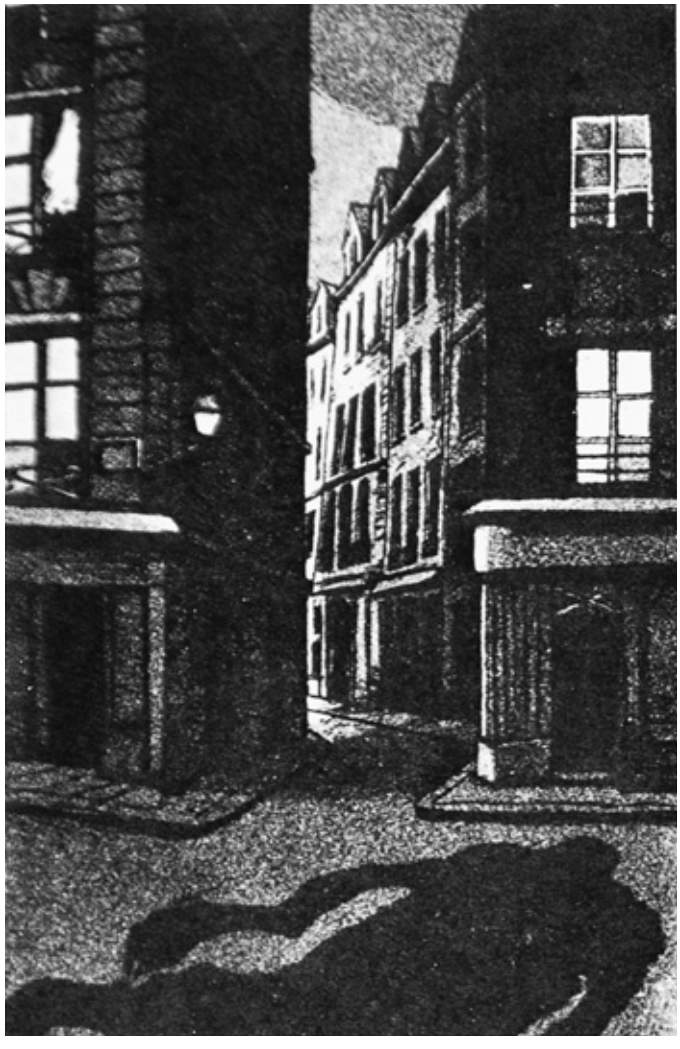
The Murders in the Rue Morgue

Part One



PARIS! IN PARIS IT WAS, in the summer of 1840. There I first met that strange and interesting young fellow, August Dupin.

Dupin was the last member of a well-known family, a family which had once been rich and famous; he himself, however, was far from rich. He cared little about money. He had enough to buy the most necessary things of life — and a few books; he did not trouble himself about the rest. Just books. With books he was happy.

We first met when we were both trying to find the same book. As it was a book which few had ever heard of, this chance brought us together in an old bookstore. Later we met again in the same store. Then again in another bookstore. Soon we began to talk.

I was deeply interested in the family history he told me. I was surprised, too, at how much and how widely he had read; more important, the force of his busy* mind was like a bright light in my soul. I felt that the friendship of such a man would be for me riches without price. I therefore told him of my feelings toward him, and he agreed to come and live with me. He would have, I thought, the joy of using my many fine books. And I would have the pleasure of having someone with me, for I was not happy alone.

We passed the days reading, writing and talking. But Dupin was a lover of the night, and at night, often with only the light of the stars to show us the way, we walked the streets of Paris, sometimes talking, sometimes quiet, always thinking.

I soon noticed a special reasoning power he had, an unusual reasoning power. Using it gave him great pleasure. He told me once, with a soft and quiet laugh, that most men have windows over their hearts; through these he could see into their souls. Then, he surprised me by telling what he knew about my own soul; and I found that he knew things about me that I had thought only I could possibly know. His manner at these moments was cold and distant. His eyes looked empty* and far away, and his voice became high and nervous. At such times it seemed to me that I saw not just Dupin, but two Dupins — one who coldly put things together, and another who just as coldly took them apart*.

One night we were walking down one of Paris's long and dirty* streets. Both of us were busy with our thoughts. Neither had spoken for perhaps fifteen minutes. It seemed as if we had each forgotten that the other was there, at his side. I soon learned that Dupin had not forgotten me, however. Suddenly he said:

"You're right. He is a very little fellow, that's true, and he would be more successful if he acted in lighter, less serious plays."

"Yes, there can be no doubt of that!" I said.

At first I saw nothing strange in this. Dupin had agreed with me, with my own thoughts. This, of course, seemed to me quite natural. For a few seconds I continued walking, and thinking; but suddenly I realized that Dupin had agreed with something which was only a thought. I had not spoken a single

word. I stopped walking and turned to my friend. "Dupin," I said, "Dupin, this is beyond my understanding. How could you know that I was thinking of…." Here I stopped, in order to test* him, to learn if[1] he really did know[2] my unspoken thoughts.

"How did I know you were thinking of Chantilly? Why do you stop? You were thinking that Chantilly is too small for the plays in which he acts."

"That is indeed what I was thinking. But, tell me, in Heaven's name, the method — if method there is — by which you have been able to see into my soul in this matter."

"It was the fruit*-seller."

"Fruit-seller!? I know no fruit-seller."

"I mean the man who ran into[3] you as we entered this street — it may have been ten or fifteen minutes ago, perhaps less."

"Yes; yes, that's true, I remember now. A fruit-seller, carrying a large basket* of apples* on his head, almost threw. me down. But I don't understand why the fruit-seller should make me think of Chantilly — or, if he did[4], how you can know that."

"I will explain. Listen closely now:

"Let us follow your thoughts from the fruit-seller to the play-actor, Chantilly. Those thoughts must have gone like this: from the fruit-seller to the cobblestones*, from the cobblestones to stereotomy, and from stereotomy to Epicurus, to Orion, and then to Chantilly.

"As we turned into this street the fruit-seller, walking very quickly past us, ran against[3] you and made you step on some cobblestones which had not been put down evenly, and I could see that the stones had hurt your foot. You spoke a few angry words to yourself, and continued walking. But you kept looking down[5], down at the cobblestones in the street, so I knew you were still thinking of stones.

"Then we came to a small street where they are putting down street stones which they have cut in a new and very special way. Here your face became brighter and I saw your lips move. I could not doubt that you were saying the word stereotomy, the name for this new way of cutting stones. It is a strange word, isn't it? But you will remember that we read about it in the newspaper only yesterday. I thought that the word stereotomy must make you think of that old Greek writer named Epicurus, who wrote of something he called atoms[6]; he believed that the world and everything in the heavens above are made of these atoms.

"Not long ago you and I were talking about Epicurus and his ideas, his atoms, ideas which Epicurus wrote about more than 2000 years ago. We were talking about how much those old ideas are like today's ideas about the earth and the stars and the sky. I felt sure that you would look up to the sky. You did look up[7]. Now I was certain that I had been following your thoughts as they had in fact come into your mind. I too looked up, and saw that the group of stars we call Orion is very bright and clear tonight. I knew you would notice this, and think about the name Orion.

"Now follow my thoughts carefully. Only yesterday, in the newspaper, there was an article* about the actor Chantilly, an article which was not friendly to Chantilly, not friendly at all. We noticed that the writer of the article had used some words taken from a book we both had read. These words were about Orion. So I knew you would put together the two ideas of Orion and Chantilly. I saw you smile, remembering that article and the hard words in it.

"Then I saw you stand straighter, as tall as you could make yourself. I was sure you were thinking of Chantilly's size, and especially his height. He is small; he is short. And so I spoke, saying that he is indeed a very little fellow, this Chantilly, and he would be more successful if he acted in lighter, less serious plays."

I will not say that I was surprised. I was more than surprised; I was astonished.* Dupin was right, as right as he could be. Those were in fact my thoughts, my unspoken thoughts, as my mind moved from one thought to the next. But if I was astonished by this, I would soon be more than astonished.

One morning this strangely interesting man showed me once again his unusual reasoning power. We heard that an old woman had been killed by unknown persons. The killer, or the killers, had cut her head off — and escaped into the night. Who was this killer, this murderer*? The police had no answer. They had looked everywhere* and found nothing that helped them. They did not know what to do next. And so — they did nothing.

But not Dupin. He knew what to do.