Who Was the Murderer?

From The German

On a quiet winter night, some thirty years ago, the residents of the Rue Morgue in the quarter of St. Roche, at Paris, were roused from their slumbers by a terrible cry of distress. The whole of the little street was soon astir. It was three o'clock in the morning as the startled neighbors hurried together in front of a narrow four-storied house, from the second floor of which the awful cries were still issuing. With the shriek or yell of apparent agony there were sounds as if from the feet of several persons engaged in a desperate struggle. Two voices could also be now distinguished—one harsh, and yet piercing in its wild screaming tones; the other deeper and heavier, and occasionally ejaculating the words, "Cursed devil!" and "My God!"

The excited neighbors endeavored to force an entrance into the house. The doors and windows were all fast on inside. The whole lower part of the building seemed deserted. No one stirred there; not a gleam of light was visible.

"Who lives here?" inquired a passer, attracted by the disturbance.

"Oh, no one but Madame l'Esparaye and her daughter," answered the nimble tongue of Pierre Moreau, the tobacconist. "I have known the ladies this long time. They get their snuff from me. The mother is a fortune-teller, and has some fine customers I can tell you. She must have saved a pretty sum by this time. The ladies have no acquaintances at all, as I know of, except business ones; and they live in the house entirely alone. They would rather let their rooms lie empty than have them ruined by tenants. 'We have had a sad experience with tenants, dear Monsieur Moreau,' said madame to me only yesterday, as she was buying a franc's worth of my best rappel. The lower story, and the third and fourth, are not so much as furnished; and all the window shutters are kept constantly closed, with the exception of those of the back room on the second floor; there the ladies have their living apartment. They have never kept a servant, and it is very seldom any one goes into the house."

Meanwhile, some twenty persons were trying to force an entrance. But the doors and window shutters were shaken and pounded in vain. Some ten minutes had already passed, yet still from that upper room rang out into the early morning air the same terrible cry that had first startled the deep repose of the street, and the heavy sounds of stamping and struggling had not yet ceased.

"Thank God! Here comes Monsieur Muset, the gendarme," cried Henri Duval, the street worker; "he will find a wan and I'll be bound."

The gendarme was ready and prompt. Thrusting his bayonet into the crack of this door, he gave it a sudden wrench, and the lock was sprung. Followed by the crowd, the brave Muset, his bayonet at the charge, rushed in and stormed his way up the staircase.

As yet there was no cessation to that shrill and piercing shriek of terror or agony, so strange and unearthly in its tone. And they still heard, as if in fierce contention with it, the deep and heavy

voice, with its angry "cursed" and "devil!" There were no French accents in that shriek—this was certain. Some thought they could distinguish Italian, others Spanish and English words. But no one could say with certainty whether the shriller voice belonged to a man or a woman. This much, however, there could be no doubt about—neither of the voices had the slightest resemblance to those of Madame l'Esparaye and her daughter.

Suddenly, just as the crowd reached the head of the stairs, the wild outcry ceased. The hoarse, smothered tones of two voices were now heard in the back chamber—the bed-room of the two women. Muset rattled the door. Immediately all became silent as death. Finding the door locked and the key inside, the gendarme again had recourse to his bayonet with the same result. But to the astonishment of everyone, the room was empty. Not a soul to be seen; no mangled corpse on the floor—none on the bed. And yet the sight that presented itself was fearfully significant. Everything in the chamber was in the wildest disorder. Broken furniture, shattered looking-glasses, fragments of pictures and torn bed-clothes and wearing apparel lay scattered over the floor. Along with these evidences of a fearful struggle, they found four bright Napoleons d'or, a blood-stained ear-ring set with topazes, several silver spoons and two bags containing four thousand francs in gold. The money appeared to have been taken from a small cash-box that stood open on the bed.

On a chair lay an open razor covered with blood, and in the grate were found three long, blood-matted locks of human hair.

There had evidently been both robbery and murder. But where were the victims—where were the perpetrators of the double crime? The fastenings of the doors and windows were apparently intact. Certainly no one could have escaped through these. For a moment all were bewildered—confounded. But the hair found in the grate suggested to Muset that perhaps the murderer might have fled by the chimney. Examining the grate once more, he found on the hearth-plate a heap of newly fallen soot. He crawled into the fire-place and felt up the chimney.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "here is something soft! It is hair—the long hair of a woman, and my hands are wet with something. Oh, poor woman! I feel her face; it is wet too. My God! It must be blood! Her neck and shoulders are still warm; but I cannot stir her, she is wedged so fast in the chimney."

Some of the more courageous of the bystanders hastened to assist him. Finally, by their united efforts they succeeded in withdrawing the body from the narrow flue—a sad and frightful spectacle—the mangled and disfigured corpse of poor Ludmilla l'Esparaye.

Her face and neck were covered with deep scratches and round purple spots at regular intervals. There was no doubt of it, she had been strangled, and by someone possessed of superhuman strength. The marks of the ten finger-nails were plainly visible. Yes, it must have been something more than human strength that dragged the poor girl so tightly into the chimney that it required the united efforts of four men to draw her body out again.

But what had become of her mother? At least, where was her corpse, for no one expected to find her alive.

Meanwhile, the police had been alarmed and were now flocking to the scene. In vain was the house thoroughly explored from cellar to garret. Not a trace of Madame l'Esparaye or the murderer.

At length, on the pavement of the back yard or court, they found a bloody, mangled heap, in which could scarcely be discerned a resemblance to the human form. It was the body of the miserable fortune-teller, crushed out of all shape, every limb broken [?], and with a frightful gash across the throat—a gash that must have been made by powerful hands, for as they hastened to lift the inanimate mass, the head of the poor woman was found to have been completely severed from the body.

The physicians summoned to examine into the case declared that Ludmilla l'Esparaye had been strangled by one or more persons, but that her mother had been knocked down by powerful blows from some blunt instrument, either of wood of iron, and that her head had then been severed from her body, with the razor found, as before mentioned, in the unfortunate woman's bed chamber.

Again and again the police explored every nook and corner of the house, but not the slightest clue to the mystery of the affair rewarded their efforts. The famous police of Paris were for once completely helpless. The Rue Morgue, the quarter St. Roche, indeed the entire city, became feverishly excited over this tragedy, as inexplicable as it was terrible.

The great question was, "Who is the murderer?"

Now Madame l'Esparaye for several years past had had for her banker Monsieur Jules Migrand, of the firm of Migrand & Son, in the Rue Deloraine. The police thought it necessary, therefore, to take a deposition of Monsieur Migrand.

The banker deposed that Madame l'Esparaye possessed a fortune of ten thousand francs, and had been connected with him in business for eight years; that she very frequently brought her savings to him to be added to her capital; and that three days before her death she had come to him and drawn out the sum of four thousand francs in gold. She had not stated for what purpose she wanted the money. He had directed his clerk, Adlophe le Bon, to accompany her home with the money. He knew nothing further in regard to the unfortunate woman.

Of course, the police now found in Monsieur le Bon an object for their special examination. They determined to give that young gentleman a pretty thorough sifting. The poor fellow, for the first time in his life in the presence of the police, their dark and sinister faces infusing a species of refined torture into their searching questions, turned pale with fright, and stood with chattering teeth and trembling knees before the dread tribunal. His answers were given hesitatingly, but he finally stammered out that he had accompanies Madame l'Esparaye home, carrying two bags for her containing four thousand francs, and that at the door the madame, thanking him, had taken one of the bags and the mademoiselle the other, and then both had very politely bid him good-bye. As he hoped for salvation, this was all he knew about the matter.

Now, the young fellow seemed innocent enough, and so timorous that it was doubtful whether he could have mustered up sufficient courage to decapitate a chicken. Still, after certain preliminary "hum's" and "ha's, and various profound reflections as to the depth of still waters and the short-sightedness of mankind in general, the police arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that it could not result in the least inconvenience to them if Monsieur le Bon were kept in close confinement for a few weeks.

And so Adolphe was taken to prison for further examination. In vain did the magistrates torture him with sharp cross questionings; in vain did the police trace out, step by step, every act of the clerk on the day of the murder; not the slightest evidence, not even a new ground of suspicion could be found against him.

All at once the ever open and attentive ears of the police became sensible of a whisper floating about on the atmosphere of public opinion: "The murder must have been committed by a chimney-sweep; none but a chimney-sweep could have entered the house, with its bolted shutters and locked doors; none but a chimney-sweep could have dragged the body of the poor girl so far up the chimney."

"Ah, these foolish people are wiser this time than we pupils of Monsieur Vidocq. Why, of course, none but a chimney sweep could have done the murder. Let us look, then, among the most suspicious chimney-sweeps of Paris."

And so the police went among the chimney-sweeps. They found the very one who had swept Madame l'Esparye's chimney—Francois Ramel. He, then learned further, and on the very day of the murder, cleaned the chimney of a house in the Rue Morgue, in the immediate neighborhood of that occupied by madame and her daughter.

The police were in high spirits. There could be no doubt now. They had vindicated their reputation. Arresting Ramel, they gave Adolphe le Bon his liberty. They had a more promising candidate for the guillotine.

But their triumph was destined to be short lived. Nevertheless, every day they discovered fresh grounds of suspicion against the chimney-sweep. On a close examination of his person, they found on his arms and legs, but especially on his knees, many scratched wounds—from the finger-nails of the victims?

"How did you come by those scratches, Francois?"

"They are not scratches; every chimney-sweep has such marks always. We get them from slipping and climbing in narrow flues where the soot is sharp.

"Bah! That is a poor makeshift. What were you doing at three o'clock on the night of the murder?"

"I was at home asleep in my bed."

"Can you prove it?"

"Oh—oh—well, I really believe—I don't know—but the truth is, no one saw me in bed, for everybody in the house was asleep too."

"Very good, my friend. We know you. You are the very man. You have already been punished twice for fighting—evidently with intent to kill—and your ungovernable temper was on both occasions the cause of the difficulty. Come now; you see the police know everything, so be brave and confess that you murdered Madame l'Esparaye and her daughter. There is no use in lying. Come, out with the truth!"

But the chimney-sweep, Francois Ramel, was without a doubt, a most hardened sinner. He stoutly persisted in asserting his innocence, declaring that he had never so much as set eyes on either of the murdered women.

The abandoned miscreant was thereupon into solitary confinement, and daily subjected to a sharp cross-examination. Week after week passed away, but the prisoner showed no signs of yielding. No confession could be extorted from him. All Paris was shocked by his obstinacy. Nevertheless, Paris consoled itself with the reflection that he would certainly be condemned and executed.

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Several weeks subsequent to the terrible murder—the mystery of which, since the chimney-sweep, though strongly suspected, still adhered to his first story, was yet unexplained—the Parisians read in a morning issue of the *Monde* the following advertisement:

"CAPTURED—Early on the morning of the 15th of July, a very large, dark-yellow orange outing. The lawful owner can obtain possession of the animal on the payment of all charges, including the cost of this advertisement, by applying at No. 97 Rue de Faubourg St. Germain, third story, left-hand door."

In the evening of the same day, a man, apparently still young, was thoughtfully pacing the floor in the apartment designated in the advertisement given above. Every now and then he would stop at the head of the stairs and listen, as if expecting some one. Hearing nothing he would resume his promenade. Plainly yet neatly and tastefully clad, there was a quiet unobtrusiveness in his appearance which nevertheless was in itself an attraction. The people in the house called him Monsieur Allard, and only knew of him that a great portion of his time was taken up in reading learned books. Any further than this with respect to their taciturn lodger they had not troubled themselves to find out.

Soon after the occurrence of the mysterious tragedy in the rue Morgue, Monsieur Allard was frequently to be seen in that ill-fated street, inspecting with the utmost minuteness every spot of blood, every stick, every straw, every nail, every fragment of fallen plaster. The police looked upon him as an ordinary curiosity-hunter, but allowed him to go through the house on his respectfully asking their permission to do so.

What had been unnoticed by the crafty pupils of Vidocq, Monsieur Allard's closer examination revealed: a window behind the bedstead could be raised almost by a feather's weight; the bolt, which was yet sticking in the window frame, had been broken off in the middle. "It is very probable that the murderer got in at this window and out of it also," said Monsieur Allard to himself. With the utmost care and nicety he examined the wounds of the victims and their hands, looking for some trace of the fearful struggle they had made in defense of their lived. A few short yellow hairs still adhered to the finger-nails of the mother. These Allard carefully folded in paper and put in his pocket. Of the dark blue spots on the daughter's neck he made a close and accurate drawing. Undoubtedly ten sharp finger-nails had been pressed deeply into the flesh. Allard tried to place his own nails in the nail marks drawn upon the paper, but he could not. It must have been the iron grip of a giant by which the wretched young woman had suffered strangulation.

Allard next examined the exterior wall of the house under the window through which he inferred the murderer could have made his escape. It was high and perfectly smooth; no man without a ladder could have scaled it. Yonder at the corner of the house ran a lightning-rod. A person of more than ordinary strength and activity, such as the murderer of the l'Esparayes evidently was, might have ascended this rod and then swung himself into the window, which, it was more than probably, had been standing open.

Allard had his own thoughts as he retreated to his quiet room in the Rue de Faubourg Sr. Germain. Taking down his Buffon and Cuvier, till late in the night he studied the natural history of the apes. Then and there, and from that time on, rang loudly in his ear the shrill cry of agony and terror, such as those present on that night of blood at the house of Madame l'Esparayes had heard and described it.

His studies in natural history compelled him gradually to the conviction that the great yellow orangutan of the East Islands, so remarkable for its gigantic stature, its strength and activity and its bloodthirsty ferocity and rare powers of imitation, could alone have been the murderer of the l'Esparayes. There was a savageness about the tragedy scarcely possible even for the most cruel and depraved of men. And would any man, after committing the murder, have so uselessly wasted time and strength in dragging the young woman's body into the chimney, only, at last, to leave the four thousand francs lying on the floor?

But the deep, angry voice, with its "Cursed devil!" and "My God!" which had been so plainly heard, did that also belong to an orangutan, Monsieur Allard?

No, probably to the ape's owner. But first let us look for the orangutan, some of whose short, yellow hair was left in the hands of Madame l'Esparaye.

And day after day, Allard patiently read over the Paris papers in search of an advertisement of the lost orangutan. But he saw none. "Very well," said he to himself, "we must now advertise an orangutan found. My belief that an ape only committed that murder is not to be overthrown. If the owner of the orangutan, which I am sure must in any event have made its escape, is innocent he will undoubtedly be on the look-out for his precious animal."

And thereupon, without making a soul a sharer in his suspicions or his investigations, he published the advertisement which appeared in the *Monde*.

At length, one evening, he heard a heavy step upon the stairway. There was a bright gleam of joy in his eyes as he glanced into the side pocket of his coat. His revolver was all right.

There was a timid, hesitating knock at the door.

"Come in!" said Allard in a friendly, yet listless tone.

A tall, powerful fellow, with sun-browned face almost hidden in a long,, black beard, in the garb and with the rolling gait of a sailor, bowing awkwardly and glancing fearfully around, entered the room. "Am I right, sir? Are you the gentleman that caught the orangutan?"

"Yes, my friend—you, I suppose, are its owner? A finer ape that that is not to be found in the *Jardins des Plantes*."

At this quiet and friendly greeting the sailor evidently breathed easier. Ah! Thought Allard, he is not ignorant, then of the murder committed by his ape.

"When can I have my animal?"

"As soon as we agree upon what I am to receive for my trouble."

"How much do I owe you, sir?"

"Oh, only a trifle. I demand from you nothing more than a brief, straightforward confession. How did Madame l'Esparaye and her daughter come to their death?"

These quietly spoken yet piercing words made the sailor start back as if bitten by an adder. Brandishing his crab-stick, he sprang toward the door. But Allard had already as silently as swiftly locked it, and put the key in his pocket. Cocked revolver in hand, he continued in the same calm, mild tone: "You see, my friend, you are in my power. A full and frank confession only can save you. You, I know, are innocent of the murder; but how came your ape to perpetrate it, and what were you doing that night in Madame l'Esapraye's yard? You were hard more than once to cry out, 'cursed devil!' and 'my God!' Already, my friend, as you see, I know the greater part of your story; be reasonable, then, and sit down by me and quietly tell me all about the matter from the first. If you are open and candid with me, not a hair of your head shall be harmed."

"Sir, as I live, I am indeed innocent of this murder, yet it has caused me many bad hours. I will tell you all. On my last voyage I brought the ape with me from Borneo, expecting to sell him here in Paris for a pretty piece of money. But the chance for that seemed as if it would never come. Now, on that unlucky night, I came home late—I had been drinking a little, sir—and found the wooden cage in which I had shut the animal broken e very one who had swept

Madame l'Esparye's open, and with the ape, with his face lathered and my razor in his hand, standing before the looking-glass, scraping away, just as he had seen me when shaving myself. I was a little startled, sir, and made a jump for the whip with which I had often before brought the brute to reason. But, making one spring, the razor still in his hand, he flew through the window out into the street. More frightened than ever, not knowing what might take place, I hurried after him with the whip. We ran in this way through several streets. They were as if dead, for it was three o'clock in the morning, when Paris is asleep. Suddenly the ape saw a light burning in the open back window in a house in the Rue Morgue. He sprang over the low wall, ran swiftly up the lightning rod, and swung himself into the room. I heard two women scream out in wild terror—then a scuffle—and after that it became quieter. Half dead with fear, I also scrambled over the wall, and far enough up the lightning rod to see into the room. A terrible sight almost froze the blood in my veins. The old lady lay, with her throat gashed and bleeding, on the floor, and the daughter was already dead—choked to death, the cruel grasp of the savage brute. As soon as he heard my threatening voice and saw the dreaded whip, he immediately dropped the poor, dead mademoiselle, and flew around the room shrieking with terror, and breaking a tearing the furniture, and tearing the clothes and beds in pieces, seeking, as it seemed, to cover up his act, he suddenly laid his hand on the daughter and pushed her as far up the chimney as he could. The body of the old lady he flung with all his strength through the window, over my head, down into the yard. Half out of my senses with horror and fear, I slipped to the ground. Then, hearing the sound of voices in the house, I fled, full of terror, from the miserable place. How I got home I do not know. Of my murderous ape I have since seen noting. Now, sir, you know all; do with me as you will."

This plain story the sailor repeated before the court. The frightful mystery of the double murder was at last explained, the chimney sweep, Francois Ramel, was, as a matter of course, set at liberty. The unpunished and unpunishable perpetrator of the crime was soon afterward captured, almost dead with hunger, in the forest of Versailles, and is today a sad celebrity of the *Jardins des Plantes*.

As for Allard, his name was at once in everybody's mouth. The Parisians were amazed at the rare acuteness, the wonderful faculty of combination, the quiet energy of this plain, private man. He became the hero of the hour. The famed and notorious Vidocq—in his boyhood a thief, in his youth a sharper and galley-slave, in his manhood an escaped convict, and in the service of the police a wretched spy, who, in one single year, treacherously betrayed into the grasp of the law seven hundred of his former associates in crime, and who finally became the chief of the Paris police—this Vidocq had been, a few years previously, suddenly, and for some unexplained reason, dismissed from service, and was now living a paper maker in Picardy. As yet, no worthy successor had been found for the astute and sharp-witted guardian of the public safety. But in Allard was discovered one that might have been Vidocq's master, and Allard was made chief of the Paris police. And his subsequent career fully justified the choice.— *Once a Month*.

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The Plymouth [IN] *Weekly Democrat*, May 13, 1869

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