Avenue Hotel under an assumed name, and his quiet and reserved manners singled him out at once for one not to be singled out.

No one knows why he came to Austin, but to one or two he vouchsafed the information that his mission was an important one from the French Government.

One report is that the French Minister of State has discovered an old statute among the laws of the empire, resulting from a treaty between the Emperor Charlemagne and Governor Roberts which expressly provides for the north gate of the Capital grounds being kept open, but this is merely a conjecture.

Last Wednesday afternoon a well-dressed gentleman knocked at the door of Tictocq's room in the hotel. The detective opened the door.

"Monsieur Tictocq, I believe," said the gentleman.

"You will see on the register that I sign my name Q. X. Jones," said Tictocq, "and gentlemen would understand that I wish to be known as such. If you do not like being referred to as no gentleman, I will give you satisfaction any time after July 1st, and fight Steve O'Donnell, John McDonald, and Ignatius Donnelly in the meantime if you desire."

"I do not mind it in the least," said the gentleman. "In fact, I am accustomed to it. I am Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee, Platform No. 2, and I have a friend in trouble. I knew you were Tictocq from your resemblance to yourself."

"Entrez vous," said the detective.

The gentleman entered and was handed a chair.

"I am a man of few words," said Tictocq. "I will help your friend if possible. Our countries are great friends. We have given you Lafayette and French fried potatoes. You have given us California champagne and—taken back Ward McAllister. State your case."

"I will be very brief," said the visitor. "In room No. 76 in this hotel is stopping a prominent Populist Candidate. He is alone. Last night some one stole his socks. They cannot be found. If they are not recovered, his party will attribute their loss to the Democracy. They will make great capital of the burglary, although I am sure it was not a political move at all. The socks must be recovered. You are the only man that can do it."

Tictocq bowed.

"Am I to have carte blanche to question every person connected with the hotel?"

"The proprietor has already been spoken to. Everything and everybody is at your service."

Tictocq consulted his watch. "Come to this room to-morrow afternoon at 6 o'clock with the landlord, the Populist Candidate, and any other witnesses elected from both parties, and I will return the socks."

"Bien, Monsieur; schlafen sie wohl."

"Au revoir."

The Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee, Platform No.2, bowed courteously and withdrew.

\* \* \* \*

Tictocq sent for the bell boy. "Did you go to room 76 last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was there?"

"An old hayseed what come on the 7:25."

"What did he want?"

"The bouncer."

"What for?"

"To put the light out."

"Did you take anything while in the room?"

"No, he didn't ask me."

"What is your name?"

## TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

"Jim."

"You can go."

## CHAPTER II

The drawing-rooms of one of the most magnificent private residences in Austin are a blaze of lights. Carriages line the streets in front, and from gate to doorway is spread a velvet carpet, on which the delicate feet of the guests may tread.

The occasion is the entree into society of one of the fairest buds in the City of the Violet Crown. The rooms are filled with the culture, the beauty, the youth and fashion of society. Austin society is acknowledged to be the wittiest, the most select, and the highest bred to be found southwest of Kansas City.

Mrs. Rutabaga St. Vitus, the hostess, is accustomed to draw around her a circle of talent, and beauty, rarely equalled anywhere. Her evenings come nearer approaching the dignity of a salon than any occasion, except, perhaps, a Tony Faust and Marguerite reception at the Iron Front.

Miss St. Vitus, whose advent into society's maze was heralded by such an auspicious display of hospitality, is a slender brunette, with large, lustrous eyes, a winning smile, and a charming ingenue manner. She wears a china silk, cut princesse, with diamond ornaments, and a couple of towels inserted in the back to conceal prominence of shoulder blades. She is chatting easily and naturally on a plush covered tete-a-tete with Harold St. Clair, the agent for a Minneapolis pants company. Her friend and schoolmate, Elsie Hicks, who married three drummers in one day, a week or two before, and won a wager of two dozen bottles of Budweiser from the handsome and talented young hack-driver, Bum Smithers, is promenading in and out the low French windows with Ethelbert Windup, the popular young candidate for hide inspector, whose name is familiar to every one who reads police court reports.

Somewhere, concealed by shrubbery, a band is playing, and during the pauses in conversation, onions can be smelt frying in the kitchen.

Happy laughter rings out from ruby lips, handsome faces grow tender as they bend over white necks and drooping beads; timid eyes convey things that lips dare not speak, and beneath silken bodice and broadcloth, hearts beat time to the sweet notes of "Love's Young Dream."

"And where have you been for some time past, you recreant cavalier?" says Miss St. Vitus to Harold St. Clair. "Have you been worshipping at another shrine? Are you recreant to your whilom friends? Speak, Sir Knight, and defend yourself."

"Oh, come off," says Harold, in his deep, musical baritone; "I've been having a devil of a time fitting pants on a lot of bow-legged jays from the cotton-patch. Got knobs on their legs, some of 'em big as gourds, and all expect a fit. Did you every try to measure a bow-legged—I mean—can't you imagine what a jam-swizzled time I have getting pants to fit 'em? Business dull too, nobody wants 'em over three dollars."

"You witty boy," says Miss St. Vitus. "Just as full of bon mots and clever sayings as ever. What do you take now?"

"Oh, beer."

"Give me your arm and let's go into the drawing-room and draw a cork. I'm chewing a little cotton myself."

Arm in arm, the handsome couple pass across the room, the cynosure of all eyes. Luderic Hetherington, the rising and gifted night-watchman at the Lone Star slaughter house, and Mabel Grubb, the daughter of the millionaire owner of the Humped-backed Camel saloon, are standing under the oleanders as they go by.

"She is very beautiful," says Luderic.

"Rats," says Mabel.

A keen observer would have noted all this time the figure of a solitary man who seemed to avoid the company but by adroit changing of his position, and perfectly cool and self-possessed manner, avoided drawing any especial attention to himself.

The lion of the evening is Herr Professor Ludwig von Bum, the pianist.

He had been found drinking beer in a saloon on East Pecan Street by Colonel St. Vitus about a week before, and according to the Austin custom in such cases, was invited home by the colonel, and the next day accepted into society, with large music classes at his service.

Professor von Bum is playing the lovely symphony in G minor from Beethoven's "Songs Without Music." The



## TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

grand chords fill the room with exquisite harmony. He plays the extremely difficult passages in the obligato home run in a masterly manner, and when he finishes with that grand te deum with arpeggios on the side, there is that complete hush in the room that is dearer to the artist's heart than the loudest applause.

The professor looks around.

The room is empty.

Empty with the exception of Tictocq, the great French detective, who springs from behind a mass of tropical plants to his side.

The professor rises in alarm.

"Hush," says Tictocq: "Make no noise at all. You have already made enough."

Footsteps are heard outside.

"Be quick," says Tictocq: "give me those socks. There is not a moment to spare."

"Vas sagst du?"

"Ah, he confesses," says Tictocq. "No socks will do but those you carried off from the Populist Candidate's room."

The company is returning, no longer hearing the music.

Tictocq hesitates not. He seizes the professor, throws him upon the floor, tears off his shoes and socks, and escapes with the latter through the open window into the garden.

### CHAPTER III

Tictocq's room in the Avenue Hotel.

A knock is heard at the door.

Tictocq opens it and looks at his watch.

"Ah," he says, "it is just six. Entrez, Messieurs."

The messieurs entrez. There are seven of them; the Populist Candidate who is there by invitation, not knowing for what purpose; the chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee, platform No. 2, the hotel proprietor, and three or four Democrats and Populists, as near as could be found out.

"I don't know," begins the Populist Candidate, "what in the h——"

"Excuse me," says Tictocq, firmly. "You will oblige me by keeping silent until I make my report. I have been employed in this case, and I have unravelled it. For the honor of France I request that I be heard with attention."

"Certainly," says the chairman; "we will be pleased to listen."

Tictocq stands in the centre of the room. The electric light burns brightly above him. He seems the incarnation of alertness, vigor, cleverness, and cunning.

The company seat themselves in chairs along the wall.

"When informed of the robbery," begins Tictocq, "I first questioned the bell boy. He knew nothing. I went to the police headquarters. They knew nothing. I invited one of them to the bar to drink. He said there used to be a little colored boy in the Tenth Ward who stole things and kept them for recovery by the police, but failed to be at the place agreed upon for arrest one time, and had been sent to jail.

"I then began to think. I reasoned. No man, said I, would carry a Populist's socks in his pocket without wrapping them up. He would not want to do so in the hotel. He would want a paper. Where would he get one? At the Statesman office, of course. I went there. A young man with his hair combed down on his forehead sat behind the desk. I knew he was writing society items, for a young lady's slipper, a piece of cake, a fan, a half emptied bottle of cocktail, a bunch of roses, and a police whistle lay on the desk before him.

"Can you tell me if a man purchased a paper here in the last three months?" I said.

"Yes," he replied; "we sold one last night."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Accurately. He had blue whiskers, a wart between his shoulder blades, a touch of colic, and an occupation tax on his breath."

"Which way did he go?"

"Out."

"I then went——"

"Wait a minute," said the Populist Candidate, rising; "I don't see why in the h——"

"Once more I must beg that you will be silent," said Tictocq, rather sharply. "You should not interrupt me in the midst of my report."

"I made one false arrest," continued Tictocq. "I was passing two finely dressed gentlemen on the street, when one of them remarked that he had 'stole his socks.' I handcuffed him and dragged him to a lighted store, when his companion explained to me that he was somewhat intoxicated and his tongue was not entirely manageable. He had been speaking of some business transaction, and what he intended to say was that he had 'sold his stocks.'

"I then released him.

"An hour afterward I passed a saloon, and saw this Professor von Bum drinking beer at a table. I knew him in Paris. I said 'here is my man.' He worshipped Wagner, lived on limburger cheese, beer, and credit, and would have stolen anybody's socks. I shadowed him to the reception at Colonel St. Vitus's, and in an opportune moment I seized him and tore the socks from his feet. There they are."

With a dramatic gesture, Tictocq threw a pair of dingy socks upon the table, folded his arms, and threw back his head.

With a loud cry of rage, the Populist Candidate sprang once more to his feet.

"Gol darn it! I WILL say what I want to. I——"

## TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

The two other Populists in the room gazed at him coldly and sternly.

"Is this tale true?" they demanded of the Candidate.

"No, by gosh, it ain't!" he replied, pointing a trembling finger at the Democratic Chairman. "There stands the man who has concocted the whole scheme. It is an infernal, unfair political trick to lose votes for our party. How far has thing gone?" he added, turning savagely to the detective.

"All the newspapers have my written report on the matter, and the Statesman will have it in plate matter next week," said Tictocq, complacently.

"All is lost!" said the Populists, turning toward the door.

"For God's sake, my friends," pleaded the Candidate, following them; "listen to me; I swear before high heaven that I never wore a pair of socks in my life. It is all a devilish campaign lie."

The Populists turn their backs.

"The damage is already done," they said. "The people have heard the story. You have yet time to withdraw decently before the race."

All left the room except Tictocq and the Democrats.

"Let's all go down and open a bottle of fizz on the Finance Committee," said the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Platform No. 2.

### TRACKED TO DOOM

OR

### THE MYSTERY OF THE RUE DE PEYCHAUD

'Tis midnight in Paris.

A myriad of lamps that line the Champs Elysees and the Rouge et Noir, cast their reflection in the dark waters of the Seine as it flows gloomily past the Place Vendome and the black walls of the Convent Notadam.

The great French capital is astir.

It is the hour when crime and vice and wickedness reign.

Hundreds of fiacres drive madly through the streets conveying women, flashing with jewels and as beautiful as dreams, from opera and concert, and the little bijou supper rooms of the Cafe Tout le Temps are filled with laughing groups, while bon mots, persiflage and repartee fly upon the air—the jewels of thought and conversation.

Luxury and poverty brush each other in the streets. The homeless gamin, begging a sou with which to purchase a bed, and the spendthrift roue, scattering golden louis d'or, tread the same pavement.

When other cities sleep, Paris has just begun her wild revelry.

The first scene of our story is a cellar beneath the Rue de Peychaud.

The room is filled with smoke of pipes, and is stifling with the reeking breath of its inmates. A single flaring gas jet dimly lights the scene, which is one Rembrandt or Moreland and Keisel would have loved to paint.

A garcon is selling absinthe to such of the motley crowd as have a few sous, dealing it out in niggardly portions in broken teacups.

Leaning against the bar is Carnaignole Cusheau—generally known as the Gray Wolf.

He is the worst man in Paris.

He is more than four feet ten in height, and his sharp, ferocious looking face and the mass of long, tangled gray hair that covers his face and head, have earned for him the name he bears.

His striped blouse is wide open at the neck and falls outside of his dingy leather trousers. The handle of a deadly looking knife protrudes from his belt. One stroke of its blade would open a box of the finest French sardines.

"Voila, Gray Wolf," cries Couteau, the bartender. "How many victims to-day? There is no blood upon your hands. Has the Gray Wolf forgotten how to bite?"

"Sacre Bleu, Mille Tonnerre, by George," hisses the Gray Wolf. "Monsieur Couteau, you are bold indeed to speak to me thus.

"By Ventre St. Gris! I have not even dined to-day. Spoils indeed. There is no living in Paris now. But one rich American have I garroted in a fortnight.

## TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

"Bah! those Democrats. They have ruined the country. With their income tax and their free trade, they have destroyed the millionaire business. Carrambo! Diable! D—n it!"

"Hist!" suddenly says Chamounix the rag-picker, who is worth 20,000,000 francs, "some one comes!"

The cellar door opened and a man crept softly down the rickety steps. The crowd watches him with silent awe.

He went to the bar, laid his card on the counter, bought a drink of absinthe, and then drawing from his pocket a little mirror, set it up on the counter and proceeded to don a false beard and hair and paint his face into wrinkles, until he closely resembled an old man seventy-one years of age.

He then went into a dark corner and watched the crowd of people with sharp, ferret-like eyes.

Gray Wolf slipped cautiously to the bar and examined the card left by the newcomer.

"Holy Saint Bridget!" he exclaims. "It is Tictocq, the detective."

Ten minutes later a beautiful woman enters the cellar. Tenderly nurtured, and accustomed to every luxury that money could procure, she had, when a young vivandiere at the Convent of Saint Susan de la Montarde, run away with the Gray Wolf, fascinated by his many crimes and the knowledge that his business never allowed him to scrape his feet in the hall or snore.

"Parbleu, Marie," snarls the Gray Wolf. "Que voulez vous? Avez-vous le beau cheval de mon frere, oule joli chien de votre pere?"

"No, no, Gray Wolf," shouts the motley group of assassins, rogues and pickpockets, even their hardened hearts appalled at his fearful words. Mon Dieu! You cannot be so cruel!"

"Tiens!" shouts the Gray Wolf, now maddened to desperation, and drawing his gleaming knife. "Voila! Canaille! Tout le monde, carte blanche enbonpoint sauve que peut entre nous revenez nous a nous moutons!"

The horrified sans-culottes shrink back in terror as the Gray Wolf seizes Maria by the hair and cuts her into twenty-nine pieces, each exactly the same size.

As he stands with reeking hands above the corpse, amid a deep silence, the old, gray-bearded man who has been watching the scene springs forward, tears off his false beard and locks, and Tictocq, the famous French detective, stands before them.

Spellbound and immovable, the denizens of the cellar gaze at the greatest modern detective as he goes about the customary duties of his office.

He first measures the distance from the murdered woman to a point on the wall, then he takes down the name of the bartender and the day of the month and the year. Then drawing from his pocket a powerful microscope, he examines a little of the blood that stands upon the floor in little pools.

"Mon Dieu!" he mutters, "it is as I feared—human blood."

He then enters rapidly in a memorandum book the result of his investigations, and leaves the cellar.

Tictocq bends his rapid steps in the direction of the headquarters of the Paris gendarmerie, but suddenly pausing, he strikes his hand upon his brow with a gesture of impatience.

"Mille tonnerre," he mutters. "I should have asked the name of that man with the knife in his hand."

\* \* \*

It is reception night at the palace of the Duchess Valerie du Bellairs.

The apartments are flooded with a mellow light from paraffine candles in solid silver candelabra.

The company is the most aristocratic and wealthy in Paris.

Three or four brass bands are playing behind a portiere between the coal shed, and also behind time. Footmen in gay-laced livery bring in beer noiselessly and carry out apple-peelings dropped by the guests.

Valerie, seventh Duchess du Bellairs, leans back on a solid gold ottoman on eiderdown cushions, surrounded by the wittiest, the bravest, and the handsomest courtiers in the capital.

"Ah, madame," said the Prince Champvilliers, of Palms Royale, corner of Seventy-third Street, "as Montesquiaux says, 'Rien de plus bon tutti frutti'—Youth seems your inheritance. You are to-night the most beautiful, the wittiest in your own salon. I can scarce believe my own senses, when I remember that thirty-one years ago you—"

"Saw it off!" says the Duchess peremptorily.

The Prince bows low, and drawing a jewelled dagger, stabs himself to the heart.

"The displeasure of your grace is worse than death," he says, as he takes his overcoat and hat from a corner of the mantelpiece and leaves the room.

## TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

"Voila," says Beebe Francillon, fanning herself languidly. "That is the way with men. Flatter them, and they kiss your hand. Loose but a moment the silken leash that holds them captive through their vanity and self-opinionativeness, and the son-of-a-gun gets on his ear at once. The devil go with him, I say."

"Ah, mon Princesse," sighs the Count Pumpnickel, stooping and whispering with eloquent eyes into her ear. "You are too hard upon us. Balzac says, 'All women are not to themselves what no one else is to another.' Do you not agree with him?"

"Cheese it!" says the Princess. "Philosophy palls upon me. I'll shake you."

"Hosses?" says the Count.

Arm and arm they go out to the salon au Beurre.

Armande de Fleury, the young pianissimo danseuse from the Folies Bergere is about to sing.

She slightly clears her throat and lays a voluptuous cud of chewing gum upon the piano as the first notes of the accompaniment ring through the salon.

As she prepares to sing, the Duchess du Bellairs grasps the arm of her ottoman in a vice-like grip, and she watches with an expression of almost anguished suspense.

She scarcely breathes.

Then, as Armande de Fleury, before uttering a note, reels, wavers, turns white as snow and falls dead upon the floor, the Duchess breathes a sigh of relief.

The Duchess had poisoned her.

Then the guests crowd about the piano, gazing with bated breath, and shuddering as they look upon the music rack and observe that the song that Armande came so near singing is "Sweet Marie."

Twenty minutes later a dark and muffled figure was seen to emerge from a recess in the mullioned wall of the Arc de Triomphe and pass rapidly northward.

It was no other than Tictocq, the detective.

The network of evidence was fast being drawn about the murderer of Marie Cusheau.

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It is midnight on the steeple of the Cathedral of Notadam.

It is also the same time at other given points in the vicinity.

The spire of the Cathedral is 20,000 feet above the pavement, and a casual observer, by making a rapid mathematical calculation, would have readily perceived that this Cathedral is, at least, double the height of others that measure only 10,000 feet.

At the summit of the spire there is a little wooden platform on which there is room for but one man to stand.

Crouching on this precarious footing, which swayed, dizzily with every breeze that blew, was a man closely muffled, and disguised as a wholesale grocer.

Old Francois Beongfallong, the great astronomer, who is studying the sidereal spheres from his attic window in the Rue de Bologny, shudders as he turns his telescope upon the solitary figure upon the spire.

"Sacre Bleu!" he hisses between his new celluloid teeth. "It is Tictocq, the detective. I wonder whom he is following now?"

While Tictocq is watching with lynx-like eyes the hill of Montmartre, he suddenly hears a heavy breathing beside him, and turning, gazes into the ferocious eyes of the Gray Wolf.

Carnaignole Cusheau had put on his W. U. Tel. Co. climbers and climbed the steeple.

"Parbleu, monsieur," says Tictocq. "To whom am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

The Gray Wolf smiled softly and depreciatingly.

"You are Tictocq, the detective?" he said.

"I am."

"Then listen. I am the murderer of Marie Cusheau. She was my wife and she had cold feet and ate onions. What was I to do? Yet life is sweet to me. I do not wish to be guillotined. I have heard that you are on my track. Is it true that the case is in your hands?"

"It is."

"Thank le bon Dieu, then, I am saved."

The Gray Wolf carefully adjusts the climbers on his feet and descends the spire.

Tictocq takes out his notebook and writes in it.

## TICTOCQ, THE GREAT FRENCH DETECTIVE, IN AUSTIN

"At last," he says, "I have a clue."

Monsieur le Comte Carnaignole Cusheau, once known as the Gray Wolf, stands in the magnificent drawing-room of his palace on East 47th Street.

Three days after his confession to Tictocq, he happened to look in the pockets of a discarded pair of pants and found twenty million francs in gold.

Suddenly the door opens and Tictocq, the detective, with a dozen gend'arme, enters the room.

"You are my prisoner," says the detective.

"On what charge?"

"The murder of Marie Cusheau on the night of August 17th."

"Your proofs?"

"I saw you do it, and your own confession on the spire of Notadam."

The Count laughed and took a paper from his pocket. "Read this," he said, "here is proof that Marie Cusheau died of heart failure."

Tictocq looked at the paper.

It was a check for 100,000 francs.

Tictocq dismissed the gend'arme with a wave of his hand.

"We have made a mistake, monsieurs," he said, but as he turns to leave the room, Count Carnaignole stops him.

"One moment, monsieur."

The Count Carnaignole tears from his own face a false beard and reveals the flashing eyes and well-known features of Tictocq, the detective.

Then, springing forward, he snatches a wig and false eyebrows from his visitor, and the Gray Wolf, grinding his teeth in rage, stands before him.

The murderer of Marie Cusheau was never discovered.