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### I Give a Demonstration

The case seemed quite straightforward, if one could even call such an instance a “case”. Watson paced about in his usual manner, limping a bit from his wartime injury; psychosomatic. He, bless his heart, was clearly at a loss. His brows drew together in a stern concentration, wasting our time in the scene.

“Now, Watson,” I started, “we have half an hour to ourselves. Let us make good use of it. My case is, as I have told you, almost complete; but we must not err on the side of overconfidence. Simple as the case seems now, there may be something deeper underlying it.”

For some reason, I always felt the need to summarize our schedule to Watson, as it was always harder for his eyes to pick up on the things mine do. As it was, the case was entirely simple. Upon first seeing Mr. Sholto’s apparently stupefied twin through the keyhole, I knew something exotic was afoot. That devilish grin was so characteristic of a poison, so casually horrific and unsuspecting. As soon as I saw the poor man’s face, I could tell it was something of the sort. I stood up and noted the horror, immediately asking Watson to make a guess of the picture. His feeble attempts often brought me clarity, validating my previous observations.

“Simple!” He shouted.

“Surely,” I said. I needed to demonstrate. “Just sit in the corner there, that your footprints may not complicate matters. Now to work! In the first place, how did these folk come and how did they go? The door has not been opened since last night. How of the window?” I grabbed the lamp, moving across the room. The window needed to be observed, so the false light had to be relocated to reveal what I had seen when we first walked about the room. “Window is snibbed on the inner side. Framework is solid. No hinges at the side. Let us open it. No water-pipe near. Roof quite out of reach. Yet a man has mounted by

the window. It rained a little last night. Here is the print of a foot in mould upon the sill. And here is a circular muddy mark, and here again upon the floor, and here again by the table. See here, Watson! This is really a very pretty demonstration.”

I watched his eyes scan the footprints, and I felt the hint of a smile tug at the corners of my mouth as I watched his gaze hitch on the oddities of the steps: the non-foot prints.

“That is not a foot-mark,” he began. I had to interject.

“It is something much more valuable to us. It is the impression of a wooden stump. You see here on the sill is the boot-mark, a heavy boot with a broad metal heel, and beside it is the mark of the timber-toe.”

It could not have been helped. When we entered the room I made sure of all the entrances and exits, as with a suspected murder, you have to start with the killer. Where did they come from, how, and ultimately, why?

“It is the wooden-legged man” he decided. What a clever little man, he finally got it!

“Quite so. But there has been someone else - a very able and efficient ally. Could you scale that wall, Doctor?”

You see, when we rode into the home’s drive, I noted where Mr. Sholto glued his eyes to, and what room that would be on the interior. Likely, that would be where he is longing to see someone, and it just so fit that we were on our way to see his dear brother. So when I gained confirmation that this room was in fact the object of inspection, I considered the outside access in learning we may be looking for a murderer.

Watson leaned out of the window open to gauge his answer to my question. He would surely note the lack of anything substantial to notch a foot into, and the sheer height of the window too.

“It is absolutely impossible,” he concluded.

This is where it would get interesting. Most people assume it is always a murderer, not murderers.

“Without aid it is so. But suppose you has a friend up here who lowered you into this great hook into the wall. Then, I think, if you were an active man, you might swarm up, wooden leg and all. You

would depart, of course in the same fashion, and your ally would draw up the rope, untie it from the hook, shut the window, snib it on the inside, and get away in the way the way that he originally came.”

I continued on to make notes about our mystery climber from the marks of blood I noted on the rope, and how they must have come about. It was like a thrill, it was, to lay out my thinking so plainly as it is to me, and have Watson follow in awe. He is not stupid, I assure you, but he is not as sharp as me. Nobody is in that regard. That is not to be conceited, but merely factual. I see things plainly and without filters, notes of struggle or of blood jump out at me where the naked and average eye would have to search.

Like a high. “Morphine, or cocaine?” John would ask from his station in our flat. “Morphine,” I would respond. But morphine was nothing but a cup of coffee to a case. Something that brought my brain to life, stimulated the senses.

“This is all very well,” John began, “but the thing becomes more unintelligible than ever. How about this mysterious ally? How came he into the room?”

Ah, there it was. The deduction, however unlikely, will strike John shortly. A jostle to the brain always helps, though I have to be sure to guide him well. He suggests the chimney, a foolish conjecture.

“You will not apply my precept,” I started. “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth? We know that he did not come through the door, the window, or the chimney. We also know that he could not have been concealed in the room, as there is no concealment possible. Whence, then, did he come?”

That was a shortcoming of John’s; the impossible. He was a cliché at heart. Whenever someone could not have been somewhere, it was always twins; “It is never twins, John”.

Mr. Sholto’s brother’s house was not impenetrable, but the room nearly was. If the wooden-legged man came through the window, the accomplice had to either have been in the room, come from somewhere else in the house, or also through the window. The last of which is impossible given the foot-marks, and the first of which was impossible as there was no signs of physical struggle on the body, which would have been present had Bartholomew Sholto recognized the accomplice and fought back.

This also added a fun twist to the conclusion I would draw; Bartholomew would have been killed before the killers were seen or noticed. Surely John would see the thorn driven into his scalp soon. Poison, a state farther than rigor mortis, the wicked smile, no struggle; it was obvious! But no matter, John was almost at the right answer. He had seen the outside of the house, he had seen the hole in the roof, whether his conscious brain had decided to make note of it or not.

“He came through the hole in the roof!” He cried.

Yes! That’s it, John!

“Of course he did. He must have done so. If you will have the kindness to hold the lamp for me, we shall now extend our researchers to the room above - the secret room in which the treasure was found.”

The existence of the secret room was not as obvious as I then thought it was when we went to it. The dimensions of the house looked as normal as to be expected, but upon entering and ascending the stairs, something was off. The ceilings were a hair too low, and the rooms were not quite the width and length as I expected. Thus, I concluded that there must have been a secret room. One that both Thaddeus and Bartholomew were not aware of, or better yet, one that they were aware of and did not share with neither John nor I in some kind of test of trustworthiness. Either way, I had figured out its existence as well as its importance in time enough for us to investigate it within our half hour.

“Here you are, you see,” I pointed out. “This is a trapdoor which leads out on to the roof. I can press it back, and here is the roof itself, sloping at a gentle angle. This, then, is the way by which Number One entered.”

Before our time was up, John and I discussed the individuality of the unidentified subjects. I discerned the need for a dog, as the smell of Number Two and his entrance prints was too strong not to follow. Watson set out to retrieve him, and I sat with my conclusions and set to study the great Jones’s methods.

“Goethe is always pithy.”

(1557 words)