

Book One: THE INVESTIGATION

I

On February 20, 18--, during Carnival season, the Sunday before Lent, at about 11 p.m., a Sûreté patrol left the police station located near the Place d'Italie. During the riots of 1848, barricades, a hodge-podge of paving stones, iron grillwork, broken furniture and overturned carriages, had been built there, one of the poorest sections of Paris. That patrol's job was to check through the vast neighborhoods situated between the outlying boulevards right up to the ramparts of Paris. These neighborhoods had the same unsavory reputation that the slums of America do today. To visit there at night was considered so dangerous that soldiers from outside garrisons with leave to go to Parisian theaters were ordered to wait at the city gates and not to travel further except in groups of three or four. After midnight, these areas of narrow, muddy streets and open spaces, still numerous, became the territory of homeless tramps, escaped convicts and thieves who, with no other shelter, gathered even in the most despicable of lodgings. It was the meeting place of drifters and outlaws. If they had had a good day, they would have wild celebrations with the food they had stolen from grocery stalls. When they had to sleep, they slid under warehouse sheds and crawled into the ruins of abandoned houses. The City of Paris had tried everything to get rid of these dangerous guests, but the toughest measures had been useless. Although watched, pursued and in constant danger of arrest, they always stubbornly returned, obeying, you might say, some mysterious law of attraction. It was so bad that the police had devised a permanent mouse trap, ready to be sprung at any time and into which their prey went of their own accord.

The result of a tour of this locality was so sure of success that the officer in charge of the police station called to the squad as they left:

"I'll fix lodgings for our guests. Good luck and enjoy yourselves!"

This last was pure irony, because the weather was the most unpleasant imaginable. There had been a lot of heavy snowfall the previous days. The snow was now beginning to melt and on all the frequented thoroughfares, the slush was ankle deep. It was still cold, however, and there was a dampness that went right down to the marrow of your bones, and a fog so thick that with your arm stretched out, you couldn't see your hand before your face.

"What a hell of a job," grumbled one of the policemen.

"Yes," answered the Inspector commanding the squad, "and if you had an income of 30,000 francs, I suppose you wouldn't be here."

The laughter that greeted that frequent joke was not so much flattery as a just acknowledgement that he was a man of recognized and established superiority. The Inspector was, in fact, one of the most esteemed members of the force, a man who had proved his worth. His powers of penetration were not, maybe, very great, but he thoroughly understood his job, its resources, its mazes, its dead ends and its tricks. Experience had given him an unshakeable coolness, great self-control, and a sort of coarse diplomacy that took the place of great intelligence. To his failings and to his virtues, he added proven courage. He would grab the most dangerous criminal's collar as calmly as a devoutly religious person would dip his fingers into a bowl of holy water. He was a man of 46, strongly built, with rugged features, a heavy mustache and rather small, gray eyes, hidden under bushy eyebrows. His name was Gévrol, but he was known to everybody as "the General." This nickname pleased his vanity, which was not small, as his subordinates were well aware, and he probably felt they ought to give him the same consideration as a person of that high rank.

"If you're already complaining," he added gruffly, "what'll you do in a little while?"

In fact, it was too soon to complain. The little party was then walking along the Rue de Choisy. The sidewalks were relatively clean and the lights from the wine shops illuminated the street. All the wine shops were open. There is no fog or ice that can keep away people intent on having a good time. A boisterous crowd of Carnival revelers filled each tavern and public dancehall. Through open windows came alternatively the sounds of loud voices or bursts of noisy music. Occasionally a drunk staggered along the pavement or a masked figure crept by in the shadows of the houses. Little by little, however, the policemen were approaching the ramparts of the city. Lights became infrequent and the houses were far apart. Before some of the bars, Gévrol commanded a halt. He whistled in a certain way and, almost immediately, a man came out, another member of the force. After he gave his report, the squad moved on.

"Left, men!" ordered Gévrol. "We'll take the Rue d'Ivry and then take a shortcut to the Rue du Chevaleret."

From this point, the way forward became really unpleasant, leading through an unfinished, unnamed street, full of puddles and deep potholes, and obstructed with all sorts of rubbish. There were no longer any lights or crowded wine shops, no footsteps, no voices, nothing but an almost perfect silence, solitude and gloom. You'd

think you were 1000 leagues from Paris, except for the deep and continuous murmur which always arises from a large city, a sound which resembles the hollow roar of a waterfall from the depths of a cavern.

All the men had rolled up their trousers and were advancing cautiously, picking their way carefully, like Indians on the warpath stalking the enemy, placing their feet one by one, in spots good and bad. They had just passed the Rue du Chateau des Rentiers, when, suddenly, they heard a wild shriek. At this place and at this hour, such a cry was so frightfully meaningful that all the men stopped as if by common agreement.

“Did you hear that, General?” asked one of the policemen in a low voice.

“There’s somebody being done in not far from here—but where? Be quiet! Let’s listen!”

They all stood motionless, holding their breath, anxiously listening. Soon, there was a second cry, or rather a wild howl.

“Yes!” the Inspector yelled. “It’s at the Poivrière.”

This peculiar name, “Poivrière,” or “pepper shaker,” came from the term “peppered,” which, in French slang, is applied to a man who has left his wits at the bottom of his glass. From the same source came the nickname “pepper thieves” given to the rascals who thrived on plundering helpless, inoffensive drunks. The word, however, didn’t seem to mean anything to the policemen.

“What!” added Gévrol to his men, “don’t you recognize the Widow Chupin’s cabaret there on the right? Run! And watch out for those sheets of ice on the ground.”

And, setting the example, he dashed off in the direction indicated. His men followed and, in less than a minute, they had reached a sinister looking shack, standing alone in a vacant area. The cries had come from this hovel. They were now repeated and were followed by two pistol shots. The house was completely sealed, but through the cracks in the shutters, gleamed a reddish light like that of a fire. One of the policemen darted to a window and raising himself up by clinging to the shutter, he tried to look through the cracks to see what was happening inside. Gévrol himself ran to the door.

“Open!” he commanded, striking the door a heavy blow. There was no answer but they could hear plainly enough the sound of a terrible struggle—fierce curses, hollow groans and occasionally a woman’s sobs.

“Horrible,” yelled the policeman who was peering through the shutter cracks. “It’s horrible!”

This exclamation decided Gévrol. “Open in the name of the law!” he cried a third time. And since no one responded, he knocked the door down, hitting it with his shoulder with a blow as violent as a battering ram. Then the horror-stricken words of the man who had been looking through the shutters were explained. The scene in the room caused all the policemen, even Gévrol himself, to stay, for a moment, rooted to the doorway, shuddering with unspeakable horror.

The house had been the scene of a terrible struggle, one of those savage fights which only too often splash the drinking dens of the slums with blood. The lights had been turned off at the beginning of the fight, but a blazing pine-log fire lit up even the furthest corners of the room. Tables, broken decanters, glasses and china, overturned stools, everything had been thrown in every direction, trodden upon, broken into fragments. Near the fireplace two men lay stretched out on the floor. They were lying motionless on their backs, their arms crossed. A third was lying in the middle of the room. A woman crouched on the staircase leading to the floor above. She had thrown her apron over her head and was uttering inarticulate moans. Then, facing the police, and with his back turned to an open door leading to an adjoining room, stood a man behind a heavy oak table forming a sort of barrier between him and the police. He was of an indeterminate age, of medium height and he wore a full beard. His clothes resembled those of the workmen who unload barges near the piers close to the railway station and were in tatters, soiled with dust, wine and blood. *The murderer obviously*, thought Gévrol. There was a terrible expression on his face. A mad fury blazed in his eyes and a convulsive sneer distorted his features. On his neck and cheek were two cuts which bled profusely. In his right hand, covered with a checkered handkerchief, he held a pistol, which he aimed at the newcomers.

“Surrender!” yelled the Inspector.

The man’s lips moved, but despite a visible effort he couldn’t get out a word.

“Surrender,” commanded Gévrol. “We outnumber you; you can’t escape; so lay down your weapon.”

“I’m innocent,” exclaimed the man in a hoarse, strained voice.

“Of course, but that’s not our problem.”

“I was attacked; ask that old woman. I defended myself. I killed them—but I had a right to; it was self-defense.”

The gestures which accompanied these words were so threatening that one of the policemen drew Gévrol aside, saying as he did so: “Be careful, General! That revolver has five chambers and we heard only two shots.”

But the General was not susceptible to fear; getting himself free of his subordinate’s grasp, he again stepped forward and spoke in an even calmer tone. “No foolishness, my boy; if your case is a good one, which is possible after all, don’t ruin it.”

The man’s face showed him trying to make a decision. He held Gévrol’s life at the end of his finger. Was he about to pull the trigger? No. He suddenly threw his weapon on the floor and yelled out: “Come and get me!”

And turning as he spoke, he dashed into the adjoining room, possibly hoping to escape by some exit which he knew.

Gévrol had expected this movement. He sprang after him, but the table stood in his way. "Ah!" he yelled, "the bastard is getting away!"

But the fugitive was not to be so lucky. While Gévrol was talking, one of the policemen—the one who'd looked through the shutters—had gone to the rear of the house and managed to get in through the back door.

As the murderer darted out, this man jumped him and, with surprising strength and agility, dragged him back. The murderer tried to resist, but he couldn't. He had lost his strength; he tottered and fell on the table that had for a moment protected him, muttering loud enough for everyone to hear: "Lost! The Prussians are coming!"

This simple and decisive maneuver by the subordinate had succeeded and at first the General was enthusiastic. "Good, my boy, he said, "very good! Yeah! You have a talent for this business and you'll do well if you ever have an opportunity..." But he checked himself. All his men so obviously shared his enthusiasm that he suddenly became jealous. Feeling that he was losing some of his prestige, he quickly added: "The idea had occurred to me, but I couldn't give the order without warning the bastard himself."

Nobody heard this remark because all the policemen were now taking care of the murderer. They surrounded him and, after having secured his hands and feet, they tied him tightly to a chair. He offered no resistance. His wild behavior had become that gloomy indifference which follows all unnatural efforts, either of mind or body. Evidently he had resigned himself to his fate.

When Gévrol saw that the men had finished, he commanded: "Now, let's see about the others, and give me some light. Not much is coming from the fireplace."

The Inspector began with the two men lying near the fireplace. He put his hands on their hearts, but could hear no heartbeat. He then held the face of his watch close to their mouth, but the glass remained quite clear. "Useless," he murmured after several tries, "they're dead. They'll never see daylight again. Leave them as they are until the public prosecutor comes and let's look at the other one."

The third man was still breathing. He was a young fellow, wearing the uniform of a common soldier. He was unarmed and his large gray cloak was partly open, showing his bare chest. The policemen lifted him carefully—because he groaned piteously at every movement—and placed him in an upright position, with his back leaning against the wall. He then opened his eyes and asked for something to drink. They brought him a glass of water, which he drank avidly. He then drew a long breath and seemed to regain some strength.

"Where are you hurt?" asked Gévrol.

"In the back of my head. Look. There," he answered as he tried to raise one of his arms. "Oh, how that hurts."

The policeman who had cut off the murderer's escape now approached and, with the dexterity that an old surgeon might have envied, examined the gaping wound in the back of the young man's neck. "It's not serious," he declared, but as he spoke, there was no mistaking his slight head shake. It was evident that he considered the wound very serious, probably fatal.

"It's nothing," affirmed Gévrol in his turn, "head wounds, when they don't kill immediately, are all right in a month."

The wounded man smiled sadly. "I'm done for," he murmured.

"Ridiculous!"

"Oh! You don't need to say anything. I sense it, but I'm not complaining. I got just what I deserved."

Upon hearing these words, all the policemen turned toward the murderer, thinking he would again say he was innocent. But their expectations were disappointed. He didn't say a word, although he must have heard.

"It was that thief, Lacheneur, who lured me here," continued the wounded man, in a voice that was growing weaker.

"Lacheneur?"

"Yes, Jean Lacheneur. He used to be an actor. He knew me when I was rich. I had a fortune, but I wasted it. I wanted to have a good time. Knowing that I didn't have a penny in the world, he came and promised me enough money to make a new start. And it's because I believed him that I'm going to die like a dog in this den! Oh! I want revenge!" With that hope, he clenched his fists in a last threat. "I want revenge," he said again. "I know a lot, more than he thinks I do. I'll tell everything!..."

But he had overestimated his strength. Anger had given him momentary strength, but at the cost of his life, which was ebbing away. He tried to continue speaking, but he couldn't. He tried twice to open his lips, but only a choking cry of impotent rage came out. This was his last indication of intelligence. Bloody foam gathered on his lips; his eyes rolled back in their sockets; his body stiffened and he fell face down in a terrible convulsion.

"It's over," said Gévrol.

"Not yet," answered the young policeman whose help had been so useful, "but he probably won't live ten minutes more."

The Inspector had risen from the floor as if he had just witnessed the most common incident in the world and was carefully dusting the knees of his trousers. "That'll do," he responded. "We know all we needed to know. This fellow's a soldier, and the number of his regiment will be on the buttons of his coat, so..."

His subordinate pursed his lips. "I think you are wrong, General," he said.

"What?"

"Yes, I understand that, seeing him dressed in a military coat, you assumed—but, no, this poor fellow was no soldier. Do you want proof right now? Look, does he have a military haircut? When did you ever see a soldier with his hair falling over his shoulders?"

This objection silenced the General for a moment. But then, he said briskly: "Do you think that I'm blind? I saw the same thing you did, only I said to myself: Here is a young man on leave who bought a wig as a disguise for the Carnival."

But Gévrol would allow no interruptions. "Enough talk," he declared. "Now we'll find out what happened. Mother Chupin, that old hussy, is not dead."

As he spoke, he walked toward the old woman, still crouching on the stairs. She had not moved, nor ventured so much as a look since the police entered, but her moans had not stopped. With a quick movement, Gévrol tore off the apron which she had thrown over her head, and there she stood, just as the years, vice, poverty and drink had made her: wrinkled, shriveled, toothless and haggard, her skin as yellow and as dry as an old parchment.

"OK, stand up!" ordered the Inspector. "Your moaning doesn't mean much to me. You ought to be whipped for putting vile drugs in your drinks, making drunks go crazy."

The old woman's little red eyes traveled slowly around the room and, in tearful tones, she whimpered: "What a misfortune! What will become of me? Everything is broken—I'm ruined!" She seemed concerned only about the loss of her glasses and dishes.

"Let's get on with it. How did this fight begin?" questioned the General.

"Well, I don't really know. I was upstairs patching some of my son's old clothes, when I heard an argument."

"And after that?"

"Well, as you might expect, I came down and I saw those three men who are lying there picking a fight with the young man you've arrested, the poor innocent! Because he's innocent, as surely as I'm an honest woman. If my son, Polyte, had been here, he would've separated them; but I, a poor widow, what could I do? I yelled for help as loud as I could."

After giving this testimony, she sat down again, thinking she'd said enough. But Gévrol rudely ordered her to stand up again.

"We aren't finished yet. I want more details"

"What details, Monsieur Gévrol? I saw nothing."

Anger made the Inspector lose control. "What would you say, old woman, if I arrested you?"

"That would be a big injustice."

"Nevertheless, that's what'll happen if you don't talk. I think two weeks in jail would untie your tongue."

These words produced the effect of an electric shock on the Widow Chupin. She suddenly stopped her hypocritical lamentations, stood up, placed her hands defiantly on her hips and poured out a torrent of curses on Gévrol and his men, accusing them of persecuting her family ever since they had arrested her son, a law-abiding citizen. Finally, she said that she was not afraid of prison and would be only too glad to end her days in jail where, at least, she wouldn't starve.

At first, the General tried to make the terrible shrew shut up, but he soon found that he was powerless. In addition, all his subordinates were laughing. Turning his back on her, he walked towards the murderer, saying: "You, at least, won't refuse to explain."

The man hesitated for a moment. "I've already said all I have to say," he replied at last. "I've told you that I'm innocent, and this woman and the dying man, whom I killed, both confirmed what I said. What more do you want? When the Magistrate questions me, maybe I'll say more. Until then, don't expect another word from me."

It was easy to see that the fellow's resolve would not change and that he was not to be cowed by any police inspector. Criminals frequently maintain an absolute silence from the moment they are arrested. These men are experienced and clever. Lawyers and judges spend many sleepless nights on their account. They have learned that a system of defense can't be improvised at once; that it is, on the contrary, a work of patience and meditation. And knowing what a terrible consequences an answer, insignificant in appearance, gotten out of them when they were caught in the act, might produce in a court of law, they don't talk; they stall for time. So, in order to see if the present prisoner was an old hand or not, Gévrol was still trying to insist on a full explanation, when someone announced that the supposed soldier had just died.

"Since that is the case," the Inspector said, "two of you will stay here and I'll go back to the station with everyone else. I'll go wake up the Commissioner and tell him about this. He'll take over the case and we'll do

whatever he tells us to do. My responsibility will be over, in any case. So untie our prisoner's legs and tie up Mother Chupin's hands. We will drop them both at the station when we get there."

The men quickly started to obey, with the exception of the youngest of them, the same one who had won the General's passing compliment. He approached his chief and motioning that he wanted to talk to him, drew him outside. When they were a few steps from the house, Gévrol asked him what he wanted.

"I'd like to know, General, what you think of this business."

"I think, my boy, that four scoundrels met each other in this den of cut-throats. They started to argue, and from words, they came to blows. One of them had a revolver and he shot the others. It's as clear as daylight. According to his past history, and the past history of the victims, the assassin will be judged. Maybe society owes him a debt of gratitude."

"And you think any investigation—any further search is unnecessary?"

"Entirely unnecessary."

The younger man seemed to deliberate for a moment. "It seems to me, General," he began again, "that this affair is not perfectly clear. Have you checked out the murderer, studied his bearing, noticed his appearance? Have you been as surprised as I have been...?"

"By what?"

"Uh, well, it seems to me—I may, of course, be wrong—but I think appearances may be deceptive and—yes, I suspect something..."

"Oh? And what is that?"

"How can you explain a dog's sense of smell?"

Gévrol, the champion of the police who never made a mistake, gave a big shrug. "In short," he replied, "you smell some kind of melodrama here—a rendezvous of gentlemen in disguise, a mystery, here at the Poivrière, at Mother Chupin's place... Well, hunt for the mystery, my boy. Search all you like; you have my permission."

"You'll let me?"

"I'll not only let you—I order you to! You'll stay here with anyone you choose. And if you find anything that I missed, I'll let you buy me a new pair of glasses."

II

The young policeman to whom Gévrol had turned over what he thought was an unnecessary investigation was a newcomer to his profession. His name was Lecoq. He was about 25 or 26 years old, almost beardless, pale, with very red lips and an abundance of wavy black hair. He was rather short, but well-proportioned, and each of his movements showed unusual strength. There was nothing remarkable about his appearance, except for his eyes, which either sparkled brilliantly or grew extremely dull, according to his mood, and his nose. His large, full nostrils were surprisingly mobile.

The son of a well-to-do Norman family, Lecoq had been given a good and solid education. He was beginning his law studies in Paris when, in the same week, blow followed blow. He learned that his father had died, financially ruined, and that his mother had survived him only a few hours. He was left alone in the world, without resources, obliged to earn a living. But how? He took stock of his situation and found that he could do nothing practical, and a university, giving a Bachelor's degree doesn't give an annuity with it. So what was the use of a college education to a poor orphan boy? He envied the lot of those who, with a trade in hand, could go boldly into the office of any employer and say: "I want a job." Men like that were working and eating. Lecoq tried to earn a living by all the ways tried by those who have fallen out of the upper class into the working class. No success! There were 100,000 people in Paris who had seen better days. No matter! He had undaunted energy. From day to day, he tried out new jobs and he left no means untried to earn an honest living. He sold used books door to door. He delivered advertising handbills. He gave lessons and copied documents for a lawyer. He sold insurance. He worked as a sales representative. At last, he got a job helping Baron Moser, a well-known astronomer, and he spent his days solving bewildering and intricate mathematical problems, at the rate of 100 francs a day. But finally, he became discouraged. After five years of constant toil, he found himself at the same place he had started. He was nearly crazy with rage and disappointment as he went back over his blighted hopes, his fruitless efforts, and the insults he had received. The past had been sad, the present was intolerable and the future threatened to be worse. Condemned to constant privations, he tried to escape from the horrors of his real life by taking refuge in daydreams.

Alone in his garret, after a day of constant work, with the thousand longings of youth, Lecoq tried to devise some method of getting immediately rich. The more he daydreamed, the more he discovered that he had unusual faculties of invention, some resembling an instinct for evil. The most despicable crimes and the cleverest unsuccessful thefts were only, in his judgment, insignificant blunders. He then looked for and found strange

hypothetical situations which guaranteed success and mathematically guaranteed not getting caught. Soon it was for him a mania, an obsession. This admirably honest boy spent his time mentally carrying out the most abominable crimes. He carried it to the point that the game began to scare him. It would take only one thoughtless hour to go from the idea to the reality, from theory to practice. This is the case with all monomaniacs; a time comes when the strange conceptions that have filled their brains can no longer be held in check.

One day, he couldn't resist showing his employer a little plan he had conceived which would let him make a clean sweep of 500 or 600 francs from London and Paris. Two letters and a telegram were all that were needed and the theft would be successful. Failure was impossible and there was no danger of arousing suspicion. The astronomer, amazed at the plan's simplicity, could only admire it. On reflection, however, he decided that it wasn't prudent for him to retain so ingenious a secretary in his employ. This was why, the following day, he gave Lecoq a month's pay in advance and dismissed him, saying: "When someone has your disposition and is poor, he may become either a famous thief or a great detective. Choose."

Lecoq didn't know what to think, but the astronomer's words bore fruit. "*Why shouldn't I follow this good advice?*" he asked himself. Police work did not fill him with distaste—far from it. He had often admired that mysterious power, whose commands came down from their office on the Rue de Jérusalem, whose hand is everywhere, and which, unseen and unheard, can still hear and see everything. He was delighted with the prospect of being the instrument of such power, Providence on tip-toe. He could see a useful and honorable employment of the particular genius that he had been given, an existence of excitement, of passionate fights, of undreamed of adventures, and at the end—Fame. In short the prospect carried him away. Thanks to a recommendation from Baron Moser, he joined the Sûreté the next week as a young recruit.

A cruel disappointment was in store for him at the beginning. He had seen the results, but not the means. His disappointment resembled that of naïve theater-goers who, admitted for the first time behind the stage, sees close-up the scenery and the tricks which are so dazzling from a distance. But he had the enthusiasm and the zeal of a man who senses himself on the right path. He would persevere, hiding under a false modesty his desire to rise, taking advantage of circumstances in order to show, sooner or later, his superiority.

The opportunity which he had so longed for, and which he'd been waiting for during so many months, had finally come, he thought, when he found himself at the Poivrière bar. While clinging to the window shutters, he saw, by the light of his ambition, a path to success. At first, it was only a feeling, then it became a supposition, and then a conviction based on the actual facts which had escaped his companions, but which he had observed and carefully noted. He recognized that fortune was turning in his favor when he saw Gévol neglect all but a routine investigation, when he heard him declare, without allowing further discussion or examination, that the triple murder was just the outcome of one of those brutal arguments so frequent among the vagrants of the city's outskirts.

"*All right!*" Lecoq said to himself. "*Lock yourself into that position. Put your trust in appearances, since you can't go any further. But I'll prove to you that my youthful theory is a little better than all your experience.*"

The Inspector's lack of forethought gave Lecoq a perfect right to look for information secretly on his own. But he didn't want to do this. By telling his superior officer before trying anything, he would protect himself against being accused of ambition or of unduly taking advantage of his fellow officers. Such charges are most serious in a profession with so much rivalry and where wounded vanity can get revenge by all kinds of bad turns and petty treason. Realizing this, he spoke to his fellow officer, saying just enough so that, in case of success, he could say: "Ah! I warned you," just enough not to let Gévol change his mind.

The permission which Lecoq had gotten was his triumph and one of the best signs of possible success. But he knew how to dissimulate, and in a tone of the utmost indifference, he asked for a comrade to stay with him. Then, while the others were getting ready to leave, he seated himself on the corner of the table, seeming not to notice what was going on around him. He didn't dare look up, afraid to betray his joy. He was afraid that the others might read in his face his hopes and plans. In reality, he was wild with impatience.

While the murderer put up no resistance to the precautions taken to prevent his escape, it took four men to tie the hands of the Widow Chupin, who fought and howled as if they were burning her alive.

"*Will they never leave!*" Lecoq murmured to himself. But they did go at last. Gévol gave the order and was the last to leave, jokingly saying goodbye to his subordinate, who didn't answer. He followed his comrades as far as the threshold of the door, to make sure they were really leaving. He was afraid that Gévol might reflect, change his mind and come back to take the case, as was his right. He didn't need to worry. Little by little, the sound of the men's footsteps faded away and the cries of the Widow Chupin died away in the silence of the night. Nothing could be heard.

Only then did Lecoq go back into the room. He could no longer conceal his delight. His eyes sparkled like those of a conqueror taking possession of some vast empire. He stamped his foot on the floor and yelled out, exulting:

"Now it's just the two of us!"