

IT WAS IN PARIS 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 deepest soul.

One hot summer morning we read in the newspapers about a terrible* killing. The dead persons were an old woman and her unmarried daughter, who lived alone on the fourth floor of an old house on the street called the Rue Morgue. Someone had taken the daughter's neck in his powerful fingers and pressed with fearful* strength until her life was gone. Her mother's body was found outside, behind the house, with the head nearly cut off. The knife* with which she was killed was found, however, in the room, on the floor.

Several neighbors ran to the house when they heard the women's cries of fear. As they ran up to the fourth floor they heard two other voices. But when they reached the room and broke down the door they found no living person in the room. Like the door, the two windows were firmly closed, locked* on the inside. There was no other way that the killer could roll have got¹ in or out of the room.

The Paris police did not know where to begin to look for the answer. I told Dupin that it seemed to me that it was not possible to learn the answer to the mystery* of these killings. No, no, said Dupin.

"No; I think you are wrong. A mystery it is, yes. But there must be an answer. We must not judge what is possible just by what we have read in the newspapers. The Paris police work hard and often get¹ good results; but there is no real method in what they do. When something more than simple hard work is needed, when a little real method is needed, the police fail. Sometimes they stand too near the problem. Often, if a person looks at something very closely he can see a few things more clearly, but the shape of the whole thing escapes him.

"There must be an answer! There must! Let us go to the house and see what we can see. I know the head of the police, and he will allow us to do so. And this will be interesting and give us some pleasure."

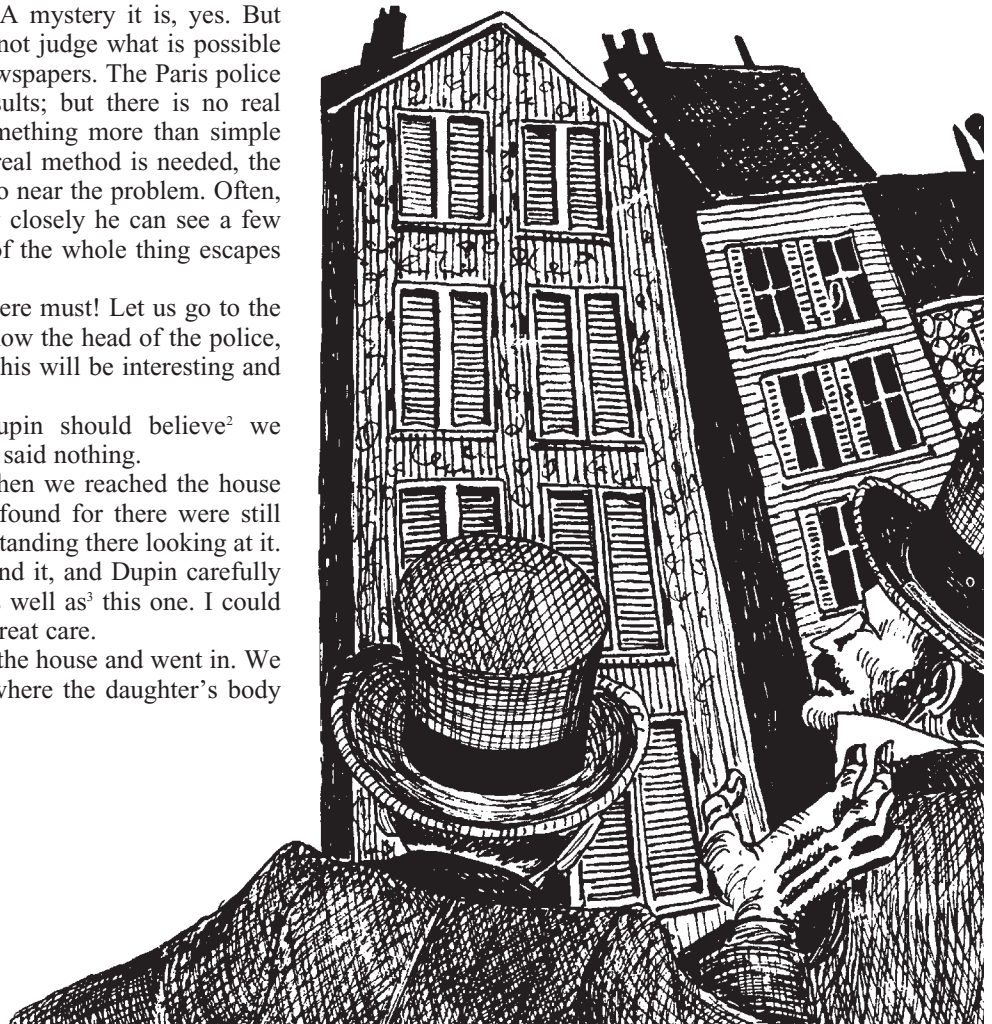
I thought it strange that Dupin should believe² we would get pleasure out of this. But I said nothing.

It was late in the afternoon when we reached the house on the Rue Morgue. It was easily found for there were still many persons — in fact, a crowd*, standing there looking at it. Before going in we walked all around it, and Dupin carefully looked at the neighboring houses as well as³ this one. I could not understand the reason for such great care.

We came again to the front of the house and went in. We went up the stairs* into the room where the daughter's body

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

Part Three



had been found. Both bodies were there. The police had left the room as they had found it. I saw nothing beyond what the newspaper had told us. Dupin looked with great care at everything, at the bodies, the walls, the fireplace, the windows. Then we went home.

Dupin said nothing. I could see the cold look in his eyes which told me that his mind was working, working busily, quickly. I asked no questions.

Dupin said nothing until the next morning, when he came into my room and asked me suddenly if I had not noticed⁵ something especially strange about what we saw at the house on the Rue Morgue. I replied: "Nothing more than we both read in the newspaper."

"Tell me, my friend. How shall we explain the horrible* force, the unusual strength used in these murders*? And whose were the voices that were heard? No one was found except the dead women; yet there was no way for anyone to escape. And the wild condition of the room; the body which was found head down above the fireplace; the terrible broken appearance of the body of the old lady, with its head cut off; these are all so far from what might be expected that the police are standing still; they don't know where to begin.

"These things are unusual, indeed; but they are not deep mysteries*. We should not ask, 'What has happened?' but 'What has happened that has never happened before?' In fact, the very things that the police think cannot possibly be explained are the things which will lead me to the answer. Indeed, I believe they have already led me to the answer."

I was so surprised I could not say a word. Dupin looked quickly at the door. "I am now waiting for a person who will know something about these murders, these wild killings. I do not think he did them himself. But I think he will know the killer. I hope I am right about this. If I am, then I expect to find the whole answer, today. I expect the man here — in this room — at any moment. It is true that he may not come; but he probably will."

"But who is this person? How did you find him?"

"I'll tell you. While we wait for this man we do not know — for I have never met him — while we wait, I will tell you how my thoughts went." Dupin began to talk. But it did not seem that he was trying to explain to me what he had thought. It seemed that he was talking to himself. He looked not at me, but at the wall.

"It has been fully proved that the voices heard by the neighbors were not the voices of the women who were killed. Someone else was in the room. It is therefore certain that the old woman did not first kill her daughter and then kill herself. She would not have been strong enough to put her daughter's body where it was found; and the manner of the old lady's death shows that she could not have caused it herself. A person can kill himself with a knife, yes. But he surely cannot cut his own head almost off, then drop the knife on the floor and jump out the window. It was murder, then, done by some third person — or persons. And the voices heard were the voices of these persons. Let us now think carefully about the things people said about those voices. Did you notice anything especially strange in what was told about them?"

"Well, yes. Everybody agreed that the low voice was the voice of a Frenchman; but they could not agree about the high voice."

"Ah! That was what they said, yes; but that was not what was so strange about what they said. You say you have noticed nothing that makes their stories very different from what might have been expected. Yet there was something. All these persons, as you say, agreed about the low voice; but not about the high hard voice. The strange thing here is that when an Italian, an Englishman, a Spaniard, and a Frenchman tried to tell what the voice was like, each one said it sounded like the voice of a foreigner.* How strangely unusual that voice really must have been! Here are four men from four big countries, and not one of them could understand what the voice said; each one gave it a different name.

"Now, I know that there are other countries in the world. You will say that perhaps it was the voice of someone from one of those other lands — Russia, perhaps. But remember, not one of these people heard anything that sounded like a separate word."

Here Dupin turned and looked into my eyes.

"This is what we have learned from the newspaper. I don't know what I have led you to think. But I believe that in this much of the story there are enough facts to lead us in the one and only direction to the right answer. What this answer is, I will not say...not yet. But I want you to keep in mind⁶ that this much was enough to tell me what I must look for when we were in that house on the Rue Morgue. And I found it!"