



The Purloined Letter

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As he did in “THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE” and “THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGET,” Dupin outshines the police in solving a seemingly insoluble crime.

Unlike the other two tales, which involve gruesome murders of women, “THE PURLOINED LETTER” presents only petty thievery and deception as the crime. The tale’s mock heroic tone is suggested even by the title’s description of the missing letter not as “stolen” but as “purloined.”

The Prefect of the Parisian police, Monsieur G-----, actually knows the identity of the thief, the Minister D-----, but the letter itself must be found in order to protect the honor of a lady being blackmailed. Despite an exhaustive search of the culprit’s apartment over a three-month period, the Prefect has not found the document and appeals to Dupin for assistance in the matter.

As in “THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE,” Dupin’s strategy is to match wits with the culprit. Dupin and the Minister D----- are, in many respects, alike. Both are poets and mathematicians who tend to think in a similar fashion, both find the letter in plain sight, and, significantly, both use the letter for personal gain. The Minister uses it for political advantage, while in the end Dupin extracts a large reward from the Prefect.

Dupin claims the reward by handing the letter in question to the Prefect after a search of the Minister’s apartment that involves some deception and trickery. Dupin then explains to the incredulous narrator the reasoning which led him to discover the letter: His reasoning in the matter was superior to the Prefect’s elaborate search because too much concentration on minute detail can obscure obvious truths.

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