

A MYSTERY.

Or the Murders in the Rue Morgue.

BY EDGAR A. POE.

What song the siren sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions are not altogether beyond conjecture.

Sir Thomas Browne.

"There are two windows in the chamber. One of them is unobstructed by furniture, and is wholly visible. The lower portion of the other is hidden from view by the head of an unwieldy bedstead which is thrust close up against it. The former was closed securely fastened from within. It resisted the utmost force of those who endeavored to raise it. A large gimlet hole had been pierced in the frame to the left and a stout nail was found fitted therein, nearly to the head. Upon examining the other window, a similar nail was seen tightly fitted in it; and a vigorous attempt to raise this sash, failed also. The police were now entirely satisfied that egress had not been in these directions. And, therefore, it was a matter of supererogation to withdraw the nails and open the windows.

"My own examination was somewhat more particular, and was for the reason I have just given—because here it was, I knew, that all apparent impossibilities must be proved to be not such in reality.

"I proceed to think thus—a posteriori. The murderers had escaped from one of these windows. This being so, they could not have re-fastened the sashes from the inside, as they were found fastened;—the consideration which put a stop, through its obviousness, to the scrutiny of the police in this quarter. Yet the sashes were fastened. They must, then, have the power of fastening themselves. There was no escape from this conclusion. I stepped to the unobstructed casement, withdrew the nail which some difficulty, and attempted to raise the sash. It resisted all my efforts, as I had anticipated. A concealed spring must, I knew, exist; and this corroboration of my idea convinced me that my premises, at least were correct, however mysterious still appeared the circumstances attending the nails. A careful search soon brought to light the hidden spring. I pressed it, and satisfied with the discovery, forbore to uraise, the sash.

"I now replaced the nail and regarded it, and one passing out of this window might have reclosed it, and the spring would have caught—but the nail could not have been replaced. The conclusion was plain and again narrowed in the field of my investigations. The assassins must have escaped through the other window. Supposing then, the springs on each sash to be the same, as was probable, there must be found a difference between the nails, or at least between the modes of their fixture. Getting upon the back of the bedstead, I looked over the head board minutely at the second casement. Passing my hand down beneath the board, I readily discovered an unobstructed spring, which was, as I had supposed, identical in character with its neighbor. I now looked at the nail. It was as stout as the other, and apparently fitted in the same manner—driven in nearly up to the head.

"You will say that I was puzzled; but if you think so you must have misunderstood the nature of the inductions. To use the sporting phrase I have not once been at fault. The scent has never been lost. There has been no flaw in any link of the chain, I had traced the secret up to its ultimate result, and the result was the nail. It had, I say, in every respect, the appearance of its fellow in the other window; but this fact was an absolute nullity (conclusive as it might seem to be), when compared with the consideration that there, at this point terminated the clue. 'There must be something wrong,' I said, 'about the nail.' I touched it, and the head and about a quarter of an inch of the shank came off in my fingers. The rest of the shank was in the gimlet-hole, where it had been broken off. The fracture was an old one (for its edges were incrustured with rust), and had apparently been accomplished by the blow of a hammer, which had been imbedded in the top of the bottom sash. I replaced the head portion of the nail. I carefully replaced this head portion into the indentation whence I had taken it, and the resemblance to a perfect nail was complete—the fissure was invisible. Pressing the spring, I gently raised the sash for a few inches; the head went with it, remaining firm in its bed. I closed the window, and the semblance of the whole nail was again perfect.

"The riddle, so far, was now unriddled. The assassin had escaped through the window which looked upon the bed. Dropping of its own accord upon this (or perhaps purposely closed), it had become fastened by the spring; and it was the detection of the spring which had been mistaken by the police for that of the nail, further inquiry being thus considered unnecessary.

"The next question is that of the mode of descent. Upon this point I had been satisfied in my walk with you around the building. Above five feet and a half from the casement in question there runs a lightning rod. From this rod it would have been impossible for any one to reach the window itself, to say nothing of entering it. I observed, however, that the shutters of the fourth story were of the peculiar kind called by Parisian carpenters ferrades—a kind rarely employed at the present day, but frequently seen upon very old mansions at Lyons and Bordeaux. They are in the form of an ordinary door, (a single, not a folding door) except that the lower half is latticed or worked in open trellis—thus affording an excellent hold for the hands. In the present instance the shutters are fully three feet and a half broad. When we saw them from the rear of the house, they were both about half open—that is to say, they stood off at right angles from the wall. It is probable that the police, as well as myself examined the back of the ferrades in the line of their breadth (as they must have done), they did not perceive this great breadth itself, or at all events, failed to take it into due consideration. In fact having satisfied themselves that no egress could be made in this quarter, they would naturally bestow here a very cursory examination. It was clear to me, however, that the shutter belonging to that window at the head of the bed, would, if swung back to the wall, reach within two feet of the lightning-rod. It was also evident that, by exertion of an unusual degree of activity and courage, an entrance into the window, from the rod, might have been effected. By reaching to the distance of two feet and a half (we now suppose the shutter open to its whole extent) a robber might have taken a firm grasp upon the trellis-work. Letting go, then, his hold upon the rod, placing his feet securely on the wall, springing boldly from it, he might have swung the shutter so as to close it, and, if we imagine the window open at the time, might have even swung himself into the room.

"I wish you to bear especially in mind, that I have spoken of a very unusual degree of activity as requisite to success in so hazardous and difficult a feat, it is my design to show you, first, that the thing might have possibly been accomplished;—but secondly and chiefly, wish to impress upon your understanding the very extraordinary—the almost preternatural character of that agility which could have accomplished it.

"You will say, no doubt, using the language of the law, that to make out my case, I should rather undervalue than insist upon a full estimation of the activity required in this matter. This may be the practice in law, but is not the usage of reason. My ultimate object is only truth. My immediate purpose is to lead you to a place of juxtaposition, that very unusual activity of which I have just spoken, with that very peculiar shrill (or harsh) and unequal voice, about whose nationality no two persons could be found to agree, and in whose utterance no syllabification could be detected.

"At these words a vague and half-formed conception of the meaning of Dupin flitted over my mind. I seemed to be on the verge of comprehension, without power to comprehend—as men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. My friend went on with his discourse.

"You will see," said he, "that I have shifted the question from the mode of egress to that of ingress. It was my design to convey the idea that both were effected in the same manner, at the same point. Let us survey the appearances here. The drawers of the bureau, it is said, had been rifled, although many articles of apparel still remained within them. The conclusion is absurd. It is a mere guess—a very silly one—and no more. How are we to know that the articles found in the drawers are not all these drawers had originally contained? Madam L'Espanaye, and her daughter lived an exceedingly retired life—saw no company—seldom went out—had little use for numerous changes of habitation. Those found were at least as good quality as any likely to be possessed by these ladies. If a thief had taken any why did he not take the best—why did he not take all? In a word, why did he abandon four thousand francs in gold to encumber himself with a bundle of trines? The gold was abandoned. Nearly the whole sum mentioned by M. Maguad, the banker was discovered, in M. Maguad, upon the floor. I wish you, therefore, to discard from your thoughts the blundering idea of motive, engendered in the brains of the police by that portion of the evidence which speaks of money delivered at the door of the house. Coincidences three times as remarkable as this (the delivery of the money, and murder committed within three days upon the party receiving it), happen to all of us every hour of our lives, without attracting even momentary notice. Coincidences, in general, are great stumbling-blocks in the way of thinkers who have been educated to know nothing of the theory of probabilities—that theory to which the most glorious objects of human research are indebted, for the most glorious of illustrations. In the present instance, had the gold been gone, the fact of its delivery three days before would have formed something more than a coincidence. It would have been corroborative of this idea of motive. But, under the real circumstances of the case, if we are to suppose gold the motive of this outrage, we must also imagine the perpetrator such an idiot as to have abandoned his motive altogether."

"Keeping steadily in behind the points to which I have drawn your attention—that peculiar voice, that unusual agility, and that startling absence of motive in a murder so singularly atrocious as this, let us glance at the butchery itself. Here is a woman strangled to death by manual strength, and thrust up a chimney, head downward. Ordinary assassins employ no such modes of murder as this. Least of all do they thus dispose of their murdered. In the manner of thrusting the corpse up the chimney, you will admit there was something excessively out—something altogether irreconcilable with our own common notions of human action, even when we suppose the actors to be the most depraved of men. Think, too, how great must have been that strength which could have thrust the body up such an aperture so forcibly that the united vigor of several persons was found barely sufficient to drag it down.

"Turn now to other indications of the employment of a vigor most marvelous. On the hearth were thick tresses—very thick tresses—of grey human hair. These had been torn out by the roots. You are aware of the great force necessary in tearing thus from the head twenty or thirty hairs together. You saw the locks in question as well as myself. Their roots (a hideous sight!) were clothed with fragments of the flesh of the scalp—a sure token taken of prodigious power which had been exerted in uprooting half a million of hairs at a time. The throat of the old lady was not merely cut, but the head absolutely severed from the body, the instrument was a mere razor. I wish you also to look at the brutal ferocity of these deeds. Of the bruises upon the body of Madame L'Espanaye I do not speak. Monsieur Dumas and his worthy coadjutor Etienne have pronounced that they were inflicted by some obtuse instrument; and so far these gentlemen are very correct. The obtuse instrument was clearly the stone pavement in the yard, upon which the victim had fallen from the window which looked in upon the bed. This idea however simple it may now seem, escaped the notice for the same reason that the breadth of the shutters escaped them—because, by the affair of the nails, their perceptions had been hermetically sealed against the possibility of the windows having been opened at all.

"If now, in addition to all these things you have properly reflected upon the odd disorder of the chamber, we have gone so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a grotesque in horror ab-

solutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification. What result, then, has ensued? What impression have I made upon your fancy?"

"I felt a creeping of the flesh as Dupin asked me the question. 'A madman,' I said, 'has done this deed—some raving maniac escaped from a neighboring Maison de Sante.'

"In some respects," he replied, "your idea is not irrelevant. But the voices of madmen, even in their wildest paroxysms, are never found to tally with that peculiar voice heard upon the stairs. Madmen are of some nation, and their language, however incoherent in its words; has always a coherence of syllabification. Besides the hair of a madman is no such as I now hold in my hand. I disentangled this little tuft from the rigidly clenched fingers of Madame L'Espanaye. Tell me what you can make of it."

"Dupin!" I said completely unnerved; "this hair is most unusual—this is no human hair."

"I have not asserted that it is," said he; "but before we decided upon this point, I wish you to glance at this little sketch I have traced upon this paper. It is a fac simile drawing of what has been described in one portion of this testimony as 'dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails,' upon the throat of Madame L'Espanaye, and in another (by Messrs. Dumas and Etienne), as 'a series of livid spots, evidently the impression of fingers.'"

"You will perceive," continued my friend, spreading out the paper upon the table before us, "that this is no slipping apparent. Each finger has retained—possibly until the death of the victim—the fearful grasp by which it originally imbedded itself. Attempt now, to place all your fingers, at the same time in the respective impressions as you see them. I made the attempt in vain.

"We are possibly not giving this matter a fair trial," he said. "The paper is spread upon a plane surface; but the human throat is cylindrical. Here is a billet of wood, the circumference of which is about that of the throat. Wrap the drawing around it, and try the experiment again."

I did so; but the difficulty was even more obvious than before. "This," I said, "is the mark for no human hand."

"Read now," replied Dupin, "this passage from Cuvier."

It was a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Orang-Outang of the East Indian Islands. The gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and active, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once.

"The description of the digits," said I, "as I made an end of the reading, is in exact accordance with this drawing. I see that no animal but an Orang-Outang, of the species he mentioned, could have impressed the indentations as you have traced them. This tuft of tawny hair, too, is identical in hue with that of the beast of Cuvier. But I cannot possibly comprehend the particulars of this frightful mystery. Besides there were two voices heard in contention, and one of them was unquestionably the voice of a Frenchman."

"True; and you will remember an expression attributed almost unanimously by the evidence, to this voice,—the expression, 'mon Dieu!' This under the circumstances, has been justly characterized by one of the witnesses (Montani, the confectioner), as an expression of remonstrance or expostulation. Upon these two words, therefore, I have mainly built my hopes of a full solution of the riddle. A Frenchman cognizant of the murder. It is possible—indeed, it is far more than probable—that he was innocent of all participation in the bloody transactions which took place. The Orang-Outang may have escaped from him. He may have traced it to the chamber; but, under the agitating circumstances which ensued, he could never have captured it. It is still at large. I will not pursue these guesses—for I have no right to call them guesses—since the shades of reflection upon which they are based are scarcely of sufficient depth to be appreciable by my own intellect, and since I could not pretend to make them intelligible to the understanding of another. We will call them, guesses then and speak of them as such. If the Frenchman in question is indeed as I suppose, innocent of this atrocity, this advertisement, which I left last night, upon our return home, at the office of 'Le Monde,' (a paper devoted to the shipping interest, and much sought by sailors,) will bring him to our residence."

He handed me a paper, and I read thus:

CATGHT—In the Bois Boulogne, early in the morning of the—inst., the morning of the murder, a very large, tawny Orang-Outang of the Borneo species. The owner, (who is ascertained to be a sailor belonging to a Maltese vessel,) may have the animal again, upon identifying it satisfactorily, and paying a few shillings arising from its capture and keeping. Call at No., Rue—Faubourg St. Germain—au troiteime.

"How was it possible, that you should know the man to be a sailor, and belonging to a Maltese vessel?"

"I do not know," said Dupin. "I am not sure of it. Here, however, is a small piece of ribbon, which from its form, and from its greasy appearance, has evidently been used in tying the hair in one of those long queues of which sailors are so fond. Moreover, this knot is one which few besides sailors can tie, and is peculiar to the Maltese. I picked the ribbon up at the foot of the lightning rod. It could not have belonged to either of the deceased. Now, if after all, I am wrong in my induction from this ribbon, that the Frenchman was a sailor belonging to a Maltese vessel still I can have done no harm in saving what I did in the advertisement. If I am in error, he will merely suppose that I have been misled by some circumstances into which he will not take the trouble to inquire. But if I am right, a great point is gained, significant although innocent of the murder, the Frenchman would naturally hesitate about replying to the advertisement—about demanding the Orang-Outang of great value—one in my circumstances a fortune of itself—at a vast distance from the scene of that butchery. How can it ever be suspected that a brute beast should have done the deed? The police are at fault—they have failed to procure the slightest clue. Should they even trace the animal, it would have been impossible to prove me cognizant of the murder or to implicate me in guilt or on account of that cognizance. Above all, I am known."

The advertiser designates me as the possessor of the beast. I am not sure to what limit his knowledge may extend. Should I avoid claiming a property of so great a value, which it is known that I possess, I will render the animal at least liable to suspicion. It is not my policy to attract attention to myself or to the beast. I will answer the advertisement, get the Orang-Outang, and keep it close until this matter has blown over."

At this moment we heard a step upon the stairs.

"Be ready," said Dupin, "with your pistols, neither use them nor show them except at a signal from myself."

The front door of the house had been left open and the visitor had entered, without ringing, and advanced several steps upon the staircase. Now, however, he seemed to hesitate. Presently we heard him descending. Dupin was moving quickly to the door, when we again heard him coming up. He did turn back a second time, but stepped up with decision, and rapped at the door of our chamber.

"Come in," said Dupin, in a cheerful and hearty tone.

A man entered. He was a sailor, evidently—a tall, stout and muscular-looking person, with a certain devil expression of countenance, not altogether unprepossessing. His face greatly sunburnt, was more than half hidden by whiskers and mustache, he had with him a huge oaken cudgel, but appeared to be otherwise unarmed. He bowed awkwardly, and bade us "good evening," in French accents, which although somewhat Neuchateleish, were sufficiently dictative of a Parisian origin.

"Sit down, my friend," said Dupin. "I suppose you have called about the Orang-Outang. Upon my word I almost envy you in the possession of him: a remarkably fine, and doubtless very valuable animal. How old do you suppose him to be?"

The sailor drew a long breath, with the air of a man relieved of some intolerable burden, and then he replied in an assured tone.

"I have no way of telling—but he can't be more than four or five years old. Have got him here?"

"Oh no; we had no conveniences for keeping him here. He is at a livery stable in the Rue Dubouge, just by. You can get him in the morning. Of course you are ready to identify the property?"

"To be sure I am, sir."

"I shall be sorry to part with him," said Dupin.

"I don't mean that you should go to all this trouble for nothing, sir," said the man. "Couldn't expect it. Am very willing to pay a reward for the finding of the animal—that is to say anything within reason."

"Well," replied my friend, "that is all very fair, to be sure. Let me think!—What should I have? Oh! I will tell you. My reward shall be this. You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue."

Dupin said the last words in a very low tone, and very quietly. Just as quietly, too, he walked toward the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. He then drew a pistol from his bosom and placed it, without the least flourish, upon the table.

The sailor's face flushed up as if he were struggling with suffocation. He started to his feet and grasped his cudgel; but the next moment he fell back in his seat, trembling violently, and with the countenance of death itself. He spoke not a word. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart.

"My friend," said Dupin, in a kind tone, "you are alarming yourself unnecessarily—you are indeed. We mean you no harm whatever. I pledge you the honor of a gentleman and a Frenchman, that we intend you no injury. I perfectly well know that you are innocent of the atrocities in the Rue Morgue. It will not do, however, to deny that you are in some measure implicated in them. From what I have already said, you must know that I have had means of information about the matter—means of which you never could have dreamed. Now the thing stands thus. You have done nothing which you could have avoided—nothing, certainly, which renders you culpable. You were not even guilty of robbery, when you might have robbed with impunity. You have nothing to conceal. You have no reason for concealment. On the other hand, you are bound by every principle of honor to confess all you know. An innocent man is now imprisoned, charged with that crime of which you can point out the perpetrator."

The sailor had recovered his presence of mind, in a great measure, while Dupin uttered these words; but his original boldness of bearing was all gone.

"So help me God," said he, after a brief pause, "I will tell you all I know about this affair; but I do not expect you to believe one half I say; I would be a fool, indeed, if I did. Still, I am innocent, and I will make a clean breast if I die for it."

What he stated was in substance this: He had lately made a voyage to Indian Archipelago. A party of which he formed and landed at Borneo, and passed into the interior on an excursion of pleasure. Himself and a companion had captured the Orang-Outang. This companion dying, the animal fell into his own exclusive possession. After great trouble, occasioned by the intractable ferocity of his captive during the home voyage, he at length succeeded in lodging it safely at his own residence in Paris, where, not to attract toward himself the unpleasant curiosity of his neighbors, he kept it carefully secluded, until such time as it should recover from a wound in the foot, received from a splinter on board ship. His ultimate design was to sell it.

Returning home from some sailors frolic on the night, or rather in the morning of the murder, he found the beast occupying his own bed-room; into which it had broken from a closet adjoining, where it had been, as was thought, securely confined. Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet. Terrified at the sight of so dangerous a weapon in the possession of an animal so ferocious, and so well able to use it, the man, for some moments, was at a loss what to do. He was accustomed, however, to quiet the creature, even in the fiercest moods, by the use of a whip, and to this he now restored. Upon sight of it, the Orang-Outang sprang at once through the door of the chamber, down the stairs,

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