

#### IV. The Phantom of Silaz

The Château de Silaz is situated on the left bank of the Rhône, a few kilometers from Culoz. It rises up in the woods between the broad river and the long straight line of highway that follows its course. The hamlet of Silaz groups a few hearths around the domain at the foot of a small round crag, rocky and isolated, covered with bushes and shrubs, known as the Molard de Silaz. The region is therefore located on the border of the department of Savoy and, as in the ancient Sardinian province, old country people can still be found there who say “in France” when they talk about the right bank of the Rhône, from which extends the département de l’Ain.

The situation of the château is very beautiful, because of the mountains, which can be seen from all parts, and the woods, cut through by fields, vineyards and marshes, which surround it. The buildings are not very tall, and give the impression—falsely—of being constructed at a low level, the huge butte that supports them being dominated by the mass of the Molard and the imposing height of the horizon. It is a secluded spot. The road that goes to the nearby highway stops there, or, at least, only continues beyond Silaz in stony pathways, like all the hill-paths in the region.

The daylight was fading when Charles Christiani’s cabriolet, driven by the chauffeur Julien, left the highway and set off along the final stage of the 550-kilometer journey from Paris to Silaz.

They had left the day before in the early afternoon. Charles had instructed the chauffeur not to hurry. That way, the voyage became salutary for him. He had sat beside Julien. The open air entered into his lungs generously. The spectacle of the world paraded its hundred thousand scenes before him, and he had been able to exchange a few words with his neighbor, who was neither stupid nor indiscreetly loquacious.

Charles was not at all worried about the cause that was bringing him to Savoy. He had dined well and slept well in Saulieu; they had been in no hurry to get back on the road. He abandoned himself quietly to pensive pleasure, to the beneficent dream of returning to a region and a house where he knew that his melancholy would not be jarred by any presence, untimely memory, ugliness or pettiness: a beautiful and silent desert.

A profound peace had filtered into him when, at Ambérieu, the car had suddenly gone into the gorges along a level road, following incessant curves at the bottom of the magnificent defile. Personally, he loved the mountain; it gave him physical pleasure to breathe the light and energetic atmosphere, while measuring the summits and the slopes, seeing the peaks stand out against the pure sky high above, or losing sight of them in the moving clouds.

Then, at the mouth of the valleys, in the grandiose enlargement of the land and the sky, in the dazzle of the returning bright light, as the descending road still overlooked the vast panorama, he had perceived the Molard de Silaz in the middle of the plain, and felt an almost-imperceptible quiver in his heart. Then he had thought that there was a little of the past preserved in his heard, a little of the Savoyard great-great-great-grandmother that stirred on approaching Silaz, and that idea charmed him again with a strange secret pleasure when he perceived the slate roofs and square tower of the manor.

All that dissipated within a second. Claude’s face reminded him instantly that he had not come to Silaz to enjoy a romantic repose.

The old man had come running in response to the clamor of the horn, as quickly as his age permitted. Properly dressed in his Sunday clothes, he raised his gnarled hands in an almost adoring gesture, coarse and touching. “Oh, Monsieur Charles!”

Joy and anxiety were combined in his face: a joy that was entirely new superimposed on an anterior anxiety, which it had not yet succeeded in effacing. He had his hat in his hand. He was bald. His fine grey moustache accentuated the astonishingly deep suntan of his complexion. The muscles of his neck disappeared into the collar of a shirt of coarse white linen, a vestige of olden times. “I can’t tell you, Monsieur Charles, how glad I am that you’ve come!”

“Because of the *sarvant*?” said Charles, laughing.

“How do you know about that?” asked the astonished guardian of Silaz. “I didn’t put anything in my letter.”

Péronne had come out in her turn, wearing her white frilly bonnet, wiping her hands on her blue apron. She had a simple, open face, molded by honesty and devotion—and also common sense—and two eyes that expressed a rarely-seen fidelity and respectful submission toward Charles.

An odd household! A bizarre couple, who were not a married couple, but more like a pair of hounds.<sup>1</sup> Claude and Péronne had been living there since their youth, in the service of the Christiani family. No other bond united them, but they had a marvelous mutual understanding as comrades, and nothing had ever disturbed their amity. An old man and an old woman, each having “property” in a native village, they remained at Silaz, content to serve the same masters with the same probity.

“Is Monsieur Charles up to date?” said Péronne, looking up at the traveler plaintively. “Have you explained it to him, Claude?”

“No, but Monsieur knows already that it’s the *sarvant*.”

They were on the threshold of the garage, sheltered by an arch. The little road continued between the commons and the grounds. Charles, flanked by the two old people, headed for the château. They went in by the kitchen door.

“Come with me,” said Charles. “Tell me about it.”

The windows of the drawing-room were open, as was the glazed door overlooking the English park. The weather was mild and the light gilded. The great silence of the countryside reigned like a fascination. After a day in a roaring automobile, Charles felt the spaciousness weighing upon him.

“Well?” the young man queried.

“It’s in the little top room,” said Claude. “Every night, there’s a light that appears—and someone can be seen.”

Charles smiled.

“Monsieur Charles will see for himself,” said Péronne, respectfully. “It’s in the evening, when dusk has fallen, that the *sarvant* goes into the little top room. The people in the village have seen it, as we have.”

“All right! I believe you. Since when?”

“We first saw it a fortnight ago,” Claude said. “That night, we were about to go to bed after supper. I’d just released the dog Milord—which is, as you know, a very good guard-dog—when, all of a sudden, I heard him barking in the grounds, near the château. I went out and made a tour of the buildings...”

“You should know,” Péronne added, “that the dog was barking very loudly, more loudly than he does from time to time when animals are on the prowl or people are passing by on the road.”

“Yes,” Claude confirmed. “So, in consequence, I muffled my footsteps on the gravel. Look, Monsieur Charles, Milord was there.” He pointed through the open window at a place outside. “If you wouldn’t mind stepping out in front of the château, I’ll show you...”

They went out.

The floor of the drawing-room was on a level with the gravel-covered esplanade that preceded the lawns. There was a porch outside the door with a glass canopy. As they passed through it, Charles looked at it critically. That addition dated from 1860; Napoléon Christiani had had it built at the time of the annexation of the Savoy, on which occasion he had splashed out on celebratory parties, moved by patriotism and ambition. The porch, in the Napoléon III style, contrasted strongly with the aspect of the thoroughly Savoyard façade, with its ancient coarse stonework, its little windows and its heavy, steeply-sloped roofs, which overhung it like a firmly pushed-down hat.

Apart from the porch, in fact, the slightly-dilapidated Château de Silaz presented a remarkable example of the regional architecture of the 17th century, unpolished but charming. Charles noticed that once again as he raised his eyes toward the “little top room”—which it seems indispensable to us to situate more precisely for the reader’s benefit.

The façade of the château facing the grounds—which still exists, of course, at the time of writing—is not established on a single vertical plane but composed of two parts, one of which extends further forward than the other. For an observer placed in the grounds, it is the section on the right that is set back from the section on the left, to a depth of one room, and it is from that section in retreat that Charles, Claude and Péronne had just emerged beneath the porch.

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<sup>1</sup> This is expressed much more elegantly in French, in which the masculine noun *couple* refers specifically to a man and a woman, while the feminine noun *couple* refers to other sorts of paired individuals, especially in the context of hunting, so Renard only has to say that Claude and Péronne constitute *une couple* rather than *un couple*.

The other section, on the left, which protrudes by comparison with the one on the right, is similarly provided with a ground floor and a first floor, but it is surmounted, though only on its right-hand part, by a second floor, the side of which forms a right-angle with the façade in retreat. That second story, consisting of only one room, forms a square tower, similarly topped by a tiled roof, whose base is integrated into the advanced construction. This tower is pierced by two windows on each floor, one facing southwards—the orientation of the whole façade—the other facing eastwards and having a view, at right-angles, of the retreating façade.

The ground-floor of the tower is a study.

The first floor is a bathroom connected to the next room.

The second and final floor is the “little top room,” a library and work-room.

“It’s up there!” said Claude. “I didn’t suspect anything when I arrived close to Milord, of course. The night was already dark, with no moon. Immediately, my attention was drawn to that window.” He pointed to the eastward-facing window, the one in the sheltered corner formed above the gravel esplanade by the two sections of the building. “The dog had his head raised, barking and turning round and round, growling. And up there, Monsieur, there was a light, as in a room that someone was using. My first impulse was to go fetch my revolver and go up to the little top room, because my first thought was that we were dealing with burglars. But—I don’t know why—it suddenly occurred to me that it must be the *sarvant*...”

Charles chided him in a mocking tone. “Come on, Claude! Seriously, do you still believe in ghosts?”

As the two old people lowered their heads, Charles recalled all the ghost stories they had told him when he was young. He knew that both of them were convinced that they had glimpsed the *sarvant* in various forms, indecisive but alarming, at dusk, in moonlight, in darkness, in the gloomy depths of wine-cellar, going along a corridor in a deserted house or disappearing around the corner of a shadowed staircase.

What exactly is a *sarvant*, or *servant*? A shade, a specter, a spirit, a demon, a soul in torment—anything you like. Savoyard and Bugist legends are haunted by them. Simple minds, influenced by the wild solitudes and somber gorges, have not yet abjured the ancient superstition, and they create these nocturnal scarecrows for themselves, before which they shiver all the more because they are imaginatively tailored to their fears, in such a way that nothing could be more frightening.

“So you didn’t go up to see what the light was?” Claude went on. “To see what produced it?”

“I wouldn’t have gone up there for all the gold in the world!”

“He came to look for me,” said Péronne. “He brought the dog back...”

“Yes, I wanted there to be two of us, at first. Afterwards, I tried to shut Milord up, so as to be able to listen without his growling and barking.”

“Didn’t the racket the dog was making disturb the person with the light?” Charles asked. “You mentioned someone just now—someone who had gone into the little top room, and continues to go into it every night. Is that right?”

“Yes, Monsieur Charles, that’s right. But the din that Milord was making hadn’t drawn anyone to the window, or caused any sort of movement inside. Perhaps it was that, fundamentally, that seemed bizarre to me, you see! When I came back with Péronne, a few minutes later, without the dog, the light was still there...”

“What sort of light? White? Yellow? Bright?”

“Lamplight,” said Péronne, “and not very strong. Yellowish—like a small lamp. We had gone out without making any noise, me in my slippers, Claude in his socks. There was still nothing to be heard. Nothing was moving in the room. We stayed there for three-quarters of an hour, looking up, and looking behind us at the darkness from time to time. We weren’t reassured, you know, Monsieur Charles.”

“But in the end, you saw someone?”

Claude took up the story. “The *shadow* of someone, at first. On the wall and the ceiling, then on the bookcase. And suddenly—oh, goodnight! I remember it!—a man, or the false semblance of a man, came from the left to stand in front of the window.”

Charles examined the window, quite calmly. From below he could indeed see, through the panes, a corner of the ceiling and the edge of the bookcase, which he recognized. He was familiar with the “little top room.” He had worked there in the past. The glass-fronted bookcase, in varnished

mahogany, contained the great majority of the documents that he had taken the trouble to organize. His memory recalled the other items of furniture: a ridge-backed desk in fruit-tree wood; a nice simply-designed Directory-style chest of drawers. All of that gave an impression of the “good old days,” to which no modification had probably been made since the beginning of the 19th century.

The window at which he was looking was not equipped with shutters. He went around the corner to look at the little top room’s other window; that one was hermetically sealed by solid shutters. (There is no need to be surprised by such disparities, which are quite common in the older buildings of the region.) Now, anticipating Charles’ arrival, Claude had opened the shutters—solid or slatted—of all the other windows in the château. On seeing those closed shutters, Charles knew that the brave man was decidedly not brave enough to have dared to go into the little top room, even in broad daylight.

Claude confessed that he had only opened the door, cast a glance around, and assured himself that everything was in its usual place. “One might have thought that no one had been in there since the last inspection—but a *sarvant* isn’t someone!” The old fellow, surprised and annoyed to see his master so incredulous and indifferent, added: “Monsieur Charles hasn’t even asked me for the end of my story!”

“Well, go on, my brave Claude. What happened next?”

“What happened, Monsieur, is that the man turned round—and then he started walking around, quickly, like someone deep in thought. And imagine this, Monsieur Charles: *his footsteps didn’t make the slightest sound, and the silence was so profound that we would have heard him walking in the room, even if he were wearing carpet-slippers.* There’s no carpet up there, on the floor, and we have sharp ears, Péronne and me, thank God!

“Finally, about midnight, we saw him go out of the room. Because of the height, we could only see his head. He took the light away, but we couldn’t see whether he was holding a lamp or a lantern, or anything else. Anyway, we saw perfectly clearly that he opened the door—didn’t we, Péronne?—and that the door closed behind him, silently, like a phantom door! And everything went dark again in the top room...except that he must have put the light out as soon as he went out, because we didn’t see the slightest glimmer in the windows of the loft.”

“That’s true,” said Charles. “The door to the little top room lets out into the loft, via the stairway. He remembered the picturesque disposition that had delighted him when, as a small boy, he had played beneath the roofs of Silaz—too rarely for his liking. The little top room did not entirely occupy the contents of the square tower on the top floor; its door opened on to a light fir-wood stairway which led down to the loft of the section in retreat, by means of a door-less opening. There was no other exit from the little top room.

“What does Monsieur Charles think of all that?” Péronne asked, anxiously. “No noise! Not a whisper! And every night, the *sarvant* comes back at the same time, and goes away at the same time! I don’t know if Monsieur can imagine what it’s like to lodge under the same roof as such a frightful thing! Not to mention that we don’t know where the accursed thing goes when it leaves that room up there!”

“In sum,” said Charles, “What have you done? What measures have you taken?”

Claude made a gesture of helplessness. “I’ve written to Madame. I’ve moved our beds to the ground floor, because our bedrooms in the attic...you understand! Besides, I’ve continued to keep a lookout, even with men from the village. They’ve kept me company and will repeat what I’ve just told you.”

“A lookout? Where? How?”

“But...from here, where we’re standing...from nightfall until the disappearance of...the thing.”

“What does he look like, your *sarvant*?”

“It’s difficult to be sure, Monsieur Charles. The light’s weak. You can only make out a dark shape, and you can only see the upper part of the body, of course.”

“None of the men from the village thought of going up there while your visitor was there?”

“Oh!” cried Claude, while Péronne expressed the same sentiment. “Not one of them wanted to get mixed up in it!”

“Right. And tell me, Claude: have you suspected anyone of playing a malicious joke on you? That must have occurred to you, mustn’t it? Have you any enemies? Have *we*? You’ve been deceived by a practical joker—I’m sure of it. Think hard. Who? Think of anyone who might have a reason for doing it, who thinks he has a score to settle with you, if not with my family...”

“Honestly, I can’t think of anyone. Come on, Monsieur Charles, believe me—it’s no good looking for an explanation in that direction. What’s happening *isn’t natural*, and I’ll wager a hundred francs that you’ll soon share our opinion, when you’ve seen with your own eyes...”

“Unless the presumed *sarvant* doesn’t do me the honor of putting in an appearance for me!”

The setting sun had just slipped behind the blue chains of the west. The temperature was cooling rapidly. The grounds were full of shadows. Only one sheer slope, quite close by, still benefited from the rays of sunlight, but the shadow was moving up it like a tide and the golden mountain was gradually turning into a mountain of darkness. Soon the very peaks were submerged and extinguished. Bats began their rounds in the crepuscular twilight.

Péronne and Claude followed Charles Christiani back into the drawing-room. The two servants waited expectantly for questions and instructions.

“Where am I to sleep?” he asked.

“I’ll prepare whichever room Monsieur wishes,” said Péronne.

“The usual one, then.”

“Very well, Monsieur,” said the servant, meekly. “Has Monsieur taken account...?”

“Of what, my dear?” he said cordially. “Of the fact that the room I usually occupy is next to the tower? That its bathroom is immediately underneath the little top room? I assure you that it’s all the same to me.” He added: “Ah! I’ll have dinner right away, so as not to miss the arrival of the *sarvant*!”

“I hope that Monsieur Charles will not be imprudent!” said Péronne, anxiously.

“I suspect that the circumstances will not permit any recklessness,” he replied. “I’m convinced, my friends, that someone has been trying to frighten you; I shall try, in the next few days, to find out why and penetrate the secrets of this stage-setting. As for this evening, I’ll wager, myself, that all will be tranquil and that your trickster won’t come! I regret now having arrived without taking any precautions. I ought to have left the automobile somewhere nearby and slipped in here on foot or by bicycle, without being seen.

“In any case, don’t mention my arrival in the village. Try not to make any more movement here than usual. Don’t go into the room I’ll be staying in until I tell you. I’ll only go into it myself at bedtime—and, of course, I’ll be ready to go up to the little top room at a moment’s notice. In brief, let’s do our best not to tip off the joker.”

“But what if he comes, Monsieur Charles?” said Claude.

“If he comes, Monsieur Claude, Julien and I are big enough to deprive him of any desire to return!”

“Oh, my God, my God!” groaned Péronne, heading for the kitchen.

“I have my revolver,” Claude recalled.

“You’d do better to get your shotgun and load it with coarse salt! Call Julien, then, if you please, and I’ll give him his instructions...”

At 9:30 p.m., Charles, the chauffeur Julien and Claude were posted under a chestnut-tree. Through the foliage, they were easily able to observe the suspect window, a casement formed in four squares, two to the left and two to the right. The dog Milord, a rather handsome briard, was keeping Péronne company in the closed kitchen.

The crescent Moon was descending in the south-west, in a clear sky. An autumn chill was emanating from the Rhône, with a rising mist. Odors of grass and moist earth were in the air. Leaves could be heard falling, along with chestnuts, which sometimes tumbled noisily through the branches. In the distance, trains were rumbling along, then leaving the silence of nature to re-establish itself like dormant water that had been momentarily disturbed.

It was in one of these almost absolute silences that the window was softly illuminated. Up there, *someone* was opening the door and coming in. The light spread further. The door having been closed again, a man passed by and disappeared toward the left. The shadows immobilized; doubtless the lamp had now been placed on an item of furniture. Then the window remained illuminated within the dark wall, for the moon no longer struck that wall, although it bathed the façade around the corner to the right, and made the glass in the porch glisten. There had not been the slightest perceptible sound.

“What did I tell you!” said Claude, triumphantly, feeling safe with his companions.

“There’s something different about the window,” Charles murmured. “It’s partly masked; something—perhaps a curtain—has been drawn across the left-hand side; at no time have I seen the

light on that side, which leads me to believe that someone has come into the room without a light to block that half of the window, before coming in with a lamp. We'll come back to that later. For the moment, it's necessary to act. We can't see anything from here. I have a plan.

"You, Claude, are going to stay under the chestnut-tree, and you, Julien, are going to come with me. We'll go up to the loft. The small window nearest to the lighted window is no more than three or four meters away, and isn't so far beneath it that one can't easily see from there what's happening in the room. All this is rather curious. We're dealing with an ingenious robber, but there's no evidence that he knows he's being watched tonight by new forces...Julien, I advise you to be silent. Let's get going."

As they set forth on this preliminary operation, Claude, strongly impressed, whispered: "Be careful, Monsieur Charles!"

"Don't worry. Our fists will suffice, but we both have revolvers as well."

Claude shook his head. "Something tells me that a revolver is just as good as nothing, on this occasion."

"Come on!" Charles said to the chauffeur.

The latter, a sturdy fellow in the prime of life, could hardly contain his jubilation. This adventure pleased him enormously.

In the drawing-room, Charles switched on an electric pocket-torch. Preceding his auxiliary, he crossed the room, thus reaching a spiral staircase. They went up stealthily.

The door to the loft was not locked. They went in. Two small windows facing the door cut out two rectangles of moonlit sky. The other windows visible from outside were those of the attic bedrooms.

A bluish milky light filled the lethargic, extraordinarily silent place. There were thick shadows between the beams and in the corners. To the right of the right-hand window, forming a rectangular patch of darkness in the grey wall, was a gap: the opening giving access to the bottom of the little five- or six-step stairway that led to the mysterious room—with the consequence that, in order to leave that room, it was necessary to pass through the loft. And to get out of the loft through the door that good Christians used, it was necessary to go past the widows.

Walking on tiptoe, having put out the little electric torch, Charles reached the right-hand window without meeting any obstacle, followed by Julien. Not a single creak escaped the old floorboards, which were thick and solid.

As he had expected, without being perfect, that observatory offered very appreciable advantages. It did not permit the revelation of the entire little top room, but allowed much more of it to be seen than Charles had hoped. Although the door was no longer visible at all, at least the bookcase appeared in nearly all of its breadth, only the bottom third remaining hidden—for, as we remember, the small window was on a lower level. Finally, to the left of the bookcase, an expanse of wall was visible, clad in the old flowered wallpaper that Charles recognized, and ornamented with engravings no less dear to his memory.

He hoisted himself up on tiptoe. The top of a lamp-glass was revealed—and that lamp was definitely set on the lower shelf of the ridge-backed desk. He cursed the curtain, screen, or whatever it was, though, that blocked the whole left side of the lighted window, preventing an observer from seeing an important part of the little top room. Nothing else could be seen, relative to the intruder, but the top of that lamp-glass. It was necessary to be patient and wait for something to happen. Then they would take action accordingly.

They remained motionless for minutes that seemed to them to be singularly long, their eyes fixed on that feebly-lit half-window—the lamp must be fitted with a shade—careful not to reveal their presence by any distraction.

Suddenly, Charles drew back reflexively into the shadow of the loft. *The man had just got to his feet, unhurriedly.* He had undoubtedly been sitting down at the desk, until that moment. He picked up the lamp, went to the bookcase, opened one of the glass doors, lifted up the light, and began to search for some book or document.

In an almost non-existent whisper, Julien observed: "I don't understand. What's he doing?"

The pressure of Charles' hand imposed silence on him. The latter opened his eyes so extraordinarily wide that the chauffeur, seeing his stupefied face in the moonlight, began to lose confidence.

Charles was, in fact, experiencing an indescribable stupefaction at that moment.

The man with the lamp was of medium height. He wore short graying side-whiskers; his long hair formed an unkempt mass of curls. His features testified to his vigor. His eyes were bright. He was dressed in an ill-fitting, unbuttoned olive-green jacket with a brown velvet collar. The broad collar of his loose-fitting shirt was negligently open, maintained by a silk cravat, tied without much artistry.

*He was not a man of our era—and yet, Charles knew him as well as he knew himself.* For he had before him, on the other side of the window in the little top room, the individual represented in a certain romantic painting, a painting full of life and charm, hanging in the drawing-room of the house in the Rue de Tournon. The only things lacking in the matter of absolute resemblance, were a rifle in one hand, a telescope in the other, a pistol passed through his red belt and a parrot on his shoulder.

In brief, incredible as it was, on that night in September 1929, Charles was looking at the moving, living—or, rather, re-living—image of...who? You've guessed it: César Christiani, the former corsair captain of His Majesty the Emperor Napoléon I, who had been murdered in Paris at 53 Boulevard du Temple on July 28, 1835, at the age of 66.

Shivering with an indescribable fever, Charles devoured the incredible spectacle with his eyes. Then, abruptly, he returned to a rational conception of things. The trick had been mounted with care, very intelligently, and was, without any doubt, aimed at him, Charles Christiani—for such a reconstruction would not have been able to evoke a *particular* disturbance in Claude, Péronne or any of the neighboring villagers. He therefore observed in a cooler manner the disguised individual and the scene that he was playing for his clandestine spectator.

It was well done, and it was well played: a perfect imitation of the old sea-dog, aged about 60; the coarse gestures, the original clothing, and an unspecifiable air of the obsolete, the outdated, foreign to our time. And the lamp! The old oil-lamp of the first Empire, which was still kept in the cabinet on the ground floor, from which the trickster must have removed it without Claude's knowledge!

Meanwhile, the individual was pursuing his search of the bookcase shelves with an admirable conviction. He made a semblance of finding what he was pretending to look for: a stack of papers. Then he returned to the invisible desk and, once again, nothing more could be seen than the upper part of the bookcase and the wall.

You can imagine how Charles searched for something that would reveal the truth. He went from hypothesis to hypothesis, but nothing caused him to pause at one rather than another. The only clear point in his mind related to the continuation of the operation; he was firmly resolved to lie in wait for the joker to make his exit, in order to find out where he would go and what he would do after quitting the little top room, since he routinely came out of it at midnight.

It was a long wait. The man only showed himself once before his departure, marching back and forth, still in that deceptive silence, which ended up becoming oppressive.

The moment arrived, nevertheless, when he picked up the inefficient old lamp again, ran his fingers through his untidy hair, like a sentry weary of his duty, and, having darting a glance toward the window *which seemed a trifle ironic*, extended his long free arm toward the handle of the invisible door.

"Look out!" said Charles, in a whisper—and they both plastered themselves against the wall.

It was a critical, ambiguous, anxious moment. To tell the truth, they had both lost a sense of reality, to some degree—and, in the depths of their inner being, they were not too sure of the shape of events. Someone was about to come out of the room, come down the steps of the stairway, come into the loft, and pass in front of them, or move away in the direction of the other attic rooms...

It would happen noiselessly, as if in a dream, and it was unpleasant to anticipate that phantasmal march...

While they waited, nothing appeared. Obviously, the mysterious man had put out his lamp, as Claude had predicted; of that there was no doubt. But no one appeared in the opening at the bottom of the stairway. No one passed through the moonlight that picked out the black and white shadows of the cross-sectioned windows on the floor.

When a certain time had gone by, Charles returned to his original observation-post, expecting to see the light in the room again. They must have witnessed a false exit on the part of the night-walker...

No, there was no longer any lamplight in the room—but the moon threw a more intense illumination into it than one would have thought possible; that anomaly was evidently due to the reflection of the façade at right-angles to it.

By virtue of that luminosity, Charles could still see.  
There was no movement, either in the room or in the loft; not a tremor was perceptible.  
Where had the individual gone, then?