

Murders in the Rue Morgue

BEGIN

The Paris newspapers had a big story that day in 1845. I could hear the newsboys shouting on the street.

"Murder! Murder! Read all about the murders in the Rue Morgue!"

I bought a paper and quickly read the story. It said that the murders in the Rue Morgue were the most awful the police had ever seen. They were also the strangest. The police had to admit they did not have a single clue. "A madman probably did it," one detective said. "My guess is that someone escaped from a hospital for the insane."

But no one really knew who did it, or why. Even worse, no one could figure out *how* it was done. The only "facts" the police had were these:

The Rue Morgue was a quiet street in a run-down part of Paris. Late one night, the people were awakened by wild screams. The screams came from a house where two women lived alone. They had the top-floor apartment. All the others were empty.

Two policemen and some neighbors entered the house and rushed upstairs. By this time, the screams had stopped. But two rough and angry voices were heard on the top floor. One voice was deep. The other was high. Then the voices stopped.

The policeman had to break open the door of the apartment. It was locked from the inside. The apartment was a wreck. The furniture was smashed and thrown around. Drawers were open, and everything inside them was a mess.

A long razor blade smeared with blood was found on a chair. A thick bunch of gray hair was on the floor. It had been pulled out by the roots and was wet with blood. Two bags of gold coins were also on the floor. The door of an iron safe was open.

At first, the police could not find the old woman and her daughter who lived there. Then they saw a lot of black dust in the fireplace. They looked up the chimney and saw the dead body of the daughter. It had been pushed up there, feet first, with great force. It took five men to pull the body out. There were deep scratches on her face, and marks on her throat. Her eyes were popping out of her head. The police said she was probably choked to death.

The body of the mother was not in the apartment. The police found it in the back. Her head was almost cut off. Most of her bones were broken and crushed.

edgar allan poe  
chilling story

WHOSE VOICES?

The next day, the newspapers had more stories about the murders. This is what they read:

The chief of police had taken charge of the case. He had talked to people who had known the dead women. They were not much help. What about the witnesses who had heard two voices on the top floor?

All of them were sure that the low voice

had spoken French. It was a man saying, "My God! My God!" But they did not agree about the high voice.

One man said he thought it spoke German. Another man believed it was Russian. A third man said it was probably Spanish. Another was sure it was English. But no one had understood a word of it.

Well, the chief of police asked, was it the voice of a man or a woman? Some said it was a man's voice. Others thought it was a woman's voice. The chief of police became disgusted. How could he solve a case with such stupid witnesses?

# The Murders in the Rue Morgue

The case was really a puzzle to him. Were the women murdered? They lived quiet and had no enemies. It surely was not a case of robbery. The two bags of gold on the floor proved that.

But the biggest puzzle was how the murderer got out of the apartment. The front door was locked from the inside. The door on the roof was nailed down tight. The chimney was too narrow at the top to let a large cat through.

What about the windows? The crowd in the street saw no one go out the front windows. The two back windows faced an empty yard. The police had tried to open these windows, but could not. Each one was locked by a large nail. The nails went through the window-frames and into the wall.

The chief of police had no clues, but he made an arrest anyway. The man he arrested was a bank clerk. This clerk had brought the bags of gold to the women the day before the murders.

## A DIFFERENT APPROACH

I have a friend named Auguste Dupin. He does not work as a detective. But he likes to solve crimes for the fun of it. I went to see him after I read about the murders in the Rue Morgue. He seemed very interested in the case. He asked me what I thought about it. I said I thought the murders were impossible to solve. Everyone in Paris seemed to think the same thing.

"We'll see about that," Dupin said. "The police do their job pretty well. But sometimes they look only at the mountain tops. They do not look into the valleys below. That is what we must do."

Dupin knew the chief of police well. He got him to let us enter the apartment of the murdered women. But, first, Dupin looked all around the house very carefully. The yard in the back interested him most of all.

Then we went into the apartment on the top floor. Nothing was changed there since the night of the murders. I saw nothing new, and soon got tired of looking around. But Dupin went over every inch of the apartment. He also looked at the wounds on the dead women.

On the way back home, Dupin stepped into a newspaper office. He put a small ad in the paper for the next day. He did not tell me what it said, and would not talk about the murders. "Come see me tomorrow at noon," he said. "Then I will tell you my ideas about the murders."

### AN UNUSUAL SUSPECT

The next day, Dupin told me he was almost sure he had solved the murders. "I am expecting someone soon," he said. "I believe this person is innocent of the murders. But I think he can tell us all about the crime. Just to be safe, take this pistol. I already have one."

Then Dupin began to explain what he meant. "I do not believe that the murderer is a madman, as the police say. I do not believe that *any* human being killed those poor women. It is my guess that they were killed by a very large ape!"

I was amazed. "An ape?" I asked. "What in the world makes you think that?"

"Let us go back over the evidence," Dupin said. "Do you remember the two voices that were heard upstairs? Everyone agreed that one voice spoke French, and that it was a man's voice.

"But what about the second voice? Everyone had a different idea about the language it spoke. And no one understood a word of it. Was it the voice of a man or a woman? Again the witnesses did not agree. I began to wonder if that the high voice was not human.

"Now look at the evidence in the apartment. The daughter was found stuffed up the chimney, feet first. This was not the work of any ordinary murderer. Who would get rid of a body in such a way? Remember, also, that it took five men to pull the body down. Think of the great strength it took to force the body up there! This was superhuman strength.

"The room was found in an awful mess. But two bags of gold were left on the floor. Then what reason was there for the murders? It was without any sense. What human being would act in this way?

"Now let us look at the hardest puzzle of

all. How did the murderer get out of the apartment? The door was locked from the inside. The crowd saw no one go out the front windows. Then the murderer *had* to use the back windows. But how?

"The police say they were both locked by large nails. But, as usual, the police did not look very hard. Under each window, I found a hidden spring. Press the spring, and the window unlocks."

### THE ESCAPE

"But what about the nails?" I quickly asked Dupin.

"Ah, yes, the nails," he said. "After I pressed the hidden springs, I tried to open the windows. The first window would not open because of the nail. But the second window opened easily. Why? The nail had rusted and broken on the inside! The police *thought* this window was locked by the nail. But it was really locked by the spring, which they did not find. The murderer used this window to escape. When he shut the window, the spring locked it."

"But how did the murderer get down from the top floor?" I asked.

"A good question," Dupin said. "In the yard, there is a pole as high as the house. This pole is about six feet away from the window. No man could reach this pole from the window. But an ape could do it with a little help!

"Outside the window there is a wooden shutter that swings on hinges. An ape could grab the shutter and swing out toward the pole. Then he could jump the rest of the way. I believe this is how the murderer left the apartment. Probably he entered it the same way."

It was hard for me to believe all this about an ape. But Dupin had not finished.

"Take a look at this," he said. "It's some hair that I found in the old woman's fist. What do you think of it?"



It was very unusual, I thought. Then I said, "Dupin! This is not *human* hair!"

"Exactly," Dupin said. "It is not human hair. It is the hair of an ape."

Suddenly, we heard footsteps coming up the stairs.

"I believe that's our man now," Dupin said. "Be ready with your pistol."

"What man are you talking about?" I asked.

#### THE NEWSPAPER AD

"Don't you remember that there were *two* voices heard upstairs? One was the voice of a Frenchman. This should be him coming up the stairs. You see, I put this little ad in today's newspaper."

Dupin showed me the ad. It said: "A large ape was caught early this morning in the park. The owner can have it back if he can prove it is his. Come at 3:00 p.m. to 414 Rue Simone."

"I'm sure the man wants his ape back," Dupin said. "It's worth a lot of money. And he cannot imagine that anyone suspects it killed those women."

A moment later, there was a knock on the door. "Come in," said Dupin in a cheerful tone.

A big husky sailor entered the room. Dupin invited him to sit down.

"I suppose you have come about your ape," Dupin said. "He is a very fine animal. I am keeping him at a stable nearby. Do you have proof that he is yours?"

"Oh, yes," the sailor said. "And I am willing to give you a reward for finding the animal."

"That's very fair," Dupin said. "I will tell you what I want. Tell me all you know about the murders in the Rue Morgue!"

Then Dupin calmly took out his pistol and placed it on the table. The sailor started to shake all over. He looked as pale as a ghost.

"Do not worry, my friend," Dupin said to him kindly. "We are not going to harm you. We know that you are innocent of any crime. But the chief of police has arrested a poor bank clerk for the murders. You must help this man."

"I will tell you everything," the sailor said. "But I do not expect you to believe half of it."





### THE SAILOR'S STORY

This is the story he told us:

He had caught the ape in Borneo and brought it home to Paris. He wanted to sell it to a zoo. Meanwhile, he kept it locked up in a big closet. One night he came home from a party. He found that the ape had broken out of the closet and was having some fun. It had smeared its face with shaving cream. And it was trying to shave itself with the razor!

The sailor did not think it was funny at all. A razor could be very dangerous in the hands of a big ape. The sailor became scared. He got out his whip. But the ape ran out the door and into the street. The sailor chased the ape, which still had the razor in its hand.

It was late at night, and the streets were empty. Finally, the ape came to the yard in back of the Rue Morgue. A light was shining from an open window on the top floor. The ape climbed the pole in the yard, grabbed the window shutter, and swung inside. Then the sailor climbed the pole and looked into the open window.

The two women were sitting on the floor, counting their gold. They had not seen the ape come in. Just then, the ape grabbed the old woman by the hair. It waved the razor around like a barber. It was only playing, and meant no harm. But the two women were scared out of their wits. They started to scream. This made the ape angry, and it went wild.

The sailor kept crying, "My God! My God!" Then he panicked, slid down the pole, and ran home. The ape left when it heard the police breaking in the door. It slammed the window shut before jumping to the pole. Then the window was locked by the hidden spring.

### AFTERWARD

Dupin and I went with the sailor to see the chief of police. The sailor told him the story of the murders in the Rue Morgue. Then the chief of police let the bank clerk out of jail.

Did Dupin get a reward for solving the case? Not one cent. But he got some advice from the chief of police. The chief told him to mind his own business in the future.

What about the ape? He was soon caught and put in a zoo. Children think he is very funny. When they look at him, they laugh.