

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

Part Two

IT WAS IN PARIS in the summer of 1840 that I met August Dupin. He was an unusually interesting young man with a busy*, forceful mind. This mind could, it seemed, look right through a man's body into his soul, and uncover his deepest thoughts. Sometimes he seemed to be not one, but two people — one who coldly put things together, and another who just as coldly took them apart*.

One morning, in the heat of the summer, Dupin showed me once again his special reasoning power. We read in the newspaper about a terrible* killing. An old woman and her daughter, living alone in an old house in¹ the Rue Morgue², had been killed in the middle of the night:



Paris, July 7, 1840. In the early morning today the people in the western part of the city were awakened* from their sleep by cries of terror*, which came, it seemed, from a house in the street called the Rue Morgue. The only persons living in the house were an old woman, Mrs. L'Esplanade, and her daughter. Several neighbors and a policeman ran toward the house, but by the time they reached it the cries had stopped. When no one answered their calls, they forced the door open. As they rushed in they heard voices, two voices; they seemed, to come from above. The group hurried from room to room, but they found nothing until they reached the fourth floor. There they found a door that was firmly closed, locked*, with the key* inside. Quickly they forced the door open, and they saw spread before them a bloody sickening scene — a scene of horror!*

The room was in the wildest possible order — broken chairs and tables were lying all around the room. There was only one bed, and from it everything had been taken and thrown into the middle of the floor. There was blood everywhere, on the floor, on the bed, on the walls. A sharp* knife* covered with blood was lying on the floor. In front of the fireplace* there was some long gray hair, also bloody*; it seemed to have been pulled from a human head. On the floor were four pieces of gold, an earring*, several objects made of silver, and two bags containing a large amount of money in gold. Clothes had been thrown around the room. A box was found under the bed covers. It was open, and held only a few old letters and papers.

There was no one there — or so it seemed. Above the fireplace they found the dead body of the daughter; it had been put up into the opening where the smoke escapes to the sky. The body was still warm. There was blood on the face, and on the neck there were dark, deep marks which seemed to have been made by strong fingers. These marks surely show how the daughter was killed.

After hunting in every part of the house without finding anything more, the group went outside. Behind the building they found the body of the old woman. Her neck was almost cut through, and when they tried to lift her up, her head fell off.

The next day the newspaper offered to its readers these new facts:

The Murders* in the Rue Morgue. —Paris, July 8, 1840. The police have talked with many people about the terrible killings in the old house on¹ the Rue Morgue but nothing has been learned to answer the question of who the killers were.

Pauline Dubourg, a washwoman, says she has known both of the dead women for more than three years, and has washed their clothes during that period. The old lady and her daughter seemed to love each other dearly*. They always paid her well. She did not know where their money came from, she said. She never met anyone in the house. Only the two women lived on the fourth floor.

Pierre Moreau, a shopkeeper*, says Mrs. L'Españaye had bought food at his shop for nearly four years. She owned the house and had lived in it for more than six years. People said they had money. He never saw anyone enter the door except the old lady and her daughter, and a doctor eight or ten times, perhaps.

Many other persons, neighbors³, said the same thing. Almost no one ever went into the house and Mrs. L'Españaye and her daughter were not often seen.

Jules Mignaud, a banker, says that Mrs. L'Españaye had put money in his bank, beginning eight years before. Three days before her death she took out of the bank a large amount of money, in gold. A man from the bank carried it for her to her house.

Isidore Muset, a policeman, says that he was with the group that first entered the house. While he was going up the stairs* he heard two voices, one low and soft, and one hard, high, and very strange — the voice of someone who was certainly not French, the voice of a foreigner*. Spanish perhaps. It was not a woman's voice. He could not understand what it said. But the low voice, the softer voice, said, in French, "My God!"

Alfonso Garcia, who is Spanish and lives on the Rue Morgue, says he entered the house but did not go up the stairs; he is nervous and he was afraid he might be ill. He heard the voices. He believes the high voice was not that of a Frenchman. Perhaps it was English; but he doesn't understand English, so he is not sure.

William Bird, another foreigner, an Englishman, says he was one of the persons who entered the house. He has lived in Paris for two years. He heard the voices. The low voice was that of a Frenchman, he was sure,

because he heard it say, in French, "My God!" The high voice was very loud. He is sure it was not the voice of an Englishman, nor the voice of a Frenchman. It seemed to be that of an Italian. It might have been a woman's voice. He does not understand Italian.

Mr. Alberto Montani, an Italian, was passing the house at the time of the cries. He says that they lasted for about two minutes. They were screams*, long and loud, terrible, fearful sounds. Montani, who speaks Spanish but not French, says that he also heard two voices. He thought both voices were French. But he could not understand any of the words spoken.

The persons who first entered the house all agree that the door of the room where the daughter's body was found was locked on the inside. When they reached the door everything was quiet. When they forced the door open they saw no one. The windows were closed and firmly locked on the inside. There are no steps that someone could have gone down while they were going up. They say that the openings over the fireplace are too small for anyone to have escaped through them. It took four or five people to pull the daughter's body out of the opening over the fireplace. A careful search* was made through the whole house. It was four or five minutes from the time they heard the voices to the moment they forced open the door of the room.

Paul Dumas, a doctor, says that he was called to see the bodies soon after they were found. They were in a horrible condition, badly marked and broken. Such results could not have come from a woman's hands, only from those of a very powerful man. The daughter had been killed by strong hands around her neck.

The police have learned nothing more than this. A killing as strange as this has never before happened in Paris. The police do not know where to begin to look for the answer.

When we had finished reading the newspaper's account of the murders neither Dupin nor myself said anything for a while. But I could see in his eyes that cold, empty* look which told me that his mind was working busily. When he asked me what I thought of all this, I could only agree with all Paris. I told him I considered it a very difficult problem — a mystery*, to which it was not possible to find an answer. No, no, said Dupin.

"No, I think you are wrong. A mystery it is, yes. But there must be an answer. Let us go to the house and see what we can see. There must be an answer. There must!"