

**SERIES 1: THE MURDER OF ROSE ACTON**

PART I OF IV

*This section would be inserted in Chapter 7 of The Poe Shadow immediately following the section in which Quentin Clark meets a group of policemen at a café. (In the US and UK hardcover editions, this is p. 74)*

A few days later, Duponte and I were walking again, traversing what felt to me like all of Paris. We reached a quarter sadly remote from the glories of Champs Élysée. Duponte had no apparent destination, but my step became more deliberate as we neared a crowded scene across from us. I noticed several police officers at the street door of a boarding house whispering to each other, peering in our direction.

As Duponte and I came closer, the police agents met us. Prefect Delacourt, the official I had been forced to meet upon my arrival in Paris, stood in the middle of the group. I recognized several of the policemen from our jovial encounter at the café, but now their expressions were somber and their eyes evasive. I realized that it could not be any common event that would command the presence of the Prefect of Police.

It then came back to me. I had read in the morning newspaper of a terrible murder of a young *grisette* named Rose in the outlying district of Montmartre, where we now were. I thought of this poor girl and thought automatically of Hattie's pretty face. There was a touch of horror at finding myself so close to this house. Yet, at the same time I experienced an unexpected calmness being there with Duponte – that anything, even murder, was almost reversible by the fact of his presence.

Several police agents looked Duponte up and down in disbelief. Among the officers who had been at the café, was the one who had busied himself with scratching his neck. The Scratcher, whom I had heard referred to at the café as Lazar, had insisted to me that Duponte was a fraud and a swindler who had been killed by a vengeful prisoner. This Lazar now stared dumbly at me, and angrily at Duponte for having proved him a fool.

“So it is true Duponte,” said Prefect Delacourt, stepping ahead of his men. “You are not in Vienna.”

“I am not,” agreed Duponte.

“Why have you come here, Monsieur Clark?” the Prefect turned swiftly to me. “Did I not advise you to keep clear from any trouble?”

“Prefect Delacourt, I look for no trouble.”

Officer Lazar leaned in and whispered something to the Prefect, who nodded.

“This is a grisly scene. Think carefully what you do. I would go no closer this time, Duponte,” said the Prefect.

“I haven’t the slightest intention,” said Duponte. “Indeed, you see my walking companion and I are pointed in a direction by which it would be inconvenient to enter that boarding house.”

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I had not liked the lingering gaze the prefect had given me as we departed from the street. I was concerned that the police might think to bring me to the prefecture and question me again, interrupting any progress I had made with Duponte. After leaving Duponte, I decided to return to the house in Montmartre to reassure the prefect that our presence had been entirely innocent.

At the top of the steps to the boarding house was another police agent.

“No admittance, Monsieur,” a mustachioed officer said.

“I wish to have a brief conference with the Prefect,” I said.

“Who are you?”

“See here,” Delacourt said from inside. “I know that man. Let him through.”

I already knew something of the crime and its bizarre aspects from the newspaper reports. I shall paraphrase them for the reader. The landlady in charge of this modest lodging brought coffee to her boarders each morning. On one particular morning, Rose Acton, a young lady boarding here, did not respond to the landlady’s knocking. When the circumstance continued into the afternoon, the landlady, who made it a point of pride and business advertisement that she would never open a private room where her boarder was

present, instead sent for the police. The police forced open the door and found the young Acton girl lying face up on her bed. Her body was lifeless, stabbed through the heart. The knife, or some thought it could have been a sword, had entered her chest and penetrated three or four inches deep into the mattress.

Some suggested suicide. Doctors countered that not even a robust man, much less a frail young woman, could manage to injure themselves in that way.

Stranger still, there was no apparent ingress or egress possible from the crime. The circumstances left the police quite disheartened. The door had been locked and bolted from the inside. Even the first policeman, once called, required almost an hour to force it open. Rose's window was fastened from the inside, too, with a drop of nearly forty-five feet to the ground outside. None of the valuables in the room had been removed, not even the jewelry out on her table – and the landlady swore that, although the girl was not of the *most* impeccable character, she herself had seen Rose retire to her room alone and, a light sleeper, the landlady would have heard immediately if anyone tried to enter the house afterward. The chimney represented a last possible passage, but it was too narrow – and, furthermore, there were no signs of soot. Everything was quite clean and orderly around Rose's body.

The discovery of this horrid scene had occurred more than a day earlier.

“Monsieur Clark, I am surprised at you!” said the prefect. “That you should come here once again to put your foot where it does not belong.”

“It is exactly the opposite,” I exclaimed. “I have come to apologize for our meeting earlier this afternoon. I wish to assure you that neither Monsieur Dupont nor myself had any intention of interfering in your...”

“Yes, yes,” the prefect mumbled, interrupting. He smiled humorlessly and wiped his face with a handkerchief. “This whole business. We will resolve it, Monsieur. I promise you that!”

“I have every confidence,” I answered, somewhat confused by his manner. “Monsieur Prefect, may I ask what they are doing?”

Several police officers, including Officer Lazar, were clustered around the door to the girl's room. They were experimenting with magnets. The prefect proudly explained

that they were attempting to determine whether some such instrument might have been used to turn the key of the door and move the bolt from outside Rose's door.

I took a step closer. In spite of myself, I was fascinated to be in close proximity to where the poor girl had been killed.

"You had to drag Duponte out from the garbage, didn't you."

I turned and saw this comment came from Lazar, watching me with his usual scowl.

"You see he is alive after all, Officer Lazar," I said.

"We will resolve this, as the prefect says," Lazar replied. "I, for one, do not need the help of a swindler like Auguste Duponte."

"Officer Lazar, if we may?" said the prefect. Lazar understood, leaving us to our conversation. The prefect continued. "Monsieur Clark, tell me something. Did Duponte say anything to you? I mean, about this case?"

This line of questioning worried me. "Please, Monsieur Prefect, I must insist that you listen. Duponte and I were walking through the city. We had no intentions regarding this case."

"Perhaps he noticed something on the footpath? Or some detail in the newspaper that led to him to an odd remark or two?" Seeing the surprise on my face, the prefect quickly laughed again. "Lazar is correct, I should think. We will have this done with soon. And you can tell that to your Monsieur Duponte! Yes yes."

It was then that I first understood how much Prefect Delacourt – and all of Paris – believed in Auguste Duponte's power. Indeed, believed as strongly as I did.

**SERIES I: THE MURDER OF ROSE ACTON**

PART II OF IV

*This section would be inserted in Chapter 7 of The Poe Shadow immediately following the section in which Duponte has recovered the lost cake. (In the US and UK hardcover editions, this is p. 82)*

Around this time, I had paid five francs for a fortnight's worth of access to the Galignani and Co.'s reading room in the Rue Vivienne, which had the widest selection of French and English periodicals.

French newspapers, besides lacking the quality of printing in America, often featured continued stories, or novels, on the same pages that also contained news of the day. This mingled fiction and truth in an unwise way that seemed to encourage greater sensationalism in the rest of the sheet. Since I found myself with many free hours while still trying to persuade Duponte to examine Poe's death, I wrote letters at my secretary, taking the opportunity to practice my formal French, recommending to the editors a better separation of their newspaper's departments.

The more I read of the Montmartre murder, the more appalled I became, the more I thought it was ideal. Ideal to stimulate Duponte – the culmination of the small temptations and experiments I had presented to him so far since my arrival in Paris. Therefore, I collected the best articles I could find on the Acton murder. Whenever I saw Duponte, I shared a few more details, hoping they might spark his interest.

Of course, I had other projects during my time in Paris; some relating to sundry personal affairs and others touching on the Poe predicament. Rumors of a great poet visiting from the United States were repeated on several occasions in cafés and museums when the subject of my own nationality was introduced. One Frenchwoman I met insisted the esteemed visitor was none other than Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

In connection with this, I should say, that whenever my being American was mentioned, I was certain to receive added politeness and, if in a restaurant or some other

place, far better service. There was an instant change of manners and some indefinite longing addressed to me, as though with my country of birth and residence I carried some secret I might be willing to share. When I needed to replace a ruined pair of cuffs, a shopkeeper asked a high price. She had mistaken me for an Englishman, and upon learning I was in fact American, she named a sum much lower. Perhaps, in this case, the change came from sheer relief that I was not English. “Oh!” she said, smiling, “you come from the Grand Republic!”

To return. H. W. Longfellow had long been the enemy of Poe. Or rather, Poe had made Longfellow into an enemy. What the poet from New England thought of it, I cannot say, but was prepared to find out. Poe had written some of his mystifying critical pieces that tomahawked Longfellow, accusing him of plagiarism. I never could imagine Poe reading – I envisioned that as he would start to read too many ideas would come into his imagination to write, for the true writer is never a reader, or is an extraordinarily *violent* reader. This was why Poe’s critical pieces were perhaps too caustic, because he was compelled to read through an entire book.

Although I had never seen a response to Poe in the press from Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes and other Boston litterateurs, also attacked in the article, vigorously defended themselves and Longfellow against Poe in the columns of various newspapers. If Longfellow, known for his even temper, could overlook Poe’s actions now and publish an article praising his work, its impact would be enormous. You see, then, my singular aim after hearing that Longfellow was presently somewhere in Paris.

Whenever I was about the city upon other errands, including my gathering of articles on the Acton murder, I visited hotels known to be preferred by American travelers to inquire whether Longfellow was a guest. At one of these, the hotel clerk shook his head apologetically before I even spoke.

“Monsieur, *il n’y a pas de place.*”

“No,” I replied also in French, “I am not looking for a room, Monsieur. I would like to find an American visitor, a poet. Henry Longfellow.”

“Longfellow? There is no Monsieur Longfellow.”

“You are certain?”

During our exchange, I heard a voice speaking confident, incorrect French that plainly belonged to American. I peered around the corner. It was a sturdy gentleman handing bedclothes to a hotel porter and requesting various items. I recognized him from many magazine engravings through the years: James Russell Lowell, one of America's rising young poets. His hair and suit were quite less tidy than in his engravings. I reproached myself for crediting any accuracy to the assertion that the poet visiting Paris was Longfellow! Yet the truth could prove a stroke of great fortune. Lowell, more a magazine man than Longfellow, could provide even greater assistance than his friend. Lowell had years earlier published a favorable biography of Poe for *Graham's*; although it had been paired with a very ugly, nearly defamatory engraving of Poe. Then came their feud and, well, their sad literary battles.

*Here comes Poe with his Raven, like Barnaby Rudge,  
Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge.*

That is what Lowell had written of Poe in his satire, *Fable for the Critics*.

"Mr. Lowell?" I interrupted him as he finished making demands of the porter.

"I am. Who are you?"

I introduced myself and requested a private talk in the *table-d'hôte*. He looked pale and weary, but he agreed to my invitation.

"I'm afraid," he said, "I'm rather not in a talking spirit – rare for me, but the truth. Tell me about you then."

"I have read your poetry, Mr. Lowell. I imagine Paris has received you quite splendidly."

He laughed. "As an author I am nothing particular in Europe. But as Henry Longfellow's neighbor, it is good as knowing a lord here. Tell me, isn't there something to talk about other than books tonight?" He tapped the table loudly for the waiter to serve us.

"Oh, but I am a great admirer, and Edgar Poe was, as well," I replied.

He glared meditatively into the smoky room as the waiter brought his sherry cobbler (ordering that was the surest signal you were an American, I had been told, but Lowell did not seem to mind). "My boy died a few weeks ago, Mr. Clark. He saw some

of the greatness of the world, at least. He knew my darling Maria; that alone shall bless him, I suppose. She is half of earth and more than half of heaven.”

I did not know whether he wished a response to this morose news and wished at once that I could respond more adeptly, or that Hattie were there to add a voice of composure. Lowell continued. “Do you know how it feels to lose your only son, your baby, and to watch it slowly kill your wife? It is not a ‘fair shake,’ as they would say at home. The Old World will cannibalize the New.”

Abruptly changing his tone, Lowell looked right at me. “Did you say something about Edgar *Poe*, Clark?”

“I did,” I replied eagerly.

“The ‘jingle-man,’ Emerson calls him. It must have been, I think, in 1843 when I saw Poe, when I was in New York gathering articles for a magazine. I had just before published his ‘Tell-Tale Heart’ and ‘Lenore’.”

I could not contain my interest. “Indeed?” Poe would have been thirty-two or so, only a few years older than me. “What was he like then?”

I had my own image of Poe. A turned-down collar and black cravat, one arm thrown lightly over the back of his chair. He keeps a cold demeanor when at rest, reserving himself for private meditations and dreamings. The pale complexion suggests a nervousness that could arise at any moment. But upon finding someone near him who promised genuine interest, the gray eyes would turn a shade warmer, and standing at his full height – there he is, a fine slender figure in the middle of the room, straightening his black vest, straightening himself to about an average height, five feet eight, perfectly straight – here he would present a hand that was more delicate and beautiful than any woman’s. His speech would be low, nearly a whisper, so that only if you lean forward, and exclude all other sounds from your attention, you are able to hear what he was saying and know opinions that he had told no one else about some popular politician or poem. If reciting a poem of his own to the room, he would not speak, he would positively sing, always perfect and pure in enunciation.

“Poe was small, smaller than you, my friend,” Lowell said, talking at a theatrical volume that swatted aside his introspective mood. “I’d call his complexion Clammy-White. Fine, dark eyes, and fine head, very broad at the temples,” he positioned his palms

a fair width apart, “but receding sharply from the brows backwards – something snakelike about it. His manner was rather formal, even pompous, but I have the impression he must have been a little soggy with drink when I saw him. Not tipsy. But as if he had been holding his head under a pump to cool it. I suppose, according to Griswold, he was in the cups even to the end.”

“Not so. That biography by Griswold is quite scandalous. I threw my own copies to the fire.” (Though that was not quite true, unfortunately, as you shall note later.)

“Ill-timed, perhaps,” Lowell admitted. “But Mr. Griswold was Poe’s chosen executor for such matters.”

“Executioner, too – of Poe’s name. Did you know Poe took a pledge of temperance while in Richmond, only some months before his death? I have a newspaper article reporting it at the time.” I removed this article from my memorandum book.

Lowell looked at it, then put it down and turned to me with new interest. “How in the land do you happen to keep this with you on a tour of Paris?”

As I thought my time with Lowell might be short, I tried to raise points of more importance. “Did you know, Mr. Lowell, that despite what he might have put into print he praised you highly in a letter to me. I am certain that if he had begun his new magazine, *The Stylus*, as he planned, you would have been the very first asked to contribute.”

“My dear fellow, were you so arm-in-arm with Edgar Poe?” He hesitated. “This is all about him?” His face reddened and he looked ready to stand up. “I thought you wished to drink with a fellow countryman.”

“Mr. Lowell, it is my honor! But I believe a new article written by you about Poe’s character, placed in a first class journal, would make a world of difference.”

“Obstinate—! What sort of difference could you mean?”

“His future.”

“He is *dead*, Mr. Clark. Very much so, from what I understand.”

“People in America this day run after the Channings and the Adamses and Irvings, but their children, in referring back to our time in literature, will say ‘that, that was the time of Poe!’ This I know, if it is all I know.”

Lowell looked upset. I worried for a moment I had offended him. Then he laughed. “Do you know Mrs. Clemm, Poe’s mother-in-law, wrote to me some months ago asking my forgiveness for Poe? – he was in a frenzy when I met him, she said, he was not himself, because his wife was dying. The poor old woman still cries over all his troubles and disappointments, I imagine. As though I would still hold it against him. Nothing can help him now, certainly nothing I might concoct in my own sad state.”

“Please, Mr. Lowell, consider granting your assistance. Your word has sway. I know Poe came down on Professor Longfellow, but perhaps even he could be persuaded to say a good word about his character in the journals, too.”

“Poe is dead and gone, and Longfellow alive and still writing – I think that is the end of the controversy between them.”

“Something more can be done, Mr. Lowell, before it is too late.”

Lowell had a faraway aspect to him. “My wife is upstairs and is very ill. She probably asks for me even now.” He would not listen to my further pleading. He added these words before he left. “Mr. Clark, I made Poe my enemy by doing him a service once. His literary lamp must die out – and will – because he lacked simple *character*. That is the very thing no man can favorably write about him, the thing that as poets, as writers, we all seek to find. What ailed Poe? Had he been neglected, like Dryden? Persecuted, like Dante? Had he been blind, like Milton? The character of those men transcended their circumstances, while Poe thought too intently on his circumstances to ever escape them. The mind squeezed out the heart. Poe, you see, wished to kick down the ladder by which he rose – or rather, was rising. If he were alive, and knew you were set on helping, you would be next to land flat, depend upon that.”

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Of course, this did not dissuade me from my hopes in relation to either Poe. One afternoon, when Duponte was unusually obstinate against leaving his dwelling place, I decided to view some of the settings of Poe’s Dupin tales, beginning with *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. I signaled a carriage. The horse, whose collar was ornamented with bells, tinkled to a stop.

“*Montez, Monsieur!*” the driver waved me inside with his hairy cap.

“To the Rue Morgue, please, Monsieur.”

The driver stared ahead without offering a reply.

Here I remembered clearly Monsieur Montor’s counsel from our time in Washington: The coachmen of Paris can be careless, and sometimes aim for pedestrians, but once reminded of the regulations, posted inside each cab by order of the police, they fall easily into submission. I therefore very politely reminded my driver that he was required to promptly take me to any destination named.

“The Rue Morgue?” he asked in confusion.

“Precisely, Monsieur.” I sat back contentedly as we drove. But after I found that we had been driving in circles, I firmly accused my coachman of trying to extort a greater fare through a circuitous route. It was at length explained to me after a sad sigh that there was no such street as Rue Morgue in all of Paris though the coachman greatly wished to please his American visitor. Remembering a scene from the second tale of Dupin, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, I directed the driver instead to the Rue de Drômes, with the same response.

Later, I happened upon the French translations of the Dupin tales and found that the translators corrected the street names of Paris. Poe, writing from his home in Philadelphia at the time, invented his own locales of Paris, including the title street of the first tale (Rue Morgue was changed in one of the French versions to the Rue de l’Ouest). At the Livingston company reading rooms, I found a column in an issue of *Graham’s* from five years before, in which Poe acknowledged the objection of the French press, but admitted only that no street by that name existed in Paris *to the knowledge of the Parisian editors*. To Poe, the Paris of imagination could have as detailed and useful a map as the city of the same name in France.

At the end of my dizzying and futile carriage ride, I dismissed the driver and found I was once again near the boarding house where the poor girl had been murdered. As I walked toward it, I happened to see the *chiffonier*, who went by the name Kalfon, I had previously engaged to provoke Duponte with his lost piece of cake.

“Monsieur,” I saluted the *chiffonier*, “are you here? Is this one of your regions?”

Pausing as he picked through a pile of rubbish, he nodded but said nothing to me.

“But you do remember me, Monsieur Kalfon. Do you know about the murder at that house?” I looked down the street and gestured toward it. No doubt he was disturbed by such a calamity being near his own collection territory.

When I turned back, he was walking away hurriedly. “My friend! Monsieur Kalfon! Where are you going?”

He turned back to look at me and shook his head. He was unshaven and it looked as though he had not slept in days. His face had turned milky white. “I saw nothing...” he murmured. “No. I saw...”

I could not keep up with his pace down the street.

Later, I found Duponté sitting on a chair in one of his favorite public gardens. I told him about the strange reaction of Kalfon to my questions.

“Do you think, Monsieur Duponté, that simple man had something to do with it? With the girl’s extraordinary murder?”

“Not at all,” he replied. “But he knows quite well who did.”

“What? But how? Do you mean to say the police can find nothing, but the *chiffonier* knows who murdered the girl? Will you tell the prefect?”

“Of course not! He knows as well.”

Duponté would say nothing further on the subject. He merely sat reading the newspaper.

**SERIES I: THE MURDER OF ROSE ACTON**

PART III OF IV

*This section immediately follow Series I, Part II of the Secret Chapters.*

With Duponte's cryptic words on my mind, I decided I would find Monsieur Kalfon again and confront him about whatever it was he knew. Contrary to the world as depicted by the illustrators of popular magazines, walking through the streets of a crowded city, whether in Paris or Baltimore or the darkest place on the earth, most people look and act the same as one another, common and indistinguishable even in idiosyncrasies. After an hour of searching the *chiffonier's* territory, and examining the face of each person whom I passed, I yielded my purpose.

In Paris there are catacombs running under nearly a sixth of the capital. I noticed, for the first time during my stay, the entrance to these underground vaults, which can be found at the *Barrière d'Enfer* – the Gates of Hell. Finding my current mood just as dismal as that name, I decided to inspect the garden where this entrance was located.

Admission to the public is restricted, but the head-workmen who stood with a group of engineers at the entrance quietly accepted a small fee to allow me to pass and satisfy my curiosity as to the strange underground world. The staircase was long, narrow and winding. I counted at least ninety steps down. After reaching level ground, a series of winding galleries leads to the octagonal vestibule of the catacombs. Above the door, is an inscription, *Has ultra metas requiescunt beatam spem spectantes*, which I shall leave to the reader to interpret.

Two of the engineers who stood beyond this entryway, upon discovering I was from America, seemed to take to the idea that I would report their workmanship to my country and eagerly fitted me with a small lantern to use in my exploration.

The air was damp and still this far under the earth. As I passed further inside I could see why the place was closed to the public, and why those workmen had been stationed nearby. The roofs sagged dangerously and were tenuously propped up. The

ground, meanwhile, sank under each step. In truth, at any moment one could be crushed from above or engulfed from below. I suppose it would not have been unwise to immediately turn back.

The quarries contained bones stacked from floor to roof, ordered in the most peculiar, most *inhuman* manner that perhaps only the French could devise. Arms all in one row, legs in theirs, thigh bones in another, and several lines of skulls staring out. You feel you are alone in the world among the dead. You have responsibility, as the last sample of a race, to make right whatever led to a broken and ugly end for the dead that repose all around in these horrific walls of piled bones.

As I passed a small fountain – with a few swimming goldfish, the only signs of life! – I heard a rustling behind me. I stopped in place and turned but could see nothing in the dim air even with my lantern in hand. I suppose there was some superstitious effect on me, though, as I walked faster, deep into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. The rustling grew louder, and the sound of human steps seemed to be coming toward me in a march. In a sudden panic, I remembered the tales of Parisian criminals using the subterranean catacombs to hide from police. Finding that I could still see nothing in the dark caverns behind me, I cried out in French.

“Who is back there?”

I was inside a range of low-arched crypts. I took a few slow steps back toward the mysterious sounds when a loud shot rang out. It was a gunshot. One of the skulls in the wall of bones nearby shattered. I ran, and as I did two more shots landed above me. I cried out but knew I was alone – a monstrous silence was all around except for the hot steps of my pursuer and our echoes.

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“You were wrong,” I said to Duponte, when I found him stretched out on his bed in his chambers, composing a letter. I was still out of breath.

“Indeed?” Duponte replied.

Though I had lost my inner compass, I had somehow managed to run in the correct direction to flee the catacombs, and I raced up the ninety steps that brought me back to the living world in one piece.

“Right,” I was now saying to Duponte as I helped myself to a glass of water. “The *chiffonier* Kalfon is the murderer of Rose Acton, as I thought.”

“How do you know?”

“I shall review it,” I said. I felt my frightening experience in the catacombs had given me authority to explain such a thing even to Auguste Duponte. “This morning, I found Kalfon looking through the garbage near the boarding house where Mademoiselle Acton was murdered. This is the territory in which he is permitted, by his *chiffonier* license, to examine the rubbish for any valuables.”

“Yes, I see.”

“Very well. Now, the *chiffonier*’s mandated hours to perform their occupations are between the hours of five and ten in the morning. This would have been precisely the time, according to the newspapers, that Rose Acton was killed. Therefore, I asked Kalfon if he knew anything about the murder. As I have told you before, the man nearly fell apart at the question, and hurried away.”

“Continue please.”

“After our discussion earlier today, I decided I would find Kalfon and insist that he tell me why he fled from me, and what he knew about Rose Acton’s terrible fate. I searched everywhere in his usual territory – all the alleyways he inhabits and all the cafes where he sits. Not finding him, I decided to visit the catacombs, which my Paris guidebook had advised not to miss.”

“I should disagree with the guidebook entirely. I would advise you to miss them at all costs. The dampness cannot be salutary. Yet, I interrupt. Continue, Monsieur Clark.”

“While down there, I was shot at, Monsieur! Someone attempted to murder me, and I have no doubt it was the *chiffonier* Kalfon, because I had questioned him about that other murder. He, Monsieur, therefore must be the guilty party, and believing me close to discovering that, followed me and would have left me to rot below among the anonymous bones.”

Duponte appeared to be contemplative for several minutes. He put aside his pen and draped his short cape over his shoulders.

“Come,” he said.

“You will report this all to the prefect, then?” I asked with satisfaction.

“No. Instead, if you desire, I shall show you the man who shot at you... and the murderer of that poor girl, Rose Acton. They are one in the same person – in this aspect of your analysis, you have been correct.”

**SERIES I: THE MURDER OF ROSE ACTON**

PART IV OF IV

*This section immediately follow Series I, Part III of the Secret Chapters.*

The Morgue of Paris is a low, Doric building constructed of massive stones like those used in prisons to prevent escapes. It struck me as unsuitable that this warehouse of the dead was directly adjacent to the vegetable booth of the Marché Neuf, but the customers searching through the farmers' selections made no apparent objection.

This is where Dupont brought me after we departed from his chambers. Entering the imposing Morgue, we found ourselves in a small room with a large number of people. There was a clean glass partition through which we had a perfect view of the display on the other side. The other people around me stared ahead eagerly as though they were at the animal exhibitions in the menagerie at the Jardin des Plantes.

On the other side of the glass were bodies displayed on inclined slabs. The bodies were entirely naked, except for thin oilcloths to demonstrate some small amount of decency. Next to the bodies were the clothes they were wearing when found. Above each of the bodies a stream of water fell down onto them, over their face, neck, throat and legs, to keep the bodies fresh. The effect was startling, for it made the bodies twitch and move.

The bodies displayed here, Dupont explained to me, were of unknown identities – today, there were two middle aged men as well as a beautiful young woman who had drowned.

This reminded me of the story of one of Poe's tales, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," which was my favorite. It showed the character of Dupin undertaking an investigation in Paris with his assistant, though it was in fact an analysis of an actual occurrence in New York, the scandalous murder of the beautiful shopgirl Mary Rogers, who was found in the Hudson River. I mentioned that this tale of Dupin had obtained the least popularity of the trilogy. Dupont was curious to know how it differed from the others.

“Because it takes its terror from historic truth, I suppose,” I replied.

“Perhaps precisely explaining why the public opinion prefers the others – for the ordinary mind should like to think there is no reality in fiction, which is not subject to the same natural questions we must every day ask ourselves.”

Duponte explained that here at the Morgue, the bodies were each displayed for three days, giving the public an opportunity to claim a body of family member or friend before they would be buried as paupers. The clothes, hanging near the bodies, were meant to further enable recognition.

I half expected to see Kalfon the *chiffonier* before me. Instead, the face I recognized was that of Lazar, the police officer whom I had met first at the outdoor café and then at the boarding house in Montmartre using the magnets at the room formerly belonging to Rose Acton. On his neck, the scratches where his nasty habit had perpetually removed the skin, were plainly visible. His was the only body without clothes hanging to the side.

“Monsieur Duponte!” I exclaimed. “I know that man!”

“Then you know Rose Acton’s murderer, too,” Duponte replied. I had a thousand questions, but he signaled that I should remain silent until we were sufficiently far from this scene.

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We found chairs for rent in the nearest gardens.

“I do not understand, Monsieur Duponte. How could you have known, from the same information I possessed, that it was Officer Lazar?”

“I did not know, in particular, that it was Lazar. However, I did feel confident (if not absolutely so) that we would face the murderer – whoever it was – by a simple visit to La Morgue. Recall the accounts of Rose Acton’s murder and the discovery of her body. It was stated that the first policeman present required an hour to force open Rose’s door. Inside, Rose’s body had been stabbed on her bed. Rose’s window was fastened and the chimney far too narrow for human passage. Thus the mysterious circumstances became

apparent to all – that there was no ingress or egress possible from the crime. In short, the crime was impossible. Here was the first fault.”

“What do you mean? What was the fault?”

“No crime that is committed, Monsieur, is impossible. There are two answers in such a scenario. First, that the analysts of the event have simply missed a possibility. But here, any child can see what the police have seen – with the door and window fastened from the inside, there can be no other way into the room. The second answer is that the facts have been misstated. If this is true in this instance, then the murderer is instantly apparent.”

“I do not follow your chain of reasoning, Monsieur!”

“Listen more closely. We must not confuse narrative with truth. The impossible crime, the barricaded room in which no corporeal being could enter or leave, is made possible only through words. Let us start again to consider the actors in the discovery of Rose Acton.

“First, there is the landlady. She has made it a point in the press that she would never open the door to the private chambers of a boarder while that boarder was inside. We may read the *true meaning* of this language clearly enough. This landlady encourages young ladies to board who, shall we say, require privacy on a nightly basis. It is not for the ladies boarding but for their visitors, that she is strictly obliged not to open doors, or the said male visitors will never return. However, after many hours in the morning that Rose does not reply, the landlady sends for the nearest policeman. Or, rather, the policeman who has made certain he is closest to the house. It is this policeman who will then report that the door required an hour to open.”

“You mean Lazar had been with Rose the night before!”

“Yes, although at this point in our analysis we have not yet arrived at Lazar’s identity. Whichever police officer was the first to come was also the one who had stayed with Rose and had killed her with his sword. There is no mystery beyond this. The mystery is invented by that policeman.”

“But the landlady’s deposition stated that she is the lightest sleeper in Paris, and heard nobody come in or out of the poor girl’s room!”

“As I say, there would be various gentlemen in and out of the boarding house throughout most nights. Moreover, as a general rule in life it is the case that any person who maintains she is a light sleeper, who claims that the drop of a feather will stir them awake, could not be awoken by a herd of elephants overrunning them.”

“What of the strange behavior of the *chiffonier*, Kalfon?”

“Ah, very simple, Monsieur Clark. The *chiffonier* is entirely under the thumb of the police. The police, you see, can strip them of their hard-earned brass plate, and could in an instant destroy their livelihoods. A *chiffonier* who earns his living by collecting rubbish, is frightened of nobody in Paris – frightened of nobody, that is, except for the police. Therefore, if Kalfon saw somebody around the boarding house, and that sight has left him terrified, we can be certain the person he saw was a member of the police department.”

“And my encounter in the catacombs?”

“Think of it. You spent much of that day around the boarding house where Rose Acton was killed, asking for the *chiffonier*. You had been questioning the *chiffonier* in public about the murder. Did you not think you could be heard and observed by the killer, or some man or woman close to him? You were followed down into the catacombs. The criminals of our city, as you may know, often resort to using the catacombs as a hiding spot. No criminal in Paris would fire a gun in the catacombs – for they know well how unsafe it may be, and that in the process they may risk being engulfed themselves in one of those horrid pits by damaging its flimsy supports. It is, therefore, far more likely to be a policeman than a thief who would make such an error of judgment.”

“I understand all that you have said, Monsieur Duponte. But how does all of this conclude with Officer Lazar hanging in the morgue as though he is an unknown straggler?”

“You noticed how anxious the Prefect of Police seemed in our meeting with him, and no doubt the next time you saw him as well. The prefect is under great pressure from President Louis Napoleon to prove himself. The news of this murder has saturated the Paris press, and has even spread to the columns of other countries. Louis Napoleon is not kind to those who cannot bring him results. Certainly Prefect Delacourt, though not an original thinker, given direct observation of far more facts than we could know, would

have pieced together the same story as we have. When he found that the newspapers would not cease their attention, he saw he had no choice. He ordered the guilty party – the first police officer to find Rose Acton – to be eliminated.

“I do not know if I had ever heard of this Lazar. However, I surmised that whichever officer had been the guilty one would be hanged in the Morgue, as though an anonymous beggar found on the street, stripped of his identifying uniform, as a warning to all of those who attempt to undermine his department, within the police or outside of it.”

“Could the prefect, such a jovial being, be this ruthless, as to murder a man he himself hired, Monsieur Duponte, and leave him to dangle naked in the morgue?” I asked.

“Ah,” Duponte replied. “You may do well, Monsieur, starting now, to consider the Latin proverb, *malum consilium quod mutari non potest!*”