The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Sign of the Four

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and

most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions

whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms

of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online

at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States,

you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located

before using this eBook.

Title: The Sign of the Four

Author: Arthur Conan Doyle

Release date: March 1, 2000 [eBook #2097]

Most recently updated: December 6, 2024

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SIGN OF THE FOUR \*\*\*

The Sign of the Four

by Arthur Conan Doyle

Contents

Chapter I. The Science of Deduction

Chapter II. The Statement of the Case

Chapter III. In Quest of a Solution

Chapter IV. The Story of the Bald-Headed Man

Chapter V. The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge

Chapter VI. Sherlock Holmes Gives a Demonstration

Chapter VII. The Episode of the Barrel

Chapter VIII. The Baker Street Irregulars

Chapter IX. A Break in the Chain

Chapter X. The End of the Islander

Chapter XI. The Great Agra Treasure

Chapter XII. The Strange Story of Jonathan Small

Chapter I

The Science of Deduction

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantel-piece and

his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long,

white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back

his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully

upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with

innumerable puncture-marks. Finally he thrust the sharp point home,

pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined

arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction.

Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but

custom had not reconciled my mind to it. On the contrary, from day to

day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled

nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to

protest. Again and again I had registered a vow that I should deliver

my soul upon the subject, but there was that in the cool, nonchalant

air of my companion which made him the last man with whom one would

care to take anything approaching to a liberty. His great powers, his

masterly manner, and the experience which I had had of his many

extraordinary qualities, all made me diffident and backward in crossing

him.

Yet upon that afternoon, whether it was the Beaune which I had taken

with my lunch, or the additional exasperation produced by the extreme

deliberation of his manner, I suddenly felt that I could hold out no

longer.

“Which is it to-day?” I asked,—“morphine or cocaine?”

He raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he

had opened. “It is cocaine,” he said,—“a seven-per-cent. solution.

Would you care to try it?”

“No, indeed,” I answered, brusquely. “My constitution has not got over

the Afghan campaign yet. I cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon

it.”

He smiled at my vehemence. “Perhaps you are right, Watson,” he said. “I

suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however,

so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its

secondary action is a matter of small moment.”

“But consider!” I said, earnestly. “Count the cost! Your brain may, as

you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid

process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a

permanent weakness. You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon

you. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. Why should you, for a

mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which

you have been endowed? Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to

another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to

some extent answerable.”

He did not seem offended. On the contrary, he put his finger-tips

together and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, like one who

has a relish for conversation.

“My mind,” he said, “rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me

work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate

analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then

with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence.

I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own

particular profession,—or rather created it, for I am the only one in

the world.”

“The only unofficial detective?” I said, raising my eyebrows.

“The only unofficial consulting detective,” he answered. “I am the last

and highest court of appeal in detection. When Gregson or Lestrade or

Athelney Jones are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their

normal state—the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an

expert, and pronounce a specialist’s opinion. I claim no credit in such

cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure

of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward. But

you have yourself had some experience of my methods of work in the

Jefferson Hope case.”

“Yes, indeed,” said I, cordially. “I was never so struck by anything in

my life. I even embodied it in a small brochure with the somewhat

fantastic title of ‘A Study in Scarlet.’”

He shook his head sadly. “I glanced over it,” said he. “Honestly, I

cannot congratulate you upon it. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact

science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner.

You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much

the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the

fifth proposition of Euclid.”

“But the romance was there,” I remonstrated. “I could not tamper with

the facts.”

“Some facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of

proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the

case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from

effects to causes by which I succeeded in unraveling it.”

I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially

designed to please him. I confess, too, that I was irritated by the

egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be

devoted to his own special doings. More than once during the years that

I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity

underlay my companion’s quiet and didactic manner. I made no remark,

however, but sat nursing my wounded leg. I had a Jezail bullet through

it some time before, and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it

ached wearily at every change of the weather.

“My practice has extended recently to the Continent,” said Holmes,

after a while, filling up his old brier-root pipe. “I was consulted

last week by François Le Villard, who, as you probably know, has come

rather to the front lately in the French detective service. He has all

the Celtic power of quick intuition, but he is deficient in the wide

range of exact knowledge which is essential to the higher developments

of his art. The case was concerned with a will, and possessed some

features of interest. I was able to refer him to two parallel cases,

the one at Riga in 1857, and the other at St. Louis in 1871, which have

suggested to him the true solution. Here is the letter which I had this

morning acknowledging my assistance.” He tossed over, as he spoke, a

crumpled sheet of foreign notepaper. I glanced my eyes down it,

catching a profusion of notes of admiration, with stray “magnifiques,”

“coup-de-maîtres,” and “tours-de-force,” all testifying to the ardent

admiration of the Frenchman.

“He speaks as a pupil to his master,” said I.

“Oh, he rates my assistance too highly,” said Sherlock Holmes, lightly.

“He has considerable gifts himself. He possesses two out of the three

qualities necessary for the ideal detective. He has the power of

observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge; and

that may come in time. He is now translating my small works into

French.”

“Your works?”

“Oh, didn’t you know?” he cried, laughing. “Yes, I have been guilty of

several monographs. They are all upon technical subjects. Here, for

example, is one ‘Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various

Tobaccoes.’ In it I enumerate a hundred and forty forms of cigar-,

cigarette-, and pipe-tobacco, with coloured plates illustrating the

difference in the ash. It is a point which is continually turning up in

criminal trials, and which is sometimes of supreme importance as a

clue. If you can say definitely, for example, that some murder has been

done by a man who was smoking an Indian lunkah, it obviously narrows

your field of search. To the trained eye there is as much difference

between the black ash of a Trichinopoly and the white fluff of

bird’s-eye as there is between a cabbage and a potato.”

“You have an extraordinary genius for minutiæ,” I remarked.

“I appreciate their importance. Here is my monograph upon the tracing

of footsteps, with some remarks upon the uses of plaster of Paris as a

preserver of impresses. Here, too, is a curious little work upon the

influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with lithotypes of the

hands of slaters, sailors, corkcutters, compositors, weavers, and

diamond-polishers. That is a matter of great practical interest to the

scientific detective,—especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in

discovering the antecedents of criminals. But I weary you with my

hobby.”

“Not at all,” I answered, earnestly. “It is of the greatest interest to

me, especially since I have had the opportunity of observing your

practical application of it. But you spoke just now of observation and

deduction. Surely the one to some extent implies the other.”

“Why, hardly,” he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his arm-chair,

and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. “For example,

observation shows me that you have been to the Wigmore Street

Post-Office this morning, but deduction lets me know that when there

you dispatched a telegram.”

“Right!” said I. “Right on both points! But I confess that I don’t see

how you arrived at it. It was a sudden impulse upon my part, and I have

mentioned it to no one.”

“It is simplicity itself,” he remarked, chuckling at my surprise,—“so

absurdly simple that an explanation is superfluous; and yet it may

serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. Observation

tells me that you have a little reddish mould adhering to your instep.

Just opposite the Wigmore Street Office they have taken up the pavement

and thrown up some earth which lies in such a way that it is difficult

to avoid treading in it in entering. The earth is of this peculiar

reddish tint which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the

neighbourhood. So much is observation. The rest is deduction.”

“How, then, did you deduce the telegram?”

“Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat

opposite to you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that

you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of post-cards. What could

you go into the post-office for, then, but to send a wire? Eliminate

all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”

“In this case it certainly is so,” I replied, after a little thought.

“The thing, however, is, as you say, of the simplest. Would you think

me impertinent if I were to put your theories to a more severe test?”

“On the contrary,” he answered, “it would prevent me from taking a

second dose of cocaine. I should be delighted to look into any problem

which you might submit to me.”

“I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object

in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it

in such a way that a trained observer might read it. Now, I have here a

watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you have the

kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the

late owner?”

I handed him over the watch with some slight feeling of amusement in my

heart, for the test was, as I thought, an impossible one, and I

intended it as a lesson against the somewhat dogmatic tone which he

occasionally assumed. He balanced the watch in his hand, gazed hard at

the dial, opened the back, and examined the works, first with his naked

eyes and then with a powerful convex lens. I could hardly keep from

smiling at his crestfallen face when he finally snapped the case to and

handed it back.

“There are hardly any data,” he remarked. “The watch has been recently

cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts.”

“You are right,” I answered. “It was cleaned before being sent to me.”

In my heart I accused my companion of putting forward a most lame and

impotent excuse to cover his failure. What data could he expect from an

uncleaned watch?

“Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely barren,” he

observed, staring up at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes.

“Subject to your correction, I should judge that the watch belonged to

your elder brother, who inherited it from your father.”

“That you gather, no doubt, from the H. W. upon the back?”

“Quite so. The W. suggests your own name. The date of the watch is

nearly fifty years back, and the initials are as old as the watch: so

it was made for the last generation. Jewelry usually descends to the

eldest son, and he is most likely to have the same name as the father.

Your father has, if I remember right, been dead many years. It has,

therefore, been in the hands of your eldest brother.”

“Right, so far,” said I. “Anything else?”

“He was a man of untidy habits,—very untidy and careless. He was left

with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time

in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally,

taking to drink, he died. That is all I can gather.”

I sprang from my chair and limped impatiently about the room with

considerable bitterness in my heart.

“This is unworthy of you, Holmes,” I said. “I could not have believed

that you would have descended to this. You have made inquires into the

history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this

knowledge in some fanciful way. You cannot expect me to believe that

you have read all this from his old watch! It is unkind, and, to speak

plainly, has a touch of charlatanism in it.”

“My dear doctor,” said he, kindly, “pray accept my apologies. Viewing

the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and

painful a thing it might be to you. I assure you, however, that I never

even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch.”

“Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts?

They are absolutely correct in every particular.”

“Ah, that is good luck. I could only say what was the balance of

probability. I did not at all expect to be so accurate.”

“But it was not mere guess-work?”

“No, no: I never guess. It is a shocking habit,—destructive to the

logical faculty. What seems strange to you is only so because you do

not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which

large inferences may depend. For example, I began by stating that your

brother was careless. When you observe the lower part of that

watch-case you notice that it is not only dinted in two places, but it

is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard

objects, such as coins or keys, in the same pocket. Surely it is no

great feat to assume that a man who treats a fifty-guinea watch so

cavalierly must be a careless man. Neither is it a very far-fetched

inference that a man who inherits one article of such value is pretty

well provided for in other respects.”

I nodded, to show that I followed his reasoning.

“It is very customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a

watch, to scratch the number of the ticket with a pin-point upon the

inside of the case. It is more handy than a label, as there is no risk

of the number being lost or transposed. There are no less than four

such numbers visible to my lens on the inside of this case.

Inference,—that your brother was often at low water. Secondary

inference,—that he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not

have redeemed the pledge. Finally, I ask you to look at the inner

plate, which contains the key-hole. Look at the thousands of scratches

all round the hole,—marks where the key has slipped. What sober man’s

key could have scored those grooves? But you will never see a

drunkard’s watch without them. He winds it at night, and he leaves

these traces of his unsteady hand. Where is the mystery in all this?”

“It is as clear as daylight,” I answered. “I regret the injustice which

I did you. I should have had more faith in your marvellous faculty. May

I ask whether you have any professional inquiry on foot at present?”

“None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brain-work. What else

is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary,

dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the

street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more

hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers,

doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is

commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those

which are commonplace have any function upon earth.”

I had opened my mouth to reply to this tirade, when with a crisp knock

our landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver.

“A young lady for you, sir,” she said, addressing my companion.

“Miss Mary Morstan,” he read. “Hum! I have no recollection of the name.

Ask the young lady to step up, Mrs. Hudson. Don’t go, doctor. I should

prefer that you remain.”

Chapter II

The Statement of the Case

Miss Morstan entered the room with a firm step and an outward composure

of manner. She was a blonde young lady, small, dainty, well gloved, and

dressed in the most perfect taste. There was, however, a plainness and

simplicity about her costume which bore with it a suggestion of limited

means. The dress was a sombre greyish beige, untrimmed and unbraided,

and she wore a small turban of the same dull hue, relieved only by a

suspicion of white feather in the side. Her face had neither regularity

of feature nor beauty of complexion, but her expression was sweet and

amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and

sympathetic. In an experience of women which extends over many nations

and three separate continents, I have never looked upon a face which

gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature. I could not

but observe that as she took the seat which Sherlock Holmes placed for

her, her lip trembled, her hand quivered, and she showed every sign of

intense inward agitation.

“I have come to you, Mr. Holmes,” she said, “because you once enabled

my employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester, to unravel a little domestic

complication. She was much impressed by your kindness and skill.”

“Mrs. Cecil Forrester,” he repeated thoughtfully. “I believe that I was

of some slight service to her. The case, however, as I remember it, was

a very simple one.”

“She did not think so. But at least you cannot say the same of mine. I

can hardly imagine anything more strange, more utterly inexplicable,

than the situation in which I find myself.”

Holmes rubbed his hands, and his eyes glistened. He leaned forward in

his chair with an expression of extraordinary concentration upon his

clear-cut, hawklike features. “State your case,” said he, in brisk,

business tones.

I felt that my position was an embarrassing one. “You will, I am sure,

excuse me,” I said, rising from my chair.

To my surprise, the young lady held up her gloved hand to detain me.

“If your friend,” she said, “would be good enough to stop, he might be

of inestimable service to me.”

I relapsed into my chair.

“Briefly,” she continued, “the facts are these. My father was an

officer in an Indian regiment who sent me home when I was quite a

child. My mother was dead, and I had no relative in England. I was

placed, however, in a comfortable boarding establishment at Edinburgh,

and there I remained until I was seventeen years of age. In the year

1878 my father, who was senior captain of his regiment, obtained twelve

months’ leave and came home. He telegraphed to me from London that he

had arrived all safe, and directed me to come down at once, giving the

Langham Hotel as his address. His message, as I remember, was full of

kindness and love. On reaching London I drove to the Langham, and was

informed that Captain Morstan was staying there, but that he had gone

out the night before and had not yet returned. I waited all day without

news of him. That night, on the advice of the manager of the hotel, I

communicated with the police, and next morning we advertised in all the

papers. Our inquiries led to no result; and from that day to this no

word has ever been heard of my unfortunate father. He came home with

his heart full of hope, to find some peace, some comfort, and instead—”

She put her hand to her throat, and a choking sob cut short the

sentence.

“The date?” asked Holmes, opening his note-book.

“He disappeared upon the 3rd of December, 1878,—nearly ten years ago.”

“His luggage?”

“Remained at the hotel. There was nothing in it to suggest a clue,—some

clothes, some books, and a considerable number of curiosities from the

Andaman Islands. He had been one of the officers in charge of the

convict-guard there.”

“Had he any friends in town?”

“Only one that we know of,—Major Sholto, of his own regiment, the 34th

Bombay Infantry. The major had retired some little time before, and

lived at Upper Norwood. We communicated with him, of course, but he did

not even know that his brother officer was in England.”

“A singular case,” remarked Holmes.

“I have not yet described to you the most singular part. About six

years ago—to be exact, upon the 4th of May, 1882—an advertisement

appeared in the \_Times\_ asking for the address of Miss Mary Morstan and

stating that it would be to her advantage to come forward. There was no

name or address appended. I had at that time just entered the family of

Mrs. Cecil Forrester in the capacity of governess. By her advice I

published my address in the advertisement column. The same day there

arrived through the post a small card-board box addressed to me, which

I found to contain a very large and lustrous pearl. No word of writing

was enclosed. Since then every year upon the same date there has always

appeared a similar box, containing a similar pearl, without any clue as

to the sender. They have been pronounced by an expert to be of a rare

variety and of considerable value. You can see for yourselves that they

are very handsome.” She opened a flat box as she spoke, and showed me

six of the finest pearls that I had ever seen.

“Your statement is most interesting,” said Sherlock Holmes. “Has

anything else occurred to you?”

“Yes, and no later than to-day. That is why I have come to you. This

morning I received this letter, which you will perhaps read for

yourself.”

“Thank you,” said Holmes. “The envelope too, please. Postmark, London,

S.W. Date, July 7. Hum! Man’s thumb-mark on corner,—probably postman.

Best quality paper. Envelopes at sixpence a packet. Particular man in

his stationery. No address. ‘Be at the third pillar from the left

outside the Lyceum Theatre to-night at seven o’clock. If you are

distrustful, bring two friends. You are a wronged woman, and shall have

justice. Do not bring police. If you do, all will be in vain. Your

unknown friend.’ Well, really, this is a very pretty little mystery.

What do you intend to do, Miss Morstan?”

“That is exactly what I want to ask you.”

“Then we shall most certainly go. You and I and—yes, why, Dr. Watson is

the very man. Your correspondent says two friends. He and I have worked

together before.”

“But would he come?” she asked, with something appealing in her voice

and expression.

“I should be proud and happy,” said I, fervently, “if I can be of any

service.”

“You are both very kind,” she answered. “I have led a retired life, and

have no friends whom I could appeal to. If I am here at six it will do,

I suppose?”

“You must not be later,” said Holmes. “There is one other point,

however. Is this handwriting the same as that upon the pearl-box

addresses?”

“I have them here,” she answered, producing half a dozen pieces of

paper.

“You are certainly a model client. You have the correct intuition. Let

us see, now.” He spread out the papers upon the table, and gave little

darting glances from one to the other. “They are disguised hands,

except the letter,” he said, presently, “but there can be no question

as to the authorship. See how the irrepressible Greek \_e\_ will break

out, and see the twirl of the final \_s\_. They are undoubtedly by the

same person. I should not like to suggest false hopes, Miss Morstan,

but is there any resemblance between this hand and that of your

father?”

“Nothing could be more unlike.”

“I expected to hear you say so. We shall look out for you, then, at

six. Pray allow me to keep the papers. I may look into the matter

before then. It is only half-past three. \_Au revoir\_, then.”

“\_Au revoir\_,” said our visitor, and, with a bright, kindly glance from

one to the other of us, she replaced her pearl-box in her bosom and

hurried away. Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly

down the street, until the grey turban and white feather were but a

speck in the sombre crowd.

“What a very attractive woman!” I exclaimed, turning to my companion.

He had lit his pipe again, and was leaning back with drooping eyelids.

“Is she?” he said, languidly. “I did not observe.”

“You really are an automaton,—a calculating-machine!” I cried. “There

is something positively inhuman in you at times.”

He smiled gently. “It is of the first importance,” he said, “not to

allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to

me a mere unit,—a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are

antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning

woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for

their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is

a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the

London poor.”

“In this case, however—”

“I never make exceptions. An exception disproves the rule. Have you

ever had occasion to study character in handwriting? What do you make

of this fellow’s scribble?”

“It is legible and regular,” I answered. “A man of business habits and

some force of character.”

Holmes shook his head. “Look at his long letters,” he said. “They

hardly rise above the common herd. That \_d\_ might be an \_a\_, and that

\_l\_ an \_e\_. Men of character always differentiate their long letters,

however illegibly they may write. There is vacillation in his \_k\_’s and

self-esteem in his capitals. I am going out now. I have some few

references to make. Let me recommend this book,—one of the most

remarkable ever penned. It is Winwood Reade’s ‘Martyrdom of Man.’ I

shall be back in an hour.”

I sat in the window with the volume in my hand, but my thoughts were

far from the daring speculations of the writer. My mind ran upon our

late visitor,—her smiles, the deep rich tones of her voice, the strange

mystery which overhung her life. If she were seventeen at the time of

her father’s disappearance she must be seven-and-twenty now,—a sweet

age, when youth has lost its self-consciousness and become a little

sobered by experience. So I sat and mused, until such dangerous

thoughts came into my head that I hurried away to my desk and plunged

furiously into the latest treatise upon pathology. What was I, an army

surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking-account, that I should

dare to think of such things? She was a unit, a factor,—nothing more.

If my future were black, it was better surely to face it like a man

than to attempt to brighten it by mere will-o’-the-wisps of the

imagination.

Chapter III

In Quest of a Solution

It was half-past five before Holmes returned. He was bright, eager, and

in excellent spirits,—a mood which in his case alternated with fits of

the blackest depression.

“There is no great mystery in this matter,” he said, taking the cup of

tea which I had poured out for him. “The facts appear to admit of only

one explanation.”

“What! you have solved it already?”

“Well, that would be too much to say. I have discovered a suggestive

fact, that is all. It is, however, \_very\_ suggestive. The details are

still to be added. I have just found, on consulting the back files of

the \_Times\_, that Major Sholto, of Upper Norwood, late of the 34th

Bombay Infantry, died upon the 28th of April, 1882.”

“I may be very obtuse, Holmes, but I fail to see what this suggests.”

“No? You surprise me. Look at it in this way, then. Captain Morstan

disappears. The only person in London whom he could have visited is

Major Sholto. Major Sholto denies having heard that he was in London.

Four years later Sholto dies. \_Within a week of his death\_ Captain

Morstan’s daughter receives a valuable present, which is repeated from

year to year, and now culminates in a letter which describes her as a

wronged woman. What wrong can it refer to except this deprivation of

her father? And why should the presents begin immediately after

Sholto’s death, unless it is that Sholto’s heir knows something of the

mystery and desires to make compensation? Have you any alternative

theory which will meet the facts?”

“But what a strange compensation! And how strangely made! Why, too,

should he write a letter now, rather than six years ago? Again, the

letter speaks of giving her justice. What justice can she have? It is

too much to suppose that her father is still alive. There is no other

injustice in her case that you know of.”

“There are difficulties; there are certainly difficulties,” said

Sherlock Holmes, pensively. “But our expedition of to-night will solve

them all. Ah, here is a four-wheeler, and Miss Morstan is inside. Are

you all ready? Then we had better go down, for it is a little past the

hour.”

I picked up my hat and my heaviest stick, but I observed that Holmes

took his revolver from his drawer and slipped it into his pocket. It

was clear that he thought that our night’s work might be a serious one.

Miss Morstan was muffled in a dark cloak, and her sensitive face was

composed, but pale. She must have been more than woman if she did not

feel some uneasiness at the strange enterprise upon which we were

embarking, yet her self-control was perfect, and she readily answered

the few additional questions which Sherlock Holmes put to her.

“Major Sholto was a very particular friend of papa’s,” she said. “His

letters were full of allusions to the major. He and papa were in

command of the troops at the Andaman Islands, so they were thrown a

great deal together. By the way, a curious paper was found in papa’s

desk which no one could understand. I don’t suppose that it is of the

slightest importance, but I thought you might care to see it, so I

brought it with me. It is here.”

Holmes unfolded the paper carefully and smoothed it out upon his knee.

He then very methodically examined it all over with his double lens.

“It is paper of native Indian manufacture,” he remarked. “It has at

some time been pinned to a board. The diagram upon it appears to be a

plan of part of a large building with numerous halls, corridors, and

passages. At one point is a small cross done in red ink, and above it

is ‘3.37 from left,’ in faded pencil-writing. In the left-hand corner

is a curious hieroglyphic like four crosses in a line with their arms

touching. Beside it is written, in very rough and coarse characters,

‘The sign of the four,—Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan,

Dost Akbar.’ No, I confess that I do not see how this bears upon the

matter. Yet it is evidently a document of importance. It has been kept

carefully in a pocket-book; for the one side is as clean as the other.”

“It was in his pocket-book that we found it.”

“Preserve it carefully, then, Miss Morstan, for it may prove to be of

use to us. I begin to suspect that this matter may turn out to be much

deeper and more subtle than I at first supposed. I must reconsider my

ideas.” He leaned back in the cab, and I could see by his drawn brow

and his vacant eye that he was thinking intently. Miss Morstan and I

chatted in an undertone about our present expedition and its possible

outcome, but our companion maintained his impenetrable reserve until

the end of our journey.

It was a September evening, and not yet seven o’clock, but the day had

been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city.

Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the

Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw

a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare

from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and

threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There

was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless

procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of

light,—sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all human kind, they

flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once

more. I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening,

with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make

me nervous and depressed. I could see from Miss Morstan’s manner that

she was suffering from the same feeling. Holmes alone could rise

superior to petty influences. He held his open note-book upon his knee,

and from time to time he jotted down figures and memoranda in the light

of his pocket-lantern.

At the Lyceum Theatre the crowds were already thick at the

side-entrances. In front a continuous stream of hansoms and

four-wheelers were rattling up, discharging their cargoes of

shirt-fronted men and beshawled, bediamonded women. We had hardly

reached the third pillar, which was our rendezvous, before a small,

dark, brisk man in the dress of a coachman accosted us.

“Are you the parties who come with Miss Morstan?” he asked.

“I am Miss Morstan, and these two gentlemen are my friends,” said she.

He bent a pair of wonderfully penetrating and questioning eyes upon us.

“You will excuse me, miss,” he said with a certain dogged manner, “but

I was to ask you to give me your word that neither of your companions

is a police-officer.”

“I give you my word on that,” she answered.

He gave a shrill whistle, on which a street Arab led across a

four-wheeler and opened the door. The man who had addressed us mounted

to the box, while we took our places inside. We had hardly done so

before the driver whipped up his horse, and we plunged away at a

furious pace through the foggy streets.

The situation was a curious one. We were driving to an unknown place,

on an unknown errand. Yet our invitation was either a complete

hoax,—which was an inconceivable hypothesis,—or else we had good reason

to think that important issues might hang upon our journey. Miss

Morstan’s demeanor was as resolute and collected as ever. I endeavored

to cheer and amuse her by reminiscences of my adventures in

Afghanistan; but, to tell the truth, I was myself so excited at our

situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were

slightly involved. To this day she declares that I told her one moving

anecdote as to how a musket looked into my tent at the dead of night,

and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it. At first I had some

idea as to the direction in which we were driving; but soon, what with

our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my

bearings, and knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long

way. Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and he muttered the

names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous

by-streets.

“Rochester Row,” said he. “Now Vincent Square. Now we come out on the

Vauxhall Bridge Road. We are making for the Surrey side, apparently.

Yes, I thought so. Now we are on the bridge. You can catch glimpses of

the river.”

We did indeed get a fleeting view of a stretch of the Thames with the

lamps shining upon the broad, silent water; but our cab dashed on, and

was soon involved in a labyrinth of streets upon the other side.

“Wordsworth Road,” said my companion. “Priory Road. Lark Hall Lane.

Stockwell Place. Robert Street. Cold Harbor Lane. Our quest does not

appear to take us to very fashionable regions.”

We had, indeed, reached a questionable and forbidding neighbourhood.

Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare

and tawdry brilliancy of public houses at the corner. Then came rows of

two-storied villas each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then

again interminable lines of new staring brick buildings,—the monster

tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country. At

last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace. None of the

other houses were inhabited, and that at which we stopped was as dark

as its neighbours, save for a single glimmer in the kitchen window. On

our knocking, however, the door was instantly thrown open by a Hindoo

servant clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a

yellow sash. There was something strangely incongruous in this Oriental

figure framed in the commonplace doorway of a third-rate suburban

dwelling-house.

“The Sahib awaits you,” said he, and even as he spoke there came a high

piping voice from some inner room. “Show them in to me, khitmutgar,” it

cried. “Show them straight in to me.”

Chapter IV

The Story of the Bald-Headed Man

We followed the Indian down a sordid and common passage, ill-lit and

worse furnished, until he came to a door upon the right, which he threw

open. A blaze of yellow light streamed out upon us, and in the centre

of the glare there stood a small man with a very high head, a bristle

of red hair all round the fringe of it, and a bald, shining scalp which

shot out from among it like a mountain-peak from fir-trees. He writhed

his hands together as he stood, and his features were in a perpetual

jerk, now smiling, now scowling, but never for an instant in repose.

Nature had given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow

and irregular teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly

passing his hand over the lower part of his face. In spite of his

obtrusive baldness, he gave the impression of youth. In point of fact

he had just turned his thirtieth year.

“Your servant, Miss Morstan,” he kept repeating, in a thin, high voice.

“Your servant, gentlemen. Pray step into my little sanctum. A small

place, miss, but furnished to my own liking. An oasis of art in the

howling desert of South London.”

We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he

invited us. In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond

of the first water in a setting of brass. The richest and glossiest of

curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to

expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of

amber-and-black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly

into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it

increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which

stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove

was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the

room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour.

“Mr. Thaddeus Sholto,” said the little man, still jerking and smiling.

“That is my name. You are Miss Morstan, of course. And these

gentlemen—”

“This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and this is Dr. Watson.”

“A doctor, eh?” cried he, much excited. “Have you your stethoscope?

Might I ask you—would you have the kindness? I have grave doubts as to

my mitral valve, if you would be so very good. The aortic I may rely

upon, but I should value your opinion upon the mitral.”

I listened to his heart, as requested, but was unable to find anything

amiss, save indeed that he was in an ecstasy of fear, for he shivered

from head to foot. “It appears to be normal,” I said. “You have no

cause for uneasiness.”

“You will excuse my anxiety, Miss Morstan,” he remarked, airily. “I am

a great sufferer, and I have long had suspicions as to that valve. I am

delighted to hear that they are unwarranted. Had your father, Miss

Morstan, refrained from throwing a strain upon his heart, he might have

been alive now.”

I could have struck the man across the face, so hot was I at this

callous and off-hand reference to so delicate a matter. Miss Morstan

sat down, and her face grew white to the lips. “I knew in my heart that

he was dead,” said she.

“I can give you every information,” said he, “and, what is more, I can

do you justice; and I will, too, whatever Brother Bartholomew may say.

I am so glad to have your friends here, not only as an escort to you,

but also as witnesses to what I am about to do and say. The three of us

can show a bold front to Brother Bartholomew. But let us have no

outsiders,—no police or officials. We can settle everything

satisfactorily among ourselves, without any interference. Nothing would

annoy Brother Bartholomew more than any publicity.” He sat down upon a

low settee and blinked at us inquiringly with his weak, watery blue

eyes.

“For my part,” said Holmes, “whatever you may choose to say will go no

further.”

I nodded to show my agreement.

“That is well! That is well!” said he. “May I offer you a glass of

Chianti, Miss Morstan? Or of Tokay? I keep no other wines. Shall I open

a flask? No? Well, then, I trust that you have no objection to

tobacco-smoke, to the mild balsamic odour of the Eastern tobacco. I am

a little nervous, and I find my hookah an invaluable sedative.” He

applied a taper to the great bowl, and the smoke bubbled merrily

through the rose-water. We sat all three in a semi-circle, with our

heads advanced, and our chins upon our hands, while the strange, jerky

little fellow, with his high, shining head, puffed uneasily in the

centre.

“When I first determined to make this communication to you,” said he,

“I might have given you my address, but I feared that you might

disregard my request and bring unpleasant people with you. I took the

liberty, therefore, of making an appointment in such a way that my man

Williams might be able to see you first. I have complete confidence in

his discretion, and he had orders, if he were dissatisfied, to proceed

no further in the matter. You will excuse these precautions, but I am a

man of somewhat retiring, and I might even say refined, tastes, and

there is nothing more unæsthetic than a policeman. I have a natural

shrinking from all forms of rough materialism. I seldom come in contact

with the rough crowd. I live, as you see, with some little atmosphere

of elegance around me. I may call myself a patron of the arts. It is my

weakness. The landscape is a genuine Corot, and, though a connoisseur

might perhaps throw a doubt upon that Salvator Rosa, there cannot be

the least question about the Bouguereau. I am partial to the modern

French school.”

“You will excuse me, Mr. Sholto,” said Miss Morstan, “but I am here at

your request to learn something which you desire to tell me. It is very

late, and I should desire the interview to be as short as possible.”

“At the best it must take some time,” he answered; “for we shall

certainly have to go to Norwood and see Brother Bartholomew. We shall

all go and try if we can get the better of Brother Bartholomew. He is

very angry with me for taking the course which has seemed right to me.

I had quite high words with him last night. You cannot imagine what a

terrible fellow he is when he is angry.”

“If we are to go to Norwood it would perhaps be as well to start at

once,” I ventured to remark.

He laughed until his ears were quite red. “That would hardly do,” he

cried. “I don’t know what he would say if I brought you in that sudden

way. No, I must prepare you by showing you how we all stand to each

other. In the first place, I must tell you that there are several

points in the story of which I am myself ignorant. I can only lay the

facts before you as far as I know them myself.

“My father was, as you may have guessed, Major John Sholto, once of the

Indian army. He retired some eleven years ago, and came to live at

Pondicherry Lodge in Upper Norwood. He had prospered in India, and

brought back with him a considerable sum of money, a large collection

of valuable curiosities, and a staff of native servants. With these

advantages he bought himself a house, and lived in great luxury. My

twin-brother Bartholomew and I were the only children.

“I very well remember the sensation which was caused by the

disappearance of Captain Morstan. We read the details in the papers,

and, knowing that he had been a friend of our father’s, we discussed

the case freely in his presence. He used to join in our speculations as

to what could have happened. Never for an instant did we suspect that

he had the whole secret hidden in his own breast,—that of all men he

alone knew the fate of Arthur Morstan.

“We did know, however, that some mystery—some positive danger—overhung

our father. He was very fearful of going out alone, and he always

employed two prize-fighters to act as porters at Pondicherry Lodge.

Williams, who drove you to-night, was one of them. He was once

light-weight champion of England. Our father would never tell us what

it was he feared, but he had a most marked aversion to men with wooden

legs. On one occasion he actually fired his revolver at a wooden-legged

man, who proved to be a harmless tradesman canvassing for orders. We

had to pay a large sum to hush the matter up. My brother and I used to

think this a mere whim of my father’s, but events have since led us to

change our opinion.

“Early in 1882 my father received a letter from India which was a great

shock to him. He nearly fainted at the breakfast-table when he opened

it, and from that day he sickened to his death. What was in the letter

we could never discover, but I could see as he held it that it was

short and written in a scrawling hand. He had suffered for years from

an enlarged spleen, but he now became rapidly worse, and towards the

end of April we were informed that he was beyond all hope, and that he

wished to make a last communication to us.

“When we entered his room he was propped up with pillows and breathing

heavily. He besought us to lock the door and to come upon either side

of the bed. Then, grasping our hands, he made a remarkable statement to

us, in a voice which was broken as much by emotion as by pain. I shall

try and give it to you in his own very words.

“‘I have only one thing,’ he said, ‘which weighs upon my mind at this

supreme moment. It is my treatment of poor Morstan’s orphan. The cursed

greed which has been my besetting sin through life has withheld from

her the treasure, half at least of which should have been hers. And yet

I have made no use of it myself,—so blind and foolish a thing is

avarice. The mere feeling of possession has been so dear to me that I

could not bear to share it with another. See that chaplet dipped with

pearls beside the quinine-bottle. Even that I could not bear to part

with, although I had got it out with the design of sending it to her.

You, my sons, will give her a fair share of the Agra treasure. But send

her nothing—not even the chaplet—until I am gone. After all, men have

been as bad as this and have recovered.

“‘I will tell you how Morstan died,’ he continued. ‘He had suffered for

years from a weak heart, but he concealed it from every one. I alone

knew it. When in India, he and I, through a remarkable chain of

circumstances, came into possession of a considerable treasure. I

brought it over to England, and on the night of Morstan’s arrival he

came straight over here to claim his share. He walked over from the

station, and was admitted by my faithful old Lal Chowdar, who is now

dead. Morstan and I had a difference of opinion as to the division of

the treasure, and we came to heated words. Morstan had sprung out of

his chair in a paroxysm of anger, when he suddenly pressed his hand to

his side, his face turned a dusky hue, and he fell backwards, cutting

his head against the corner of the treasure-chest. When I stooped over

him I found, to my horror, that he was dead.

“‘For a long time I sat half distracted, wondering what I should do. My

first impulse was, of course, to call for assistance; but I could not

but recognise that there was every chance that I would be accused of

his murder. His death at the moment of a quarrel, and the gash in his

head, would be black against me. Again, an official inquiry could not

be made without bringing out some facts about the treasure, which I was

particularly anxious to keep secret. He had told me that no soul upon

earth knew where he had gone. There seemed to be no necessity why any

soul ever should know.

“‘I was still pondering over the matter, when, looking up, I saw my

servant, Lal Chowdar, in the doorway. He stole in and bolted the door

behind him. “Do not fear, Sahib,” he said. “No one need know that you

have killed him. Let us hide him away, and who is the wiser?” “I did

not kill him,” said I. Lal Chowdar shook his head and smiled. “I heard

it all, Sahib,” said he. “I heard you quarrel, and I heard the blow.

But my lips are sealed. All are asleep in the house. Let us put him

away together.” That was enough to decide me. If my own servant could

not believe my innocence, how could I hope to make it good before

twelve foolish tradesmen in a jury-box? Lal Chowdar and I disposed of

the body that night, and within a few days the London papers were full

of the mysterious disappearance of Captain Morstan. You will see from

what I say that I can hardly be blamed in the matter. My fault lies in

the fact that we concealed not only the body, but also the treasure,

and that I have clung to Morstan’s share as well as to my own. I wish

you, therefore, to make restitution. Put your ears down to my mouth.

The treasure is hidden in—’

“At this instant a horrible change came over his expression; his eyes

stared wildly, his jaw dropped, and he yelled, in a voice which I can

never forget, ‘Keep him out! For Christ’s sake keep him out!’ We both

stared round at the window behind us upon which his gaze was fixed. A

face was looking in at us out of the darkness. We could see the

whitening of the nose where it was pressed against the glass. It was a

bearded, hairy face, with wild cruel eyes and an expression of

concentrated malevolence. My brother and I rushed towards the window,

but the man was gone. When we returned to my father his head had

dropped and his pulse had ceased to beat.

“We searched the garden that night, but found no sign of the intruder,

save that just under the window a single footmark was visible in the

flower-bed. But for that one trace, we might have thought that our

imaginations had conjured up that wild, fierce face. We soon, however,

had another and a more striking proof that there were secret agencies

at work all round us. The window of my father’s room was found open in

the morning, his cupboards and boxes had been rifled, and upon his

chest was fixed a torn piece of paper, with the words ‘The sign of the

four’ scrawled across it. What the phrase meant, or who our secret

visitor may have been, we never knew. As far as we can judge, none of

my father’s property had been actually stolen, though everything had

been turned out. My brother and I naturally associated this peculiar

incident with the fear which haunted my father during his life; but it

is still a complete mystery to us.”

The little man stopped to relight his hookah and puffed thoughtfully

for a few moments. We had all sat absorbed, listening to his

extraordinary narrative. At the short account of her father’s death

Miss Morstan had turned deadly white, and for a moment I feared that

she was about to faint. She rallied however, on drinking a glass of

water which I quietly poured out for her from a Venetian carafe upon

the side-table. Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair with an

abstracted expression and the lids drawn low over his glittering eyes.

As I glanced at him I could not but think how on that very day he had

complained bitterly of the commonplaceness of life. Here at least was a

problem which would tax his sagacity to the utmost. Mr. Thaddeus Sholto

looked from one to the other of us with an obvious pride at the effect

which his story had produced, and then continued between the puffs of

his overgrown pipe.

“My brother and I,” said he, “were, as you may imagine, much excited as

to the treasure which my father had spoken of. For weeks and for months

we dug and delved in every part of the garden, without discovering its

whereabouts. It was maddening to think that the hiding-place was on his

very lips at the moment that he died. We could judge the splendour of

the missing riches by the chaplet which he had taken out. Over this

chaplet my brother Bartholomew and I had some little discussion. The

pearls were evidently of great value, and he was averse to part with

them, for, between friends, my brother was himself a little inclined to

my father’s fault. He thought, too, that if we parted with the chaplet

it might give rise to gossip and finally bring us into trouble. It was

all that I could do to persuade him to let me find out Miss Morstan’s

address and send her a detached pearl at fixed intervals, so that at

least she might never feel destitute.”

“It was a kindly thought,” said our companion, earnestly. “It was

extremely good of you.”

The little man waved his hand deprecatingly. “We were your trustees,”

he said. “That was the view which I took of it, though Brother

Bartholomew could not altogether see it in that light. We had plenty of

money ourselves. I desired no more. Besides, it would have been such

bad taste to have treated a young lady in so scurvy a fashion. ‘Le

mauvais goût mène au crime.’ The French have a very neat way of putting

these things. Our difference of opinion on this subject went so far

that I thought it best to set up rooms for myself: so I left

Pondicherry Lodge, taking the old khitmutgar and Williams with me.

Yesterday, however, I learn that an event of extreme importance has

occurred. The treasure has been discovered. I instantly communicated

with Miss Morstan, and it only remains for us to drive out to Norwood

and demand our share. I explained my views last night to Brother

Bartholomew: so we shall be expected, if not welcome, visitors.”

Mr. Thaddeus Sholto ceased, and sat twitching on his luxurious settee.

We all remained silent, with our thoughts upon the new development

which the mysterious business had taken. Holmes was the first to spring

to his feet.

“You have done well, sir, from first to last,” said he. “It is possible

that we may be able to make you some small return by throwing some

light upon that which is still dark to you. But, as Miss Morstan

remarked just now, it is late, and we had best put the matter through

without delay.”

Our new acquaintance very deliberately coiled up the tube of his

hookah, and produced from behind a curtain a very long befrogged

topcoat with Astrakhan collar and cuffs. This he buttoned tightly up,

in spite of the extreme closeness of the night, and finished his attire

by putting on a rabbit-skin cap with hanging lappets which covered the

ears, so that no part of him was visible save his mobile and peaky

face. “My health is somewhat fragile,” he remarked, as he led the way

down the passage. “I am compelled to be a valetudinarian.”

Our cab was awaiting us outside, and our programme was evidently

prearranged, for the driver started off at once at a rapid pace.

Thaddeus Sholto talked incessantly, in a voice which rose high above

the rattle of the wheels.

“Bartholomew is a clever fellow,” said he. “How do you think he found

out where the treasure was? He had come to the conclusion that it was

somewhere indoors: so he worked out all the cubic space of the house,

and made measurements everywhere, so that not one inch should be

unaccounted for. Among other things, he found that the height of the

building was seventy-four feet, but on adding together the heights of

all the separate rooms, and making every allowance for the space

between, which he ascertained by borings, he could not bring the total

to more than seventy feet. There were four feet unaccounted for. These

could only be at the top of the building. He knocked a hole, therefore,

in the lath-and-plaster ceiling of the highest room, and there, sure

enough, he came upon another little garret above it, which had been

sealed up and was known to no one. In the centre stood the

treasure-chest, resting upon two rafters. He lowered it through the

hole, and there it lies. He computes the value of the jewels at not

less than half a million sterling.”

At the mention of this gigantic sum we all stared at one another

open-eyed. Miss Morstan, could we secure her rights, would change from

a needy governess to the richest heiress in England. Surely it was the

place of a loyal friend to rejoice at such news; yet I am ashamed to

say that selfishness took me by the soul, and that my heart turned as

heavy as lead within me. I stammered out some few halting words of

congratulation, and then sat downcast, with my head drooped, deaf to

the babble of our new acquaintance. He was clearly a confirmed

hypochondriac, and I was dreamily conscious that he was pouring forth

interminable trains of symptoms, and imploring information as to the

composition and action of innumerable quack nostrums, some of which he

bore about in a leather case in his pocket. I trust that he may not

remember any of the answers which I gave him that night. Holmes

declares that he overheard me caution him against the great danger of

taking more than two drops of castor oil, while I recommended

strychnine in large doses as a sedative. However that may be, I was

certainly relieved when our cab pulled up with a jerk and the coachman

sprang down to open the door.

“This, Miss Morstan, is Pondicherry Lodge,” said Mr. Thaddeus Sholto,

as he handed her out.

Chapter V

The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge

It was nearly eleven o’clock when we reached this final stage of our

night’s adventures. We had left the damp fog of the great city behind

us, and the night was fairly fine. A warm wind blew from the westward,

and heavy clouds moved slowly across the sky, with half a moon peeping

occasionally through the rifts. It was clear enough to see for some

distance, but Thaddeus Sholto took down one of the side-lamps from the

carriage to give us a better light upon our way.

Pondicherry Lodge stood in its own grounds, and was girt round with a

very high stone wall topped with broken glass. A single narrow

iron-clamped door formed the only means of entrance. On this our guide

knocked with a peculiar postman-like rat-tat.

“Who is there?” cried a gruff voice from within.

“It is I, McMurdo. You surely know my knock by this time.”

There was a grumbling sound and a clanking and jarring of keys. The

door swung heavily back, and a short, deep-chested man stood in the

opening, with the yellow light of the lantern shining upon his

protruded face and twinkling distrustful eyes.

“That you, Mr. Thaddeus? But who are the others? I had no orders about

them from the master.”

“No, McMurdo? You surprise me! I told my brother last night that I

should bring some friends.”

“He ain’t been out o’ his room to-day, Mr. Thaddeus, and I have no

orders. You know very well that I must stick to regulations. I can let

you in, but your friends must just stop where they are.”

This was an unexpected obstacle. Thaddeus Sholto looked about him in a

perplexed and helpless manner. “This is too bad of you, McMurdo!” he

said. “If I guarantee them, that is enough for you. There is the young

lady, too. She cannot wait on the public road at this hour.”

“Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus,” said the porter, inexorably. “Folk may be

friends o’ yours, and yet no friends o’ the master’s. He pays me well

to do my duty, and my duty I’ll do. I don’t know none o’ your friends.”

“Oh, yes you do, McMurdo,” cried Sherlock Holmes, genially. “I don’t

think you can have forgotten me. Don’t you remember the amateur who

fought three rounds with you at Alison’s rooms on the night of your

benefit four years back?”

“Not Mr. Sherlock Holmes!” roared the prize-fighter. “God’s truth! how

could I have mistook you? If instead o’ standin’ there so quiet you had

just stepped up and given me that cross-hit of yours under the jaw, I’d

ha’ known you without a question. Ah, you’re one that has wasted your

gifts, you have! You might have aimed high, if you had joined the

fancy.”

“You see, Watson, if all else fails me I have still one of the

scientific professions open to me,” said Holmes, laughing. “Our friend

won’t keep us out in the cold now, I am sure.”

“In you come, sir, in you come,—you and your friends,” he answered.

“Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus, but orders are very strict. Had to be

certain of your friends before I let them in.”

Inside, a gravel path wound through desolate grounds to a huge clump of

a house, square and prosaic, all plunged in shadow save where a

moonbeam struck one corner and glimmered in a garret window. The vast

size of the building, with its gloom and its deathly silence, struck a

chill to the heart. Even Thaddeus Sholto seemed ill at ease, and the

lantern quivered and rattled in his hand.

“I cannot understand it,” he said. “There must be some mistake. I

distinctly told Bartholomew that we should be here, and yet there is no

light in his window. I do not know what to make of it.”

“Does he always guard the premises in this way?” asked Holmes.

“Yes; he has followed my father’s custom. He was the favourite son, you

know, and I sometimes think that my father may have told him more than

he ever told me. That is Bartholomew’s window up there where the

moonshine strikes. It is quite bright, but there is no light from

within, I think.”

“None,” said Holmes. “But I see the glint of a light in that little

window beside the door.”

“Ah, that is the housekeeper’s room. That is where old Mrs. Bernstone

sits. She can tell us all about it. But perhaps you would not mind

waiting here for a minute or two, for if we all go in together and she

has no word of our coming she may be alarmed. But hush! what is that?”

He held up the lantern, and his hand shook until the circles of light

flickered and wavered all round us. Miss Morstan seized my wrist, and

we all stood with thumping hearts, straining our ears. From the great

black house there sounded through the silent night the saddest and most

pitiful of sounds,—the shrill, broken whimpering of a frightened woman.

“It is Mrs. Bernstone,” said Sholto. “She is the only woman in the

house. Wait here. I shall be back in a moment.” He hurried for the

door, and knocked in his peculiar way. We could see a tall old woman

admit him, and sway with pleasure at the very sight of him.

“Oh, Mr. Thaddeus, sir, I am so glad you have come! I am so glad you

have come, Mr. Thaddeus, sir!” We heard her reiterated rejoicings until

the door was closed and her voice died away into a muffled monotone.

Our guide had left us the lantern. Holmes swung it slowly round, and

peered keenly at the house, and at the great rubbish-heaps which

cumbered the grounds. Miss Morstan and I stood together, and her hand

was in mine. A wondrous subtle thing is love, for here were we two who

had never seen each other before that day, between whom no word or even

look of affection had ever passed, and yet now in an hour of trouble

our hands instinctively sought for each other. I have marvelled at it

since, but at the time it seemed the most natural thing that I should

go out to her so, and, as she has often told me, there was in her also

the instinct to turn to me for comfort and protection. So we stood hand

in hand, like two children, and there was peace in our hearts for all

the dark things that surrounded us.

“What a strange place!” she said, looking round.

“It looks as though all the moles in England had been let loose in it.

I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat,

where the prospectors had been at work.”

“And from the same cause,” said Holmes. “These are the traces of the

treasure-seekers. You must remember that they were six years looking

for it. No wonder that the grounds look like a gravel-pit.”

At that moment the door of the house burst open, and Thaddeus Sholto

came running out, with his hands thrown forward and terror in his eyes.

“There is something amiss with Bartholomew!” he cried. “I am

frightened! My nerves cannot stand it.” He was, indeed, half blubbering

with fear, and his twitching feeble face peeping out from the great

Astrakhan collar had the helpless appealing expression of a terrified

child.

“Come into the house,” said Holmes, in his crisp, firm way.

“Yes, do!” pleaded Thaddeus Sholto. “I really do not feel equal to

giving directions.”

We all followed him into the housekeeper’s room, which stood upon the

left-hand side of the passage. The old woman was pacing up and down

with a scared look and restless picking fingers, but the sight of Miss

Morstan appeared to have a soothing effect upon her.

“God bless your sweet calm face!” she cried, with an hysterical sob.

“It does me good to see you. Oh, but I have been sorely tried this

day!”

Our companion patted her thin, work-worn hand, and murmured some few

words of kindly womanly comfort which brought the colour back into the

other’s bloodless cheeks.

“Master has locked himself in and will not answer me,” she explained.

“All day I have waited to hear from him, for he often likes to be

alone; but an hour ago I feared that something was amiss, so I went up

and peeped through the key-hole. You must go up, Mr. Thaddeus,—you must

go up and look for yourself. I have seen Mr. Bartholomew Sholto in joy

and in sorrow for ten long years, but I never saw him with such a face

on him as that.”

Sherlock Holmes took the lamp and led the way, for Thaddeus Sholto’s

teeth were chattering in his head. So shaken was he that I had to pass

my hand under his arm as we went up the stairs, for his knees were

trembling under him. Twice as we ascended Holmes whipped his lens out

of his pocket and carefully examined marks which appeared to me to be

mere shapeless smudges of dust upon the cocoa-nut matting which served

as a stair-carpet. He walked slowly from step to step, holding the

lamp, and shooting keen glances to right and left. Miss Morstan had

remained behind with the frightened housekeeper.

The third flight of stairs ended in a straight passage of some length,

with a great picture in Indian tapestry upon the right of it and three

doors upon the left. Holmes advanced along it in the same slow and

methodical way, while we kept close at his heels, with our long black

shadows streaming backwards down the corridor. The third door was that

which we were seeking. Holmes knocked without receiving any answer, and

then tried to turn the handle and force it open. It was locked on the

inside, however, and by a broad and powerful bolt, as we could see when

we set our lamp up against it. The key being turned, however, the hole

was not entirely closed. Sherlock Holmes bent down to it, and instantly

rose again with a sharp intaking of the breath.

“There is something devilish in this, Watson,” said he, more moved than

I had ever before seen him. “What do you make of it?”

I stooped to the hole, and recoiled in horror. Moonlight was streaming

into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shifty radiance.

Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, in the air, for all

beneath was in shadow, there hung a face,—the very face of our

companion Thaddeus. There was the same high, shining head, the same

circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. The

features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural

grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the

nerves than any scowl or contortion. So like was the face to that of

our little friend that I looked round at him to make sure that he was

indeed with us. Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us

that his brother and he were twins.

“This is terrible!” I said to Holmes. “What is to be done?”

“The door must come down,” he answered, and, springing against it, he

put all his weight upon the lock. It creaked and groaned, but did not

yield. Together we flung ourselves upon it once more, and this time it

gave way with a sudden snap, and we found ourselves within Bartholomew

Sholto’s chamber.

It appeared to have been fitted up as a chemical laboratory. A double

line of glass-stoppered bottles was drawn up upon the wall opposite the

door, and the table was littered over with Bunsen burners, test-tubes,

and retorts. In the corners stood carboys of acid in wicker baskets.

One of these appeared to leak or to have been broken, for a stream of

dark-coloured liquid had trickled out from it, and the air was heavy

with a peculiarly pungent, tar-like odour. A set of steps stood at one

side of the room, in the midst of a litter of lath and plaster, and

above them there was an opening in the ceiling large enough for a man

to pass through. At the foot of the steps a long coil of rope was

thrown carelessly together.

By the table, in a wooden arm-chair, the master of the house was seated

all in a heap, with his head sunk upon his left shoulder, and that

ghastly, inscrutable smile upon his face. He was stiff and cold, and

had clearly been dead many hours. It seemed to me that not only his

features but all his limbs were twisted and turned in the most

fantastic fashion. By his hand upon the table there lay a peculiar

instrument,—a brown, close-grained stick, with a stone head like a

hammer, rudely lashed on with coarse twine. Beside it was a torn sheet

of note-paper with some words scrawled upon it. Holmes glanced at it,

and then handed it to me.

“You see,” he said, with a significant raising of the eyebrows.

In the light of the lantern I read, with a thrill of horror, “The sign

of the four.”

“In God’s name, what does it all mean?” I asked.

“It means murder,” said he, stooping over the dead man. “Ah, I expected

it. Look here!” He pointed to what looked like a long, dark thorn stuck

in the skin just above the ear.

“It looks like a thorn,” said I.

“It is a thorn. You may pick it out. But be careful, for it is

poisoned.”

I took it up between my finger and thumb. It came away from the skin so

readily that hardly any mark was left behind. One tiny speck of blood

showed where the puncture had been.

“This is all an insoluble mystery to me,” said I. “It grows darker

instead of clearer.”

“On the contrary,” he answered, “it clears every instant. I only

require a few missing links to have an entirely connected case.”

We had almost forgotten our companion’s presence since we entered the

chamber. He was still standing in the doorway, the very picture of

terror, wringing his hands and moaning to himself. Suddenly, however,

he broke out into a sharp, querulous cry.

“The treasure is gone!” he said. “They have robbed him of the treasure!

There is the hole through which we lowered it. I helped him to do it! I

was the last person who saw him! I left him here last night, and I

heard him lock the door as I came downstairs.”

“What time was that?”

“It was ten o’clock. And now he is dead, and the police will be called

in, and I shall be suspected of having had a hand in it. Oh, yes, I am

sure I shall. But you don’t think so, gentlemen? Surely you don’t think

that it was I? Is it likely that I would have brought you here if it

were I? Oh, dear! oh, dear! I know that I shall go mad!” He jerked his

arms and stamped his feet in a kind of convulsive frenzy.

“You have no reason for fear, Mr. Sholto,” said Holmes, kindly, putting

his hand upon his shoulder. “Take my advice, and drive down to the

station to report this matter to the police. Offer to assist them in

every way. We shall wait here until your return.”

The little man obeyed in a half-stupefied fashion, and we heard him

stumbling down the stairs in the dark.

Chapter VI

Sherlock Holmes Gives a Demonstration

“Now, Watson,” said Holmes, rubbing his hands, “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 over-confidence.

Simple as the case seems now, there may be something deeper underlying

it.”

“Simple!” I ejaculated.

“Surely,” said he, with something of the air of a clinical professor

expounding to his class. “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?” He carried the lamp across

to it, muttering his observations aloud the while, but addressing them

to himself rather than to me. “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 looked at the round, well-defined muddy discs. “This is not a

footmark,” said I.

“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 the broad metal heel, and beside it is the mark of the

timber-toe.”

“It is the wooden-legged man.”

“Quite so. But there has been some one else,—a very able and efficient

ally. Could you scale that wall, doctor?”

I looked out of the open window. The moon still shone brightly on that

angle of the house. We were a good sixty feet from the ground, and,

look where I would, I could see no foothold, nor as much as a crevice

in the brick-work.

“It is absolutely impossible,” I answered.

“Without aid it is so. But suppose you had a friend up here who lowered

you this good stout rope which I see in the corner, securing one end of

it to this great hook in 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 that he originally came. As a minor point it may be

noted,” he continued, fingering the rope, “that our wooden-legged

friend, though a fair climber, was not a professional sailor. His hands

were far from horny. My lens discloses more than one blood-mark,

especially towards the end of the rope, from which I gather that he

slipped down with such velocity that he took the skin off his hand.”

“This is all very well,” said I, “but the thing becomes more

unintelligible than ever. How about this mysterious ally? How came he

into the room?”

“Yes, the ally!” repeated Holmes, pensively. “There are features of

interest about this ally. He lifts the case from the regions of the

commonplace. I fancy that this ally breaks fresh ground in the annals

of crime in this country,—though parallel cases suggest themselves from

India, and, if my memory serves me, from Senegambia.”

“How came he, then?” I reiterated. “The door is locked, the window is

inaccessible. Was it through the chimney?”

“The grate is much too small,” he answered. “I had already considered

that possibility.”

“How then?” I persisted.

“You will not apply my precept,” he said, shaking his head. “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?”

“He came through the hole in the roof,” I cried.

“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 researches to the room

above,—the secret room in which the treasure was found.”

He mounted the steps, and, seizing a rafter with either hand, he swung

himself up into the garret. Then, lying on his face, he reached down

for the lamp and held it while I followed him.

The chamber in which we found ourselves was about ten feet one way and

six the other. The floor was formed by the rafters, with thin

lath-and-plaster between, so that in walking one had to step from beam

to beam. The roof ran up to an apex, and was evidently the inner shell

of the true roof of the house. There was no furniture of any sort, and

the accumulated dust of years lay thick upon the floor.

“Here you are, you see,” said Sherlock Holmes, putting his hand against

the sloping wall. “This is a trap-door 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. Let us see

if we can find any other traces of his individuality.”

He held down the lamp to the floor, and as he did so I saw for the

second time that night a startled, surprised look come over his face.

For myself, as I followed his gaze my skin was cold under my clothes.

The floor was covered thickly with the prints of a naked foot,—clear,

well defined, perfectly formed, but scarce half the size of those of an

ordinary man.

“Holmes,” I said, in a whisper, “a child has done the horrid thing.”

He had recovered his self-possession in an instant. “I was staggered

for the moment,” he said, “but the thing is quite natural. My memory

failed me, or I should have been able to foretell it. There is nothing

more to be learned here. Let us go down.”

“What is your theory, then, as to those footmarks?” I asked, eagerly,

when we had regained the lower room once more.

“My dear Watson, try a little analysis yourself,” said he, with a touch

of impatience. “You know my methods. Apply them, and it will be

instructive to compare results.”

“I cannot conceive anything which will cover the facts,” I answered.

“It will be clear enough to you soon,” he said, in an off-hand way. “I

think that there is nothing else of importance here, but I will look.”

He whipped out his lens and a tape measure, and hurried about the room

on his knees, measuring, comparing, examining, with his long thin nose

only a few inches from the planks, and his beady eyes gleaming and

deep-set like those of a bird. So swift, silent, and furtive were his

movements, like those of a trained blood-hound picking out a scent,

that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made

had he turned his energy and sagacity against the law, instead of

exerting them in its defence. As he hunted about, he kept muttering to

himself, and finally he broke out into a loud crow of delight.

“We are certainly in luck,” said he. “We ought to have very little

trouble now. Number One has had the misfortune to tread in the

creosote. You can see the outline of the edge of his small foot here at

the side of this evil-smelling mess. The carboy has been cracked, You

see, and the stuff has leaked out.”

“What then?” I asked.

“Why, we have got him, that’s all,” said he. “I know a dog that would

follow that scent to the world’s end. If a pack can track a trailed

herring across a shire, how far can a specially-trained hound follow so

pungent a smell as this? It sounds like a sum in the rule of three. The

answer should give us the—But halloa! here are the accredited

representatives of the law.”

Heavy steps and the clamour of loud voices were audible from below, and

the hall door shut with a loud crash.

“Before they come,” said Holmes, “just put your hand here on this poor

fellow’s arm, and here on his leg. What do you feel?”

“The muscles are as hard as a board,” I answered.

“Quite so. They are in a state of extreme contraction, far exceeding

the usual \_rigor mortis\_. Coupled with this distortion of the face,

this Hippocratic smile, or ‘\_risus sardonicus\_,’ as the old writers

called it, what conclusion would it suggest to your mind?”

“Death from some powerful vegetable alkaloid,” I answered,—“some

strychnine-like substance which would produce tetanus.”

“That was the idea which occurred to me the instant I saw the drawn

muscles of the face. On getting into the room I at once looked for the

means by which the poison had entered the system. As you saw, I

discovered a thorn which had been driven or shot with no great force

into the scalp. You observe that the part struck was that which would

be turned towards the hole in the ceiling if the man were erect in his

chair. Now examine the thorn.”

I took it up gingerly and held it in the light of the lantern. It was

long, sharp, and black, with a glazed look near the point as though

some gummy substance had dried upon it. The blunt end had been trimmed

and rounded off with a knife.

“Is that an English thorn?” he asked.

“No, it certainly is not.”

“With all these data you should be able to draw some just inference.

But here are the regulars; so the auxiliary forces may beat a retreat.”

As he spoke, the steps which had been coming nearer sounded loudly on

the passage, and a very stout, portly man in a grey suit strode heavily

into the room. He was red-faced, burly and plethoric, with a pair of

very small twinkling eyes which looked keenly out from between swollen

and puffy pouches. He was closely followed by an inspector in uniform,

and by the still palpitating Thaddeus Sholto.

“Here’s a business!” he cried, in a muffled, husky voice. “Here’s a

pretty business! But who are all these? Why, the house seems to be as

full as a rabbit-warren!”

“I think you must recollect me, Mr. Athelney Jones,” said Holmes,

quietly.

“Why, of course I do!” he wheezed. “It’s Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the

theorist. Remember you! I’ll never forget how you lectured us all on

causes and inferences and effects in the Bishopgate jewel case. It’s

true you set us on the right track; but you’ll own now that it was more

by good luck than good guidance.”

“It was a piece of very simple reasoning.”

“Oh, come, now, come! Never be ashamed to own up. But what is all this?

Bad business! Bad business! Stern facts here,—no room for theories. How

lucky that I happened to be out at Norwood over another case! I was at

the station when the message arrived. What d’you think the man died

of?”

“Oh, this is hardly a case for me to theorise over,” said Holmes,

dryly.

“No, no. Still, we can’t deny that you hit the nail on the head

sometimes. Dear me! Door locked, I understand. Jewels worth half a

million missing. How was the window?”

“Fastened; but there are steps on the sill.”

“Well, well, if it was fastened the steps could have nothing to do with

the matter. That’s common sense. Man might have died in a fit; but then

the jewels are missing. Ha! I have a theory. These flashes come upon me

at times.—Just step outside, sergeant, and you, Mr. Sholto. Your friend

can remain.—What do you think of this, Holmes? Sholto was, on his own

confession, with his brother last night. The brother died in a fit, on

which Sholto walked off with the treasure. How’s that?”

“On which the dead man very considerately got up and locked the door on

the inside.”

“Hum! There’s a flaw there. Let us apply common sense to the matter.

This Thaddeus Sholto \_was\_ with his brother; there \_was\_ a quarrel; so

much we know. The brother is dead and the jewels are gone. So much also

we know. No one saw the brother from the time Thaddeus left him. His

bed had not been slept in. Thaddeus is evidently in a most disturbed

state of mind. His appearance is—well, not attractive. You see that I

am weaving my web round Thaddeus. The net begins to close upon him.”

“You are not quite in possession of the facts yet,” said Holmes. “This

splinter of wood, which I have every reason to believe to be poisoned,

was in the man’s scalp where you still see the mark; this card,

inscribed as you see it, was on the table; and beside it lay this

rather curious stone-headed instrument. How does all that fit into your

theory?”

“Confirms it in every respect,” said the fat detective, pompously.

“House is full of Indian curiosities. Thaddeus brought this up, and if

this splinter be poisonous Thaddeus may as well have made murderous use

of it as any other man. The card is some hocus-pocus,—a blind, as like

as not. The only question is, how did he depart? Ah, of course, here is

a hole in the roof.” With great activity, considering his bulk, he

sprang up the steps and squeezed through into the garret, and

immediately afterwards we heard his exulting voice proclaiming that he

had found the trap-door.

“He can find something,” remarked Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. “He

has occasional glimmerings of reason. \_Il n’y a pas des sots si

incommodes que ceux qui ont de l’esprit!\_”

“You see!” said Athelney Jones, reappearing down the steps again.

“Facts are better than mere theories, after all. My view of the case is

confirmed. There is a trap-door communicating with the roof, and it is

partly open.”

“It was I who opened it.”

“Oh, indeed! You did notice it, then?” He seemed a little crestfallen

at the discovery. “Well, whoever noticed it, it shows how our gentleman

got away. Inspector!”

“Yes, sir,” from the passage.

“Ask Mr. Sholto to step this way.—Mr. Sholto, it is my duty to inform

you that anything which you may say will be used against you. I arrest

you in the Queen’s name as being concerned in the death of your

brother.”

“There, now! Didn’t I tell you!” cried the poor little man, throwing

out his hands, and looking from one to the other of us.

“Don’t trouble yourself about it, Mr. Sholto,” said Holmes. “I think

that I can engage to clear you of the charge.”

“Don’t promise too much, Mr. Theorist,—don’t promise too much!” snapped

the detective. “You may find it a harder matter than you think.”

“Not only will I clear him, Mr. Jones, but I will make you a free

present of the name and description of one of the two people who were

in this room last night. His name, I have every reason to believe, is

Jonathan Small. He is a poorly-educated man, small, active, with his

right leg off, and wearing a wooden stump which is worn away upon the

inner side. His left boot has a coarse, square-toed sole, with an iron

band round the heel. He is a middle-aged man, much sunburned, and has

been a convict. These few indications may be of some assistance to you,

coupled with the fact that there is a good deal of skin missing from

the palm of his hand. The other man—”

“Ah! the other man—?” asked Athelney Jones, in a sneering voice, but

impressed none the less, as I could easily see, by the precision of the

other’s manner.

“Is a rather curious person,” said Sherlock Holmes, turning upon his

heel. “I hope before very long to be able to introduce you to the pair

of them.—A word with you, Watson.”

He led me out to the head of the stair. “This unexpected occurrence,”

he said, “has caused us rather to lose sight of the original purpose of

our journey.”

“I have just been thinking so,” I answered. “It is not right that Miss

Morstan should remain in this stricken house.”

“No. You must escort her home. She lives with Mrs. Cecil Forrester, in

Lower Camberwell: so it is not very far. I will wait for you here if

you will drive out again. Or perhaps you are too tired?”

“By no means. I don’t think I could rest until I know more of this

fantastic business. I have seen something of the rough side of life,

but I give you my word that this quick succession of strange surprises

to-night has shaken my nerve completely. I should like, however, to see

the matter through with you, now that I have got so far.”

“Your presence will be of great service to me,” he answered. “We shall

work the case out independently, and leave this fellow Jones to exult

over any mare’s-nest which he may choose to construct. When you have

dropped Miss Morstan I wish you to go on to No. 3, Pinchin Lane, down

near the water’s edge at Lambeth. The third house on the right-hand

side is a bird-stuffer’s: Sherman is the name. You will see a weasel

holding a young rabbit in the window. Knock old Sherman up, and tell

him, with my compliments, that I want Toby at once. You will bring Toby

back in the cab with you.”

“A dog, I suppose.”

“Yes,—a queer mongrel, with a most amazing power of scent. I would

rather have Toby’s help than that of the whole detective force of

London.”

“I shall bring him, then,” said I. “It is one now. I ought to be back

before three, if I can get a fresh horse.”

“And I,” said Holmes, “shall see what I can learn from Mrs. Bernstone,

and from the Indian servant, who, Mr. Thaddeus tell me, sleeps in the

next garret. Then I shall study the great Jones’s methods and listen to

his not too delicate sarcasms. ‘\_Wir sind gewohnt das die Menschen

verhöhnen was sie nicht verstehen.\_’ Goethe is always pithy.”

Chapter VII

The Episode of the Barrel

The police had brought a cab with them, and in this I escorted Miss

Morstan back to her home. After the angelic fashion of women, she had

borne trouble with a calm face as long as there was some one weaker

than herself to support, and I had found her bright and placid by the

side of the frightened housekeeper. In the cab, however, she first

turned faint, and then burst into a passion of weeping,—so sorely had

she been tried by the adventures of the night. She has told me since

that she thought me cold and distant upon that journey. She little

guessed the struggle within my breast, or the effort of self-restraint

which held me back. My sympathies and my love went out to her, even as

my hand had in the garden. I felt that years of the conventionalities

of life could not teach me to know her sweet, brave nature as had this

one day of strange experiences. Yet there were two thoughts which

sealed the words of affection upon my lips. She was weak and helpless,

shaken in mind and nerve. It was to take her at a disadvantage to

obtrude love upon her at such a time. Worse still, she was rich. If

Holmes’s researches were successful, she would be an heiress. Was it

fair, was it honourable, that a half-pay surgeon should take such

advantage of an intimacy which chance had brought about? Might she not

look upon me as a mere vulgar fortune-seeker? I could not bear to risk

that such a thought should cross her mind. This Agra treasure

intervened like an impassable barrier between us.

It was nearly two o’clock when we reached Mrs. Cecil Forrester’s. The

servants had retired hours ago, but Mrs. Forrester had been so

interested by the strange message which Miss Morstan had received that

she had sat up in the hope of her return. She opened the door herself,

a middle-aged, graceful woman, and it gave me joy to see how tenderly

her arm stole round the other’s waist and how motherly was the voice in

which she greeted her. She was clearly no mere paid dependant, but an

honoured friend. I was introduced, and Mrs. Forrester earnestly begged

me to step in and tell her our adventures. I explained, however, the

importance of my errand, and promised faithfully to call and report any

progress which we might make with the case. As we drove away I stole a

glance back, and I still seem to see that little group on the step, the

two graceful, clinging figures, the half-opened door, the hall-light

shining through stained glass, the barometer, and the bright

stair-rods. It was soothing to catch even that passing glimpse of a

tranquil English home in the midst of the wild, dark business which had

absorbed us.

And the more I thought of what had happened, the wilder and darker it

grew. I reviewed the whole extraordinary sequence of events as I

rattled on through the silent gas-lit streets. There was the original

problem: that at least was pretty clear now. The death of Captain

Morstan, the sending of the pearls, the advertisement, the letter,—we

had had light upon all those events. They had only led us, however, to

a deeper and far more tragic mystery. The Indian treasure, the curious

plan found among Morstan’s baggage, the strange scene at Major Sholto’s

death, the rediscovery of the treasure immediately followed by the

murder of the discoverer, the very singular accompaniments to the

crime, the footsteps, the remarkable weapons, the words upon the card,

corresponding with those upon Captain Morstan’s chart,—here was indeed

a labyrinth in which a man less singularly endowed than my

fellow-lodger might well despair of ever finding the clue.

Pinchin Lane was a row of shabby two-storied brick houses in the lower

quarter of Lambeth. I had to knock for some time at No. 3 before I

could make my impression. At last, however, there was the glint of a

candle behind the blind, and a face looked out at the upper window.

“Go on, you drunken vagabone,” said the face. “If you kick up any more

row I’ll open the kennels and let out forty-three dogs upon you.”

“If you’ll let one out it’s just what I have come for,” said I.

“Go on!” yelled the voice. “So help me gracious, I have a wiper in the

bag, an’ I’ll drop it on your ’ead if you don’t hook it.”

“But I want a dog,” I cried.

“I won’t be argued with!” shouted Mr. Sherman. “Now stand clear, for

when I say ‘three,’ down goes the wiper.”

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes—” I began, but the words had a most magical

effect, for the window instantly slammed down, and within a minute the

door was unbarred and open. Mr. Sherman was a lanky, lean old man, with

stooping shoulders, a stringy neck, and blue-tinted glasses.

“A friend of Mr. Sherlock is always welcome,” said he. “Step in, sir.

Keep clear of the badger; for he bites. Ah, naughty, naughty, would you

take a nip at the gentleman?” This to a stoat which thrust its wicked

head and red eyes between the bars of its cage. “Don’t mind that, sir:

it’s only a slow-worm. It hain’t got no fangs, so I gives it the run o’

the room, for it keeps the beetles down. You must not mind my bein’

just a little short wi’ you at first, for I’m guyed at by the children,

and there’s many a one just comes down this lane to knock me up. What

was it that Mr. Sherlock Holmes wanted, sir?”

“He wanted a dog of yours.”

“Ah! that would be Toby.”

“Yes, Toby was the name.”

“Toby lives at No. 7 on the left here.” He moved slowly forward with

his candle among the queer animal family which he had gathered round

him. In the uncertain, shadowy light I could see dimly that there were

glancing, glimmering eyes peeping down at us from every cranny and

corner. Even the rafters above our heads were lined by solemn fowls,

who lazily shifted their weight from one leg to the other as our voices

disturbed their slumbers.

Toby proved to be an ugly, long-haired, lop-eared creature, half

spaniel and half lurcher, brown-and-white in colour, with a very clumsy

waddling gait. It accepted after some hesitation a lump of sugar which

the old naturalist handed to me, and, having thus sealed an alliance,

it followed me to the cab, and made no difficulties about accompanying

me. It had just struck three on the Palace clock when I found myself

back once more at Pondicherry Lodge. The ex-prize-fighter McMurdo had,

I found, been arrested as an accessory, and both he and Mr. Sholto had

been marched off to the station. Two constables guarded the narrow

gate, but they allowed me to pass with the dog on my mentioning the

detective’s name.

Holmes was standing on the door-step, with his hands in his pockets,

smoking his pipe.

“Ah, you have him there!” said he. “Good dog, then! Athelney Jones has

gone. We have had an immense display of energy since you left. He has

arrested not only friend Thaddeus, but the gatekeeper, the housekeeper,

and the Indian servant. We have the place to ourselves, but for a

sergeant upstairs. Leave the dog here, and come up.”

We tied Toby to the hall table, and re-ascended the stairs. The room

was as he had left it, save that a sheet had been draped over the

central figure. A weary-looking police-sergeant reclined in the corner.

“Lend me your bull’s-eye, sergeant,” said my companion. “Now tie this

bit of card round my neck, so as to hang it in front of me. Thank you.

Now I must kick off my boots and stockings.—Just you carry them down

with you, Watson. I am going to do a little climbing. And dip my

handkerchief into the creasote. That will do. Now come up into the

garret with me for a moment.”

We clambered up through the hole. Holmes turned his light once more

upon the footsteps in the dust.

“I wish you particularly to notice these footmarks,” he said. “Do you

observe anything noteworthy about them?”

“They belong,” I said, “to a child or a small woman.”

“Apart from their size, though. Is there nothing else?”

“They appear to be much as other footmarks.”

“Not at all. Look here! This is the print of a right foot in the dust.

Now I make one with my naked foot beside it. What is the chief

difference?”

“Your toes are all cramped together. The other print has each toe

distinctly divided.”

“Quite so. That is the point. Bear that in mind. Now, would you kindly

step over to that flap-window and smell the edge of the wood-work? I

shall stay here, as I have this handkerchief in my hand.”

I did as he directed, and was instantly conscious of a strong tarry

smell.

“That is where he put his foot in getting out. If \_you\_ can trace him,

I should think that Toby will have no difficulty. Now run downstairs,

loose the dog, and look out for Blondin.”

By the time that I got out into the grounds Sherlock Holmes was on the

roof, and I could see him like an enormous glow-worm crawling very

slowly along the ridge. I lost sight of him behind a stack of chimneys,

but he presently reappeared, and then vanished once more upon the

opposite side. When I made my way round there I found him seated at one

of the corner eaves.

“That you, Watson?” he cried.

“Yes.”

“This is the place. What is that black thing down there?”

“A water-barrel.”

“Top on it?”

“Yes.”

“No sign of a ladder?”

“No.”

“Confound the fellow! It’s a most break-neck place. I ought to be able

to come down where he could climb up. The water-pipe feels pretty firm.

Here goes, anyhow.”

There was a scuffling of feet, and the lantern began to come steadily

down the side of the wall. Then with a light spring he came on to the

barrel, and from there to the earth.

“It was easy to follow him,” he said, drawing on his stockings and

boots. “Tiles were loosened the whole way along, and in his hurry he

had dropped this. It confirms my diagnosis, as you doctors express it.”

The object which he held up to me was a small pocket or pouch woven out

of coloured grasses and with a few tawdry beads strung round it. In

shape and size it was not unlike a cigarette-case. Inside were half a

dozen spines of dark wood, sharp at one end and rounded at the other,

like that which had struck Bartholomew Sholto.

“They are hellish things,” said he. “Look out that you don’t prick

yourself. I’m delighted to have them, for the chances are that they are

all he has. There is the less fear of you or me finding one in our skin

before long. I would sooner face a Martini bullet, myself. Are you game

for a six-mile trudge, Watson?”

“Certainly,” I answered.

“Your leg will stand it?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Here you are, doggy! Good old Toby! Smell it, Toby, smell it!” He

pushed the creasote handkerchief under the dog’s nose, while the

creature stood with its fluffy legs separated, and with a most comical

cock to its head, like a connoisseur sniffing the \_bouquet\_ of a famous

vintage. Holmes then threw the handkerchief to a distance, fastened a

stout cord to the mongrel’s collar, and led him to the foot of the

water-barrel. The creature instantly broke into a succession of high,

tremulous yelps, and, with his nose on the ground, and his tail in the

air, pattered off upon the trail at a pace which strained his leash and

kept us at the top of our speed.

The east had been gradually whitening, and we could now see some

distance in the cold grey light. The square, massive house, with its

black, empty windows and high, bare walls, towered up, sad and forlorn,

behind us. Our course led right across the grounds, in and out among

the trenches and pits with which they were scarred and intersected. The

whole place, with its scattered dirt-heaps and ill-grown shrubs, had a

blighted, ill-omened look which harmonized with the black tragedy which

hung over it.

On reaching the boundary wall Toby ran along, whining eagerly,

underneath its shadow, and stopped finally in a corner screened by a

young beech. Where the two walls joined, several bricks had been

loosened, and the crevices left were worn down and rounded upon the

lower side, as though they had frequently been used as a ladder. Holmes

clambered up, and, taking the dog from me, he dropped it over upon the

other side.

“There’s the print of wooden-leg’s hand,” he remarked, as I mounted up

beside him. “You see the slight smudge of blood upon the white plaster.

What a lucky thing it is that we have had no very heavy rain since

yesterday! The scent will lie upon the road in spite of their

eight-and-twenty hours’ start.”

I confess that I had my doubts myself when I reflected upon the great

traffic which had passed along the London road in the interval. My

fears were soon appeased, however. Toby never hesitated or swerved, but

waddled on in his peculiar rolling fashion. Clearly, the pungent smell

of the creasote rose high above all other contending scents.

“Do not imagine,” said Holmes, “that I depend for my success in this

case upon the mere chance of one of these fellows having put his foot

in the chemical. I have knowledge now which would enable me to trace

them in many different ways. This, however, is the readiest and, since

fortune has put it into our hands, I should be culpable if I neglected

it. It has, however, prevented the case from becoming the pretty little

intellectual problem which it at one time promised to be. There might

have been some credit to be gained out of it, but for this too palpable

clue.”

“There is credit, and to spare,” said I. “I assure you, Holmes, that I

marvel at the means by which you obtain your results in this case, even

more than I did in the Jefferson Hope Murder. The thing seems to me to

be deeper and more inexplicable. How, for example, could you describe

with such confidence the wooden-legged man?”

“Pshaw, my dear boy! it was simplicity itself. I don’t wish to be

theatrical. It is all patent and above-board. Two officers who are in

command of a convict-guard learn an important secret as to buried

treasure. A map is drawn for them by an Englishman named Jonathan

Small. You remember that we saw the name upon the chart in Captain

Morstan’s possession. He had signed it in behalf of himself and his

associates,—the sign of the four, as he somewhat dramatically called

it. Aided by this chart, the officers—or one of them—gets the treasure

and brings it to England, leaving, we will suppose, some condition

under which he received it unfulfilled. Now, then, why did not Jonathan

Small get the treasure himself? The answer is obvious. The chart is

dated at a time when Morstan was brought into close association with

convicts. Jonathan Small did not get the treasure because he and his

associates were themselves convicts and could not get away.”

“But that is mere speculation,” said I.

“It is more than that. It is the only hypothesis which covers the

facts. Let us see how it fits in with the sequel. Major Sholto remains

at peace for some years, happy in the possession of his treasure. Then

he receives a letter from India which gives him a great fright. What

was that?”

“A letter to say that the men whom he had wronged had been set free.”

“Or had escaped. That is much more likely, for he would have known what

their term of imprisonment was. It would not have been a surprise to

him. What does he do then? He guards himself against a wooden-legged

man,—a white man, mark you, for he mistakes a white tradesman for him,

and actually fires a pistol at him. Now, only one white man’s name is

on the chart. The others are Hindoos or Mohammedans. There is no other

white man. Therefore we may say with confidence that the wooden-legged

man is identical with Jonathan Small. Does the reasoning strike you as

being faulty?”

“No: it is clear and concise.”

“Well, now, let us put ourselves in the place of Jonathan Small. Let us

look at it from his point of view. He comes to England with the double

idea of regaining what he would consider to be his rights and of having

his revenge upon the man who had wronged him. He found out where Sholto

lived, and very possibly he established communications with some one

inside the house. There is this butler, Lal Rao, whom we have not seen.

Mrs. Bernstone gives him far from a good character. Small could not

find out, however, where the treasure was hid, for no one ever knew,

save the major and one faithful servant who had died. Suddenly Small

learns that the major is on his death-bed. In a frenzy lest the secret

of the treasure die with him, he runs the gauntlet of the guards, makes

his way to the dying man’s window, and is only deterred from entering

by the presence of his two sons. Mad with hate, however, against the

dead man, he enters the room that night, searches his private papers in

the hope of discovering some memorandum relating to the treasure, and

finally leaves a momento of his visit in the short inscription upon the

card. He had doubtless planned beforehand that should he slay the major

he would leave some such record upon the body as a sign that it was not

a common murder, but, from the point of view of the four associates,

something in the nature of an act of justice. Whimsical and bizarre

conceits of this kind are common enough in the annals of crime, and

usually afford valuable indications as to the criminal. Do you follow

all this?”

“Very clearly.”

“Now, what could Jonathan Small do? He could only continue to keep a

secret watch upon the efforts made to find the treasure. Possibly he

leaves England and only comes back at intervals. Then comes the

discovery of the garret, and he is instantly informed of it. We again

trace the presence of some confederate in the household. Jonathan, with

his wooden leg, is utterly unable to reach the lofty room of

Bartholomew Sholto. He takes with him, however, a rather curious

associate, who gets over this difficulty, but dips his naked foot into

creasote, whence comes Toby, and a six-mile limp for a half-pay officer

with a damaged tendo Achillis.”

“But it was the associate, and not Jonathan, who committed the crime.”

“Quite so. And rather to Jonathan’s disgust, to judge by the way he

stamped about when he got into the room. He bore no grudge against

Bartholomew Sholto, and would have preferred if he could have been

simply bound and gagged. He did not wish to put his head in a halter.

There was no help for it, however: the savage instincts of his

companion had broken out, and the poison had done its work: so Jonathan

Small left his record, lowered the treasure-box to the ground, and

followed it himself. That was the train of events as far as I can

decipher them. Of course as to his personal appearance he must be

middle-aged, and must be sunburned after serving his time in such an

oven as the Andamans. His height is readily calculated from the length

of his stride, and we know that he was bearded. His hairiness was the

one point which impressed itself upon Thaddeus Sholto when he saw him

at the window. I don’t know that there is anything else.”

“The associate?”

“Ah, well, there is no great mystery in that. But you will know all

about it soon enough. How sweet the morning air is! See how that one

little cloud floats like a pink feather from some gigantic flamingo.

Now the red rim of the sun pushes itself over the London cloud-bank. It

shines on a good many folk, but on none, I dare bet, who are on a

stranger errand than you and I. How small we feel with our petty

ambitions and strivings in the presence of the great elemental forces

of nature! Are you well up in your Jean Paul?”

“Fairly so. I worked back to him through Carlyle.”

“That was like following the brook to the parent lake. He makes one

curious but profound remark. It is that the chief proof of man’s real

greatness lies in his perception of his own smallness. It argues, you

see, a power of comparison and of appreciation which is in itself a

proof of nobility. There is much food for thought in Richter. You have

not a pistol, have you?”

“I have my stick.”

“It is just possible that we may need something of the sort if we get

to their lair. Jonathan I shall leave to you, but if the other turns

nasty I shall shoot him dead.” He took out his revolver as he spoke,

and, having loaded two of the chambers, he put it back into the

right-hand pocket of his jacket.

We had during this time been following the guidance of Toby down the

half-rural villa-lined roads which lead to the metropolis. Now,

however, we were beginning to come among continuous streets, where

labourers and dockmen were already astir, and slatternly women were

taking down shutters and brushing door-steps. At the square-topped

corner public houses business was just beginning, and rough-looking men

were emerging, rubbing their sleeves across their beards after their

morning wet. Strange dogs sauntered up and stared wonderingly at us as

we passed, but our inimitable Toby looked neither to the right nor to

the left, but trotted onwards with his nose to the ground and an

occasional eager whine which spoke of a hot scent.

We had traversed Streatham, Brixton, Camberwell, and now found

ourselves in Kennington Lane, having borne away through the

side-streets to the east of the Oval. The men whom we pursued seemed to

have taken a curiously zigzag road, with the idea probably of escaping

observation. They had never kept to the main road if a parallel

side-street would serve their turn. At the foot of Kennington Lane they

had edged away to the left through Bond Street and Miles Street. Where

the latter street turns into Knight’s Place, Toby ceased to advance,

but began to run backwards and forwards with one ear cocked and the

other drooping, the very picture of canine indecision. Then he waddled

round in circles, looking up to us from time to time, as if to ask for

sympathy in his embarrassment.

“What the deuce is the matter with the dog?” growled Holmes. “They

surely would not take a cab, or go off in a balloon.”

“Perhaps they stood here for some time,” I suggested.

“Ah! it’s all right. He’s off again,” said my companion, in a tone of

relief.

He was indeed off, for after sniffing round again he suddenly made up

his mind, and darted away with an energy and determination such as he

had not yet shown. The scent appeared to be much hotter than before,

for he had not even to put his nose on the ground, but tugged at his

leash and tried to break into a run. I could see by the gleam in

Holmes’s eyes that he thought we were nearing the end of our journey.

Our course now ran down Nine Elms until we came to Broderick and

Nelson’s large timber-yard, just past the White Eagle tavern. Here the

dog, frantic with excitement, turned down through the side-gate into

the enclosure, where the sawyers were already at work. On the dog raced

through sawdust and shavings, down an alley, round a passage, between

two wood-piles, and finally, with a triumphant yelp, sprang upon a

large barrel which still stood upon the hand-trolley on which it had

been brought. With lolling tongue and blinking eyes, Toby stood upon

the cask, looking from one to the other of us for some sign of

appreciation. The staves of the barrel and the wheels of the trolley

were smeared with a dark liquid, and the whole air was heavy with the

smell of creasote.

Sherlock Holmes and I looked blankly at each other, and then burst

simultaneously into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Chapter VIII

The Baker Street Irregulars

“What now?” I asked. “Toby has lost his character for infallibility.”

“He acted according to his lights,” said Holmes, lifting him down from

the barrel and walking him out of the timber-yard. “If you consider how

much creasote is carted about London in one day, it is no great wonder

that our trail should have been crossed. It is much used now,

especially for the seasoning of wood. Poor Toby is not to blame.”

“We must get on the main scent again, I suppose.”

“Yes. And, fortunately, we have no distance to go. Evidently what

puzzled the dog at the corner of Knight’s Place was that there were two

different trails running in opposite directions. We took the wrong one.

It only remains to follow the other.”

There was no difficulty about this. On leading Toby to the place where

he had committed his fault, he cast about in a wide circle and finally

dashed off in a fresh direction.

“We must take care that he does not now bring us to the place where the

creasote-barrel came from,” I observed.

“I had thought of that. But you notice that he keeps on the pavement,

whereas the barrel passed down the roadway. No, we are on the true

scent now.”

It tended down towards the river-side, running through Belmont Place

and Prince’s Street. At the end of Broad Street it ran right down to

the water’s edge, where there was a small wooden wharf. Toby led us to

the very edge of this, and there stood whining, looking out on the dark

current beyond.

“We are out of luck,” said Holmes. “They have taken to a boat here.”

Several small punts and skiffs were lying about in the water and on the

edge of the wharf. We took Toby round to each in turn, but, though he

sniffed earnestly, he made no sign.

Close to the rude landing-stage was a small brick house, with a wooden

placard slung out through the second window. “Mordecai Smith” was

printed across it in large letters, and, underneath, “Boats to hire by

the hour or day.” A second inscription above the door informed us that

a steam launch was kept,—a statement which was confirmed by a great

pile of coke upon the jetty. Sherlock Holmes looked slowly round, and

his face assumed an ominous expression.

“This looks bad,” said he. “These fellows are sharper than I expected.

They seem to have covered their tracks. There has, I fear, been

preconcerted management here.”

He was approaching the door of the house, when it opened, and a little,

curly-headed lad of six came running out, followed by a stoutish,

red-faced woman with a large sponge in her hand.

“You come back and be washed, Jack,” she shouted. “Come back, you young

imp; for if your father comes home and finds you like that, he’ll let

us hear of it.”

“Dear little chap!” said Holmes, strategically. “What a rosy-cheeked

young rascal! Now, Jack, is there anything you would like?”

The youth pondered for a moment. “I’d like a shillin’,” said he.

“Nothing you would like better?”

“I’d like two shillin’ better,” the prodigy answered, after some

thought.

“Here you are, then! Catch!—A fine child, Mrs. Smith!”

“Lor’ bless you, sir, he is that, and forward. He gets a’most too much

for me to manage, ’specially when my man is away days at a time.”

“Away, is he?” said Holmes, in a disappointed voice. “I am sorry for

that, for I wanted to speak to Mr. Smith.”

“He’s been away since yesterday mornin’, sir, and, truth to tell, I am

beginnin’ to feel frightened about him. But if it was about a boat,

sir, maybe I could serve as well.”

“I wanted to hire his steam launch.”

“Why, bless you, sir, it is in the steam launch that he has gone.

That’s what puzzles me; for I know there ain’t more coals in her than

would take her to about Woolwich and back. If he’d been away in the

barge I’d ha’ thought nothin’; for many a time a job has taken him as

far as Gravesend, and then if there was much doin’ there he might ha’

stayed over. But what good is a steam launch without coals?”

“He might have bought some at a wharf down the river.”

“He might, sir, but it weren’t his way. Many a time I’ve heard him call

out at the prices they charge for a few odd bags. Besides, I don’t like

that wooden-legged man, wi’ his ugly face and outlandish talk. What did

he want always knockin’ about here for?”

“A wooden-legged man?” said Holmes, with bland surprise.

“Yes, sir, a brown, monkey-faced chap that’s called more’n once for my

old man. It was him that roused him up yesternight, and, what’s more,

my man knew he was comin’, for he had steam up in the launch. I tell

you straight, sir, I don’t feel easy in my mind about it.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Smith,” said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders, “You

are frightening yourself about nothing. How could you possibly tell

that it was the wooden-legged man who came in the night? I don’t quite

understand how you can be so sure.”

“His voice, sir. I knew his voice, which is kind o’ thick and foggy. He

tapped at the winder,—about three it would be. ‘Show a leg, matey,’

says he: ‘time to turn out guard.’ My old man woke up Jim,—that’s my

eldest,—and away they went, without so much as a word to me. I could

hear the wooden leg clackin’ on the stones.”

“And was this wooden-legged man alone?”

“Couldn’t say, I am sure, sir. I didn’t hear no one else.”

“I am sorry, Mrs. Smith, for I wanted a steam launch, and I have heard

good reports of the—Let me see, what is her name?”

“The \_Aurora\_, sir.”

“Ah! She’s not that old green launch with a yellow line, very broad in

the beam?”

“No, indeed. She’s as trim a little thing as any on the river. She’s

been fresh painted, black with two red streaks.”

“Thanks. I hope that you will hear soon from Mr. Smith. I am going down

the river; and if I should see anything of the \_Aurora\_ I shall let him

know that you are uneasy. A black funnel, you say?”

“No, sir. Black with a white band.”

“Ah, of course. It was the sides which were black. Good-morning, Mrs.

Smith.—There is a boatman here with a wherry, Watson. We shall take it

and cross the river.

“The main thing with people of that sort,” said Holmes, as we sat in

the sheets of the wherry, “is never to let them think that their

information can be of the slightest importance to you. If you do, they

will instantly shut up like an oyster. If you listen to them under

protest, as it were, you are very likely to get what you want.”

“Our course now seems pretty clear,” said I.

“What would you do, then?”

“I would engage a launch and go down the river on the track of the

\_Aurora\_.”

“My dear fellow, it would be a colossal task. She may have touched at

any wharf on either side of the stream between here and Greenwich.

Below the bridge there is a perfect labyrinth of landing-places for

miles. It would take you days and days to exhaust them, if you set

about it alone.”

“Employ the police, then.”

“No. I shall probably call Athelney Jones in at the last moment. He is

not a bad fellow, and I should not like to do anything which would

injure him professionally. But I have a fancy for working it out

myself, now that we have gone so far.”

“Could we advertise, then, asking for information from wharfingers?”

“Worse and worse! Our men would know that the chase was hot at their

heels, and they would be off out of the country. As it is, they are

likely enough to leave, but as long as they think they are perfectly

safe they will be in no hurry. Jones’s energy will be of use to us

there, for his view of the case is sure to push itself into the daily

press, and the runaways will think that every one is off on the wrong

scent.”

“What are we to do, then?” I asked, as we landed near Millbank

Penitentiary.

“Take this hansom, drive home, have some breakfast, and get an hour’s

sleep. It is quite on the cards that we may be afoot to-night again.

Stop at a telegraph-office, cabby! We will keep Toby, for he may be of

use to us yet.”

We pulled up at the Great Peter Street post-office, and Holmes

despatched his wire. “Whom do you think that is to?” he asked, as we

resumed our journey.

“I am sure I don’t know.”

“You remember the Baker Street division of the detective police force

whom I employed in the Jefferson Hope case?”

“Well,” said I, laughing.

“This is just the case where they might be invaluable. If they fail, I

have other resources; but I shall try them first. That wire was to my

dirty little lieutenant, Wiggins, and I expect that he and his gang

will be with us before we have finished our breakfast.”

It was between eight and nine o’clock now, and I was conscious of a

strong reaction after the successive excitements of the night. I was

limp and weary, befogged in mind and fatigued in body. I had not the

professional enthusiasm which carried my companion on, nor could I look

at the matter as a mere abstract intellectual problem. As far as the

death of Bartholomew Sholto went, I had heard little good of him, and

could feel no intense antipathy to his murderers. The treasure,

however, was a different matter. That, or part of it, belonged

rightfully to Miss Morstan. While there was a chance of recovering it I

was ready to devote my life to the one object. True, if I found it it

would probably put her forever beyond my reach. Yet it would be a petty

and selfish love which would be influenced by such a thought as that.

If Holmes could work to find the criminals, I had a tenfold stronger

reason to urge me on to find the treasure.

A bath at Baker Street and a complete change freshened me up

wonderfully. When I came down to our room I found the breakfast laid

and Holmes pouring out the coffee.

“Here it is,” said he, laughing, and pointing to an open newspaper.

“The energetic Jones and the ubiquitous reporter have fixed it up

between them. But you have had enough of the case. Better have your ham

and eggs first.”

I took the paper from him and read the short notice, which was headed

“Mysterious Business at Upper Norwood.”

“About twelve o’clock last night,” said the \_Standard\_, “Mr.

Bartholomew Sholto, of Pondicherry Lodge, Upper Norwood, was found dead

in his room under circumstances which point to foul play. As far as we

can learn, no actual traces of violence were found upon Mr. Sholto’s

person, but a valuable collection of Indian gems which the deceased

gentleman had inherited from his father has been carried off. The

discovery was first made by Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, who had

called at the house with Mr. Thaddeus Sholto, brother of the deceased.

By a singular piece of good fortune, Mr. Athelney Jones, the well-known

member of the detective police force, happened to be at the Norwood

Police Station, and was on the ground within half an hour of the first

alarm. His trained and experienced faculties were at once directed

towards the detection of the criminals, with the gratifying result that

the brother, Thaddeus Sholto, has already been arrested, together with

the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, an Indian butler named Lal Rao, and a

porter, or gatekeeper, named McMurdo. It is quite certain that the

thief or thieves were well acquainted with the house, for Mr. Jones’s

well-known technical knowledge and his powers of minute observation

have enabled him to prove conclusively that the miscreants could not

have entered by the door or by the window, but must have made their way

across the roof of the building, and so through a trap-door into a room

which communicated with that in which the body was found. This fact,

which has been very clearly made out, proves conclusively that it was

no mere haphazard burglary. The prompt and energetic action of the

officers of the law shows the great advantage of the presence on such

occasions of a single vigorous and masterful mind. We cannot but think

that it supplies an argument to those who would wish to see our

detectives more decentralised, and so brought into closer and more

effective touch with the cases which it is their duty to investigate.”

“Isn’t it gorgeous!” said Holmes, grinning over his coffee-cup. “What

do you think of it?”

“I think that we have had a close shave ourselves of being arrested for

the crime.”

“So do I. I wouldn’t answer for our safety now, if he should happen to

have another of his attacks of energy.”

At this moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and I could hear Mrs.

Hudson, our landlady, raising her voice in a wail of expostulation and

dismay.

“By heaven, Holmes,” I said, half rising, “I believe that they are

really after us.”

“No, it’s not quite so bad as that. It is the unofficial force,—the

Baker Street irregulars.”

As he spoke, there came a swift pattering of naked feet upon the

stairs, a clatter of high voices, and in rushed a dozen dirty and

ragged little street-Arabs. There was some show of discipline among

them, despite their tumultuous entry, for they instantly drew up in

line and stood facing us with expectant faces. One of their number,

taller and older than the others, stood forward with an air of lounging

superiority which was very funny in such a disreputable little

scarecrow.

“Got your message, sir,” said he, “and brought ’em on sharp. Three bob

and a tanner for tickets.”

“Here you are,” said Holmes, producing some silver. “In future they can

report to you, Wiggins, and you to me. I cannot have the house invaded

in this way. However, it is just as well that you should all hear the

instructions. I want to find the whereabouts of a steam launch called

the \_Aurora\_, owner Mordecai Smith, black with two red streaks, funnel

black with a white band. She is down the river somewhere. I want one

boy to be at Mordecai Smith’s landing-stage opposite Millbank to say if

the boat comes back. You must divide it out among yourselves, and do

both banks thoroughly. Let me know the moment you have news. Is that

all clear?”

“Yes, guv’nor,” said Wiggins.

“The old scale of pay, and a guinea to the boy who finds the boat.

Here’s a day in advance. Now off you go!” He handed them a shilling

each, and away they buzzed down the stairs, and I saw them a moment

later streaming down the street.

“If the launch is above water they will find her,” said Holmes, as he

rose from the table and lit his pipe. “They can go everywhere, see

everything, overhear every one. I expect to hear before evening that

they have spotted her. In the meanwhile, we can do nothing but await

results. We cannot pick up the broken trail until we find either the

\_Aurora\_ or Mr. Mordecai Smith.”

“Toby could eat these scraps, I dare say. Are you going to bed,

Holmes?”

“No; I am not tired. I have a curious constitution. I never remember

feeling tired by work, though idleness exhausts me completely. I am

going to smoke and to think over this queer business to which my fair

client has introduced us. If ever man had an easy task, this of ours

ought to be. Wooden-legged men are not so common, but the other man

must, I should think, be absolutely unique.”

“That other man again!”

“I have no wish to make a mystery of him,—to you, anyway. But you must

have formed your own opinion. Now, do consider the data. Diminutive

footmarks, toes never fettered by boots, naked feet, stone-headed

wooden mace, great agility, small poisoned darts. What do you make of

all this?”

“A savage!” I exclaimed. “Perhaps one of those Indians who were the

associates of Jonathan Small.”

“Hardly that,” said he. “When first I saw signs of strange weapons I

was inclined to think so; but the remarkable character of the footmarks

caused me to reconsider my views. Some of the inhabitants of the Indian

Peninsula are small men, but none could have left such marks as that.

The Hindoo proper has long and thin feet. The sandal-wearing Mohammedan

has the great toe well separated from the others, because the thong is

commonly passed between. These little darts, too, could only be shot in

one way. They are from a blow-pipe. Now, then, where are we to find our

savage?”

“South American,” I hazarded.

He stretched his hand up, and took down a bulky volume from the shelf.

“This is the first volume of a gazetteer which is now being published.

It may be looked upon as the very latest authority. What have we here?

‘Andaman Islands, situated 340 miles to the north of Sumatra, in the

Bay of Bengal.’ Hum! hum! What’s all this? Moist climate, coral reefs,

sharks, Port Blair, convict-barracks, Rutland Island, cottonwoods—Ah,

here we are. ‘The aborigines of the Andaman Islands may perhaps claim

the distinction of being the smallest race upon this earth, though some

anthropologists prefer the Bushmen of Africa, the Digger Indians of

America, and the Terra del Fuegians. The average height is rather below

four feet, although many full-grown adults may be found who are very

much smaller than this. They are a fierce, morose, and intractable

people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their

confidence has once been gained.’ Mark that, Watson. Now, then, listen

to this. ‘They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads,

small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. Their feet and hands,

however, are remarkably small. So intractable and fierce are they that

all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in

any degree. They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews,

braining the survivors with their stone-headed clubs, or shooting them

with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded by

a cannibal feast.’ Nice, amiable people, Watson! If this fellow had

been left to his own unaided devices this affair might have taken an

even more ghastly turn. I fancy that, even as it is, Jonathan Small

would give a good deal not to have employed him.”

“But how came he to have so singular a companion?”

“Ah, that is more than I can tell. Since, however, we had already

determined that Small had come from the Andamans, it is not so very

wonderful that this islander should be with him. No doubt we shall know

all about it in time. Look here, Watson; you look regularly done. Lie

down there on the sofa, and see if I can put you to sleep.”

He took up his violin from the corner, and as I stretched myself out he

began to play some low, dreamy, melodious air,—his own, no doubt, for

he had a remarkable gift for improvisation. I have a vague remembrance

of his gaunt limbs, his earnest face, and the rise and fall of his bow.

Then I seemed to be floated peacefully away upon a soft sea of sound,

until I found myself in dreamland, with the sweet face of Mary Morstan

looking down upon me.

Chapter IX

A Break in the Chain

It was late in the afternoon before I woke, strengthened and refreshed.

Sherlock Holmes still sat exactly as I had left him, save that he had

laid aside his violin and was deep in a book. He looked across at me,

as I stirred, and I noticed that his face was dark and troubled.

“You have slept soundly,” he said. “I feared that our talk would wake

you.”

“I heard nothing,” I answered. “Have you had fresh news, then?”

“Unfortunately, no. I confess that I am surprised and disappointed. I

expected something definite by this time. Wiggins has just been up to

report. He says that no trace can be found of the launch. It is a

provoking check, for every hour is of importance.”

“Can I do anything? I am perfectly fresh now, and quite ready for

another night’s outing.”

“No, we can do nothing. We can only wait. If we go ourselves, the

message might come in our absence, and delay be caused. You can do what

you will, but I must remain on guard.”

“Then I shall run over to Camberwell and call upon Mrs. Cecil

Forrester. She asked me to, yesterday.”

“On Mrs. Cecil Forrester?” asked Holmes, with the twinkle of a smile in

his eyes.

“Well, of course Miss Morstan too. They were anxious to hear what

happened.”

“I would not tell them too much,” said Holmes. “Women are never to be

entirely trusted,—not the best of them.”

I did not pause to argue over this atrocious sentiment. “I shall be

back in an hour or two,” I remarked.

“All right! Good luck! But, I say, if you are crossing the river you

may as well return Toby, for I don’t think it is at all likely that we

shall have any use for him now.”

I took our mongrel accordingly, and left him, together with a

half-sovereign, at the old naturalist’s in Pinchin Lane. At Camberwell

I found Miss Morstan a little weary after her night’s adventures, but

very eager to hear the news. Mrs. Forrester, too, was full of

curiosity. I told them all that we had done, suppressing, however, the

more dreadful parts of the tragedy. Thus, although I spoke of Mr.

Sholto’s death, I said nothing of the exact manner and method of it.

With all my omissions, however, there was enough to startle and amaze

them.

“It is a romance!” cried Mrs. Forrester. “An injured lady, half a

million in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian.

They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl.”

“And two knight-errants to the rescue,” added Miss Morstan, with a

bright glance at me.

“Why, Mary, your fortune depends upon the issue of this search. I don’t

think that you are nearly excited enough. Just imagine what it must be

to be so rich, and to have the world at your feet!”

It sent a little thrill of joy to my heart to notice that she showed no

sign of elation at the prospect. On the contrary, she gave a toss of

her proud head, as though the matter were one in which she took small

interest.

“It is for Mr. Thaddeus Sholto that I am anxious,” she said. “Nothing

else is of any consequence; but I think that he has behaved most kindly

and honourably throughout. It is our duty to clear him of this dreadful

and unfounded charge.”

It was evening before I left Camberwell, and quite dark by the time I

reached home. My companion’s book and pipe lay by his chair, but he had

disappeared. I looked about in the hope of seeing a note, but there was

none.

“I suppose that Mr. Sherlock Holmes has gone out,” I said to Mrs.

Hudson as she came up to lower the blinds.

“No, sir. He has gone to his room, sir. Do you know, sir,” sinking her

voice into an impressive whisper, “I am afraid for his health?”

“Why so, Mrs. Hudson?”

“Well, he’s that strange, sir. After you was gone he walked and he

walked, up and down, and up and down, until I was weary of the sound of

his footstep. Then I heard him talking to himself and muttering, and

every time the bell rang out he came on the stairhead, with ‘What is

that, Mrs. Hudson?’ And now he has slammed off to his room, but I can

hear him walking away the same as ever. I hope he’s not going to be

ill, sir. I ventured to say something to him about cooling medicine,

but he turned on me, sir, with such a look that I don’t know how ever I

got out of the room.”

“I don’t think that you have any cause to be uneasy, Mrs. Hudson,” I

answered. “I have seen him like this before. He has some small matter

upon his mind which makes him restless.” I tried to speak lightly to

our worthy landlady, but I was myself somewhat uneasy when through the

long night I still from time to time heard the dull sound of his tread,

and knew how his keen spirit was chafing against this involuntary

inaction.

At breakfast-time he looked worn and haggard, with a little fleck of

feverish colour upon either cheek.

“You are knocking yourself up, old man,” I remarked. “I heard you

marching about in the night.”

“No, I could not sleep,” he answered. “This infernal problem is

consuming me. It is too much to be balked by so petty an obstacle, when

all else had been overcome. I know the men, the launch, everything; and

yet I can get no news. I have set other agencies at work, and used

every means at my disposal. The whole river has been searched on either

side, but there is no news, nor has Mrs. Smith heard of her husband. I

shall come to the conclusion soon that they have scuttled the craft.

But there are objections to that.”

“Or that Mrs. Smith has put us on a wrong scent.”

“No, I think that may be dismissed. I had inquiries made, and there is

a launch of that description.”

“Could it have gone up the river?”

“I have considered that possibility too, and there is a search-party

who will work up as far as Richmond. If no news comes to-day, I shall

start off myself to-morrow, and go for the men rather than the boat.

But surely, surely, we shall hear something.”

We did not, however. Not a word came to us either from Wiggins or from

the other agencies. There were articles in most of the papers upon the

Norwood tragedy. They all appeared to be rather hostile to the

unfortunate Thaddeus Sholto. No fresh details were to be found,

however, in any of them, save that an inquest was to be held upon the

following day. I walked over to Camberwell in the evening to report our

ill success to the ladies, and on my return I found Holmes dejected and

somewhat morose. He would hardly reply to my questions, and busied

himself all evening in an abstruse chemical analysis which involved

much heating of retorts and distilling of vapours, ending at last in a

smell which fairly drove me out of the apartment. Up to the small hours

of the morning I could hear the clinking of his test-tubes which told

me that he was still engaged in his malodorous experiment.

In the early dawn I woke with a start, and was surprised to find him

standing by my bedside, clad in a rude sailor dress with a pea-jacket,

and a coarse red scarf round his neck.

“I am off down the river, Watson,” said he. “I have been turning it

over in my mind, and I can see only one way out of it. It is worth

trying, at all events.”

“Surely I can come with you, then?” said I.

“No; you can be much more useful if you will remain here as my

representative. I am loath to go, for it is quite on the cards that

some message may come during the day, though Wiggins was despondent

about it last night. I want you to open all notes and telegrams, and to

act on your own judgment if any news should come. Can I rely upon you?”

“Most certainly.”

“I am afraid that you will not be able to wire to me, for I can hardly

tell yet where I may find myself. If I am in luck, however, I may not

be gone so very long. I shall have news of some sort or other before I

get back.”

I had heard nothing of him by breakfast-time. On opening the

\_Standard\_, however, I found that there was a fresh allusion to the

business. “With reference to the Upper Norwood tragedy,” it remarked,

“we have reason to believe that the matter promises to be even more

complex and mysterious than was originally supposed. Fresh evidence has

shown that it is quite impossible that Mr. Thaddeus Sholto could have

been in any way concerned in the matter. He and the housekeeper, Mrs.

Bernstone, were both released yesterday evening. It is believed,

however, that the police have a clue as to the real culprits, and that

it is being prosecuted by Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard, with

all his well-known energy and sagacity. Further arrests may be expected

at any moment.”

“That is satisfactory so far as it goes,” thought I. “Friend Sholto is

safe, at any rate. I wonder what the fresh clue may be; though it seems

to be a stereotyped form whenever the police have made a blunder.”

I tossed the paper down upon the table, but at that moment my eye

caught an advertisement in the agony column. It ran in this way:

“Lost.—Whereas Mordecai Smith, boatman, and his son, Jim, left Smith’s

Wharf at or about three o’clock last Tuesday morning in the steam

launch \_Aurora\_, black with two red stripes, funnel black with a white

band, the sum of five pounds will be paid to any one who can give

information to Mrs. Smith, at Smith’s Wharf, or at 221\_b\_ Baker Street,

as to the whereabouts of the said Mordecai Smith and the launch

\_Aurora\_.”

This was clearly Holmes’s doing. The Baker Street address was enough to

prove that. It struck me as rather ingenious, because it might be read

by the fugitives without their seeing in it more than the natural

anxiety of a wife for her missing husband.

It was a long day. Every time that a knock came to the door, or a sharp

step passed in the street, I imagined that it was either Holmes

returning or an answer to his advertisement. I tried to read, but my

thoughts would wander off to our strange quest and to the ill-assorted

and villainous pair whom we were pursuing. Could there be, I wondered,

some radical flaw in my companion’s reasoning. Might he be suffering

from some huge self-deception? Was it not possible that his nimble and

speculative mind had built up this wild theory upon faulty premises? I

had never known him to be wrong; and yet the keenest reasoner may

occasionally be deceived. He was likely, I thought, to fall into error

through the over-refinement of his logic,—his preference for a subtle

and bizarre explanation when a plainer and more commonplace one lay

ready to his hand. Yet, on the other hand, I had myself seen the

evidence, and I had heard the reasons for his deductions. When I looked

back on the long chain of curious circumstances, many of them trivial

in themselves, but all tending in the same direction, I could not

disguise from myself that even if Holmes’s explanation were incorrect

the true theory must be equally \_outré\_ and startling.

At three o’clock in the afternoon there was a loud peal at the bell, an

authoritative voice in the hall, and, to my surprise, no less a person

than Mr. Athelney Jones was shown up to me. Very different was he,

however, from the brusque and masterful professor of common sense who

had taken over the case so confidently at Upper Norwood. His expression

was downcast, and his bearing meek and even apologetic.

“Good-day, sir; good-day,” said he. “Mr. Sherlock Holmes is out, I

understand.”

“Yes, and I cannot be sure when he will be back. But perhaps you would

care to wait. Take that chair and try one of these cigars.”

“Thank you; I don’t mind if I do,” said he, mopping his face with a red

bandanna handkerchief.

“And a whiskey-and-soda?”

“Well, half a glass. It is very hot for the time of year; and I have

had a good deal to worry and try me. You know my theory about this

Norwood case?”

“I remember that you expressed one.”

“Well, I have been obliged to reconsider it. I had my net drawn tightly

round Mr. Sholto, sir, when pop he went through a hole in the middle of

it. He was able to prove an alibi which could not be shaken. From the

time that he left his brother’s room he was never out of sight of some

one or other. So it could not be he who climbed over roofs and through

trap-doors. It’s a very dark case, and my professional credit is at

stake. I should be very glad of a little assistance.”

“We all need help sometimes,” said I.

“Your friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes is a wonderful man, sir,” said he, in

a husky and confidential voice. “He’s a man who is not to be beat. I

have known that young man go into a good many cases, but I never saw

the case yet that he could not throw a light upon. He is irregular in

his methods, and a little quick perhaps in jumping at theories, but, on

the whole, I think he would have made a most promising officer, and I

don’t care who knows it. I have had a wire from him this morning, by

which I understand that he has got some clue to this Sholto business.

Here is the message.”

He took the telegram out of his pocket, and handed it to me. It was

dated from Poplar at twelve o’clock. “Go to Baker Street at once,” it

said. “If I have not returned, wait for me. I am close on the track of

the Sholto gang. You can come with us to-night if you want to be in at

the finish.”

“This sounds well. He has evidently picked up the scent again,” said I.

“Ah, then he has been at fault too,” exclaimed Jones, with evident

satisfaction. “Even the best of us are thrown off sometimes. Of course

this may prove to be a false alarm; but it is my duty as an officer of

the law to allow no chance to slip. But there is some one at the door.

Perhaps this is he.”

A heavy step was heard ascending the stair, with a great wheezing and

rattling as from a man who was sorely put to it for breath. Once or

twice he stopped, as though the climb were too much for him, but at

last he made his way to our door and entered. His appearance

corresponded to the sounds which we had heard. He was an aged man, clad

in seafaring garb, with an old pea-jacket buttoned up to his throat.

His back was bowed, his knees were shaky, and his breathing was

painfully asthmatic. As he leaned upon a thick oaken cudgel his

shoulders heaved in the effort to draw the air into his lungs. He had a

coloured scarf round his chin, and I could see little of his face save

a pair of keen dark eyes, overhung by bushy white brows, and long grey

side-whiskers. Altogether he gave me the impression of a respectable

master mariner who had fallen into years and poverty.

“What is it, my man?” I asked.

He looked about him in the slow methodical fashion of old age.

“Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?” said he.

“No; but I am acting for him. You can tell me any message you have for

him.”

“It was to him himself I was to tell it,” said he.

“But I tell you that I am acting for him. Was it about Mordecai Smith’s

boat?”

“Yes. I knows well where it is. An’ I knows where the men he is after

are. An’ I knows where the treasure is. I knows all about it.”

“Then tell me, and I shall let him know.”

“It was to him I was to tell it,” he repeated, with the petulant

obstinacy of a very old man.

“Well, you must wait for him.”

“No, no; I ain’t goin’ to lose a whole day to please no one. If Mr.

Holmes ain’t here, then Mr. Holmes must find it all out for himself. I

don’t care about the look of either of you, and I won’t tell a word.”

He shuffled towards the door, but Athelney Jones got in front of him.

“Wait a bit, my friend,” said he. “You have important information, and

you must not walk off. We shall keep you, whether you like or not,

until our friend returns.”

The old man made a little run towards the door, but, as Athelney Jones

put his broad back up against it, he recognised the uselessness of

resistance.

“Pretty sort o’ treatment this!” he cried, stamping his stick. “I come

here to see a gentleman, and you two, who I never saw in my life, seize

me and treat me in this fashion!”

“You will be none the worse,” I said. “We shall recompense you for the

loss of your time. Sit over here on the sofa, and you will not have

long to wait.”

He came across sullenly enough, and seated himself with his face

resting on his hands. Jones and I resumed our cigars and our talk.

Suddenly, however, Holmes’s voice broke in upon us.

“I think that you might offer me a cigar too,” he said.

We both started in our chairs. There was Holmes sitting close to us

with an air of quiet amusement.

“Holmes!” I exclaimed. “You here! But where is the old man?”

“Here is the old man,” said he, holding out a heap of white hair. “Here

he is,—wig, whiskers, eyebrows, and all. I thought my disguise was

pretty good, but I hardly expected that it would stand that test.”

“Ah, You rogue!” cried Jones, highly delighted. “You would have made an

actor, and a rare one. You had the proper workhouse cough, and those

weak legs of yours are worth ten pounds a week. I thought I knew the

glint of your eye, though. You didn’t get away from us so easily, You

see.”

“I have been working in that get-up all day,” said he, lighting his

cigar. “You see, a good many of the criminal classes begin to know

me,—especially since our friend here took to publishing some of my

cases: so I can only go on the war-path under some simple disguise like

this. You got my wire?”

“Yes; that was what brought me here.”

“How has your case prospered?”

“It has all come to nothing. I have had to release two of my prisoners,

and there is no evidence against the other two.”

“Never mind. We shall give you two others in the place of them. But you

must put yourself under my orders. You are welcome to all the official

credit, but you must act on the line that I point out. Is that agreed?”

“Entirely, if you will help me to the men.”

“Well, then, in the first place I shall want a fast police-boat—a steam

launch—to be at the Westminster Stairs at seven o’clock.”

“That is easily managed. There is always one about there; but I can

step across the road and telephone to make sure.”

“Then I shall want two stanch men, in case of resistance.”

“There will be two or three in the boat. What else?”

“When we secure the men we shall get the treasure. I think that it

would be a pleasure to my friend here to take the box round to the

young lady to whom half of it rightfully belongs. Let her be the first

to open it.—Eh, Watson?”

“It would be a great pleasure to me.”

“Rather an irregular proceeding,” said Jones, shaking his head.

“However, the whole thing is irregular, and I suppose we must wink at

it. The treasure must afterwards be handed over to the authorities

until after the official investigation.”

“Certainly. That is easily managed. One other point. I should much like

to have a few details about this matter from the lips of Jonathan Small

himself. You know I like to work the detail of my cases out. There is

no objection to my having an unofficial interview with him, either here

in my rooms or elsewhere, as long as he is efficiently guarded?”

“Well, you are master of the situation. I have had no proof yet of the

existence of this Jonathan Small. However, if you can catch him I don’t

see how I can refuse you an interview with him.”

“That is understood, then?”

“Perfectly. Is there anything else?”

“Only that I insist upon your dining with us. It will be ready in half

an hour. I have oysters and a brace of grouse, with something a little

choice in white wines.—Watson, you have never yet recognised my merits

as a housekeeper.”

Chapter X

The End of the Islander

Our meal was a merry one. Holmes could talk exceedingly well when he

chose, and that night he did choose. He appeared to be in a state of

nervous exaltation. I have never known him so brilliant. He spoke on a

quick succession of subjects,—on miracle-plays, on mediæval pottery, on

Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the war-ships

of the future,—handling each as though he had made a special study of

it. His bright humour marked the reaction from his black depression of

the preceding days. Athelney Jones proved to be a sociable soul in his

hours of relaxation, and faced his dinner with the air of a \_bon

vivant\_. For myself, I felt elated at the thought that we were nearing

the end of our task, and I caught something of Holmes’s gaiety. None of

us alluded during dinner to the cause which had brought us together.

When the cloth was cleared, Holmes glanced at his watch, and filled up

three glasses with port. “One bumper,” said he, “to the success of our

little expedition. And now it is high time we were off. Have you a

pistol, Watson?”

“I have my old service-revolver in my desk.”

“You had best take it, then. It is well to be prepared. I see that the

cab is at the door. I ordered it for half-past six.”

It was a little past seven before we reached the Westminster wharf, and

found our launch awaiting us. Holmes eyed it critically.

“Is there anything to mark it as a police-boat?”

“Yes,—that green lamp at the side.”

“Then take it off.”

The small change was made, we stepped on board, and the ropes were cast

off. Jones, Holmes, and I sat in the stern. There was one man at the

rudder, one to tend the engines, and two burly police-inspectors

forward.

“Where to?” asked Jones.

“To the Tower. Tell them to stop opposite Jacobson’s Yard.”

Our craft was evidently a very fast one. We shot past the long lines of

loaded barges as though they were stationary. Holmes smiled with

satisfaction as we overhauled a river steamer and left her behind us.

“We ought to be able to catch anything on the river,” he said.

“Well, hardly that. But there are not many launches to beat us.”

“We shall have to catch the \_Aurora\_, and she has a name for being a

clipper. I will tell you how the land lies, Watson. You recollect how

annoyed I was at being balked by so small a thing?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I gave my mind a thorough rest by plunging into a chemical

analysis. One of our greatest statesmen has said that a change of work

is the best rest. So it is. When I had succeeded in dissolving the

hydrocarbon which I was at work at, I came back to our problem of the

Sholtos, and thought the whole matter out again. My boys had been up

the river and down the river without result. The launch was not at any

landing-stage or wharf, nor had it returned. Yet it could hardly have

been scuttled to hide their traces,—though that always remained as a

possible hypothesis if all else failed. I knew this man Small had a

certain degree of low cunning, but I did not think him capable of

anything in the nature of delicate finesse. That is usually a product

of higher education. I then reflected that since he had certainly been

in London some time—as we had evidence that he maintained a continual

watch over Pondicherry Lodge—he could hardly leave at a moment’s

notice, but would need some little time, if it were only a day, to

arrange his affairs. That was the balance of probability, at any rate.”

“It seems to me to be a little weak,” said I. “It is more probable that

he had arranged his affairs before ever he set out upon his

expedition.”

“No, I hardly think so. This lair of his would be too valuable a

retreat in case of need for him to give it up until he was sure that he

could do without it. But a second consideration struck me. Jonathan

Small must have felt that the peculiar appearance of his companion,

however much he may have top-coated him, would give rise to gossip, and

possibly be associated with this Norwood tragedy. He was quite sharp

enough to see that. They had started from their head-quarters under

cover of darkness, and he would wish to get back before it was broad

light. Now, it was past three o’clock, according to Mrs. Smith, when

they got the boat. It would be quite bright, and people would be about

in an hour or so. Therefore, I argued, they did not go very far. They

paid Smith well to hold his tongue, reserved his launch for the final

escape, and hurried to their lodgings with the treasure-box. In a

couple of nights, when they had time to see what view the papers took,

and whether there was any suspicion, they would make their way under

cover of darkness to some ship at Gravesend or in the Downs, where no

doubt they had already arranged for passages to America or the

Colonies.”

“But the launch? They could not have taken that to their lodgings.”

“Quite so. I argued that the launch must be no great way off, in spite

of its invisibility. I then put myself in the place of Small, and

looked at it as a man of his capacity would. He would probably consider

that to send back the launch or to keep it at a wharf would make

pursuit easy if the police did happen to get on his track. How, then,

could he conceal the launch and yet have her at hand when wanted? I

wondered what I should do myself if I were in his shoes. I could only

think of one way of doing it. I might hand the launch over to some

boat-builder or repairer, with directions to make a trifling change in

her. She would then be removed to his shed or yard, and so be

effectually concealed, while at the same time I could have her at a few

hours’ notice.”

“That seems simple enough.”

“It is just these very simple things which are extremely liable to be

overlooked. However, I determined to act on the idea. I started at once

in this harmless seaman’s rig and inquired at all the yards down the

river. I drew blank at fifteen, but at the sixteenth—Jacobson’s—I

learned that the \_Aurora\_ had been handed over to them two days ago by

a wooden-legged man, with some trivial directions as to her rudder.

‘There ain’t naught amiss with her rudder,’ said the foreman. ‘There

she lies, with the red streaks.’ At that moment who should come down

but Mordecai Smith, the missing owner? He was rather the worse for

liquor. I should not, of course, have known him, but he bellowed out

his name and the name of his launch. ‘I want her to-night at eight

o’clock,’ said he,—‘eight o’clock sharp, mind, for I have two gentlemen

who won’t be kept waiting.’ They had evidently paid him well, for he

was very flush of money, chucking shillings about to the men. I

followed him some distance, but he subsided into an ale-house: so I

went back to the yard, and, happening to pick up one of my boys on the

way, I stationed him as a sentry over the launch. He is to stand at

water’s edge and wave his handkerchief to us when they start. We shall

be lying off in the stream, and it will be a strange thing if we do not

take men, treasure, and all.”

“You have planned it all very neatly, whether they are the right men or

not,” said Jones; “but if the affair were in my hands I should have had

a body of police in Jacobson’s Yard, and arrested them when they came

down.”

“Which would have been never. This man Small is a pretty shrewd fellow.

He would send a scout on ahead, and if anything made him suspicious lie

snug for another week.”

“But you might have stuck to Mordecai Smith, and so been led to their

hiding-place,” said I.

“In that case I should have wasted my day. I think that it is a hundred

to one against Smith knowing where they live. As long as he has liquor

and good pay, why should he ask questions? They send him messages what

to do. No, I thought over every possible course, and this is the best.”

While this conversation had been proceeding, we had been shooting the

long series of bridges which span the Thames. As we passed the City the

last rays of the sun were gilding the cross upon the summit of St.

Paul’s. It was twilight before we reached the Tower.

“That is Jacobson’s Yard,” said Holmes, pointing to a bristle of masts

and rigging on the Surrey side. “Cruise gently up and down here under

cover of this string of lighters.” He took a pair of night-glasses from

his pocket and gazed some time at the shore. “I see my sentry at his

post,” he remarked, “but no sign of a handkerchief.”

“Suppose we go down-stream a short way and lie in wait for them,” said

Jones, eagerly. We were all eager by this time, even the policemen and

stokers, who had a very vague idea of what was going forward.

“We have no right to take anything for granted,” Holmes answered. “It

is certainly ten to one that they go down-stream, but we cannot be

certain. From this point we can see the entrance of the yard, and they

can hardly see us. It will be a clear night and plenty of light. We

must stay where we are. See how the folk swarm over yonder in the

gaslight.”

“They are coming from work in the yard.”

“Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose every one has some little

immortal spark concealed about him. You would not think it, to look at

them. There is no \_a priori\_ probability about it. A strange enigma is

man!”

“Some one calls him a soul concealed in an animal,” I suggested.

“Winwood Reade is good upon the subject,” said Holmes. “He remarks

that, while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate

he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never

foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what

an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages

remain constant. So says the statistician. But do I see a handkerchief?

Surely there is a white flutter over yonder.”

“Yes, it is your boy,” I cried. “I can see him plainly.”

“And there is the \_Aurora\_,” exclaimed Holmes, “and going like the

devil! Full speed ahead, engineer. Make after that launch with the

yellow light. By heaven, I shall never forgive myself if she proves to

have the heels of us!”

She had slipped unseen through the yard-entrance and passed behind two

or three small craft, so that she had fairly got her speed up before we

saw her. Now she was flying down the stream, near in to the shore,

going at a tremendous rate. Jones looked gravely at her and shook his

head.

“She is very fast,” he said. “I doubt if we shall catch her.”

“We \_must\_ catch her!” cried Holmes, between his teeth. “Heap it on,

stokers! Make her do all she can! If we burn the boat we must have

them!”

We were fairly after her now. The furnaces roared, and the powerful

engines whizzed and clanked, like a great metallic heart. Her sharp,

steep prow cut through the river-water and sent two rolling waves to

right and to left of us. With every throb of the engines we sprang and

quivered like a living thing. One great yellow lantern in our bows

threw a long, flickering funnel of light in front of us. Right ahead a

dark blur upon the water showed where the \_Aurora\_ lay, and the swirl

of white foam behind her spoke of the pace at which she was going. We

flashed past barges, steamers, merchant-vessels, in and out, behind

this one and round the other. Voices hailed us out of the darkness, but

still the \_Aurora\_ thundered on, and still we followed close upon her

track.

“Pile it on, men, pile it on!” cried Holmes, looking down into the

engine-room, while the fierce glow from below beat upon his eager,

aquiline face. “Get every pound of steam you can.”

“I think we gain a little,” said Jones, with his eyes on the \_Aurora\_.

“I am sure of it,” said I. “We shall be up with her in a very few

minutes.”

At that moment, however, as our evil fate would have it, a tug with

three barges in tow blundered in between us. It was only by putting our

helm hard down that we avoided a collision, and before we could round

them and recover our way the \_Aurora\_ had gained a good two hundred

yards. She was still, however, well in view, and the murky uncertain

twilight was setting into a clear starlit night. Our boilers were

strained to their utmost, and the frail shell vibrated and creaked with

the fierce energy which was driving us along. We had shot through the

Pool, past the West India Docks, down the long Deptford Reach, and up

again after rounding the Isle of Dogs. The dull blur in front of us

resolved itself now clearly enough into the dainty \_Aurora\_. Jones

turned our search-light upon her, so that we could plainly see the

figures upon her deck. One man sat by the stern, with something black

between his knees over which he stooped. Beside him lay a dark mass

which looked like a Newfoundland dog. The boy held the tiller, while

against the red glare of the furnace I could see old Smith, stripped to

the waist, and shovelling coals for dear life. They may have had some

doubt at first as to whether we were really pursuing them, but now as

we followed every winding and turning which they took there could no

longer be any question about it. At Greenwich we were about three

hundred paces behind them. At Blackwall we could not have been more

than two hundred and fifty. I have coursed many creatures in many

countries during my checkered career, but never did sport give me such

a wild thrill as this mad, flying man-hunt down the Thames. Steadily we

drew in upon them, yard by yard. In the silence of the night we could

hear the panting and clanking of their machinery. The man in the stern

still crouched upon the deck, and his arms were moving as though he

were busy, while every now and then he would look up and measure with a

glance the distance which still separated us. Nearer we came and

nearer. Jones yelled to them to stop. We were not more than four boat’s

lengths behind them, both boats flying at a tremendous pace. It was a

clear reach of the river, with Barking Level upon one side and the

melancholy Plumstead Marshes upon the other. At our hail the man in the

stern sprang up from the deck and shook his two clinched fists at us,

cursing the while in a high, cracked voice. He was a good-sized,

powerful man, and as he stood poising himself with legs astride I could

see that from the thigh downwards there was but a wooden stump upon the

right side. At the sound of his strident, angry cries there was

movement in the huddled bundle upon the deck. It straightened itself

into a little black man—the smallest I have ever seen—with a great,

misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair. Holmes had

already drawn his revolver, and I whipped out mine at the sight of this

savage, distorted creature. He was wrapped in some sort of dark ulster

or blanket, which left only his face exposed; but that face was enough

to give a man a sleepless night. Never have I seen features so deeply

marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and

burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from

his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with a half animal fury.

“Fire if he raises his hand,” said Holmes, quietly. We were within a

boat’s-length by this time, and almost within touch of our quarry. I

can see the two of them now as they stood, the white man with his legs

far apart, shrieking out curses, and the unhallowed dwarf with his

hideous face, and his strong yellow teeth gnashing at us in the light

of our lantern.

It was well that we had so clear a view of him. Even as we looked he

plucked out from under his covering a short, round piece of wood, like

a school-ruler, and clapped it to his lips. Our pistols rang out

together. He whirled round, threw up his arms, and with a kind of

choking cough fell sideways into the stream. I caught one glimpse of

his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters. At the

same moment the wooden-legged man threw himself upon the rudder and put

it hard down, so that his boat made straight in for the southern bank,

while we shot past her stern, only clearing her by a few feet. We were

round after her in an instant, but she was already nearly at the bank.

It was a wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide

expanse of marsh-land, with pools of stagnant water and beds of

decaying vegetation. The launch with a dull thud ran up upon the

mud-bank, with her bow in the air and her stern flush with the water.

The fugitive sprang out, but his stump instantly sank its whole length

into the sodden soil. In vain he struggled and writhed. Not one step

could he possibly take either forwards or backwards. He yelled in

impotent rage, and kicked frantically into the mud with his other foot,

but his struggles only bored his wooden pin the deeper into the sticky

bank. When we brought our launch alongside he was so firmly anchored

that it was only by throwing the end of a rope over his shoulders that

we were able to haul him out, and to drag him, like some evil fish,

over our side. The two Smiths, father and son, sat sullenly in their

launch, but came aboard meekly enough when commanded. The \_Aurora\_

herself we hauled off and made fast to our stern. A solid iron chest of

Indian workmanship stood upon the deck. This, there could be no

question, was the same that had contained the ill-omened treasure of

the Sholtos. There was no key, but it was of considerable weight, so we

transferred it carefully to our own little cabin. As we steamed slowly

up-stream again, we flashed our search-light in every direction, but

there was no sign of the Islander. Somewhere in the dark ooze at the

bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange visitor to our

shores.

“See here,” said Holmes, pointing to the wooden hatchway. “We were

hardly quick enough with our pistols.” There, sure enough, just behind

where we had been standing, stuck one of those murderous darts which we

knew so well. It must have whizzed between us at the instant that we

fired. Holmes smiled at it and shrugged his shoulders in his easy

fashion, but I confess that it turned me sick to think of the horrible

death which had passed so close to us that night.

Chapter XI

The Great Agra Treasure

Our captive sat in the cabin opposite to the iron box which he had done

so much and waited so long to gain. He was a sunburned, reckless-eyed

fellow, with a network of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany

features, which told of a hard, open-air life. There was a singular

prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was not to be

easily turned from his purpose. His age may have been fifty or

thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was thickly shot with grey. His

face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and

aggressive chin gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression

when moved to anger. He sat now with his handcuffed hands upon his lap,

and his head sunk upon his breast, while he looked with his keen,

twinkling eyes at the box which had been the cause of his ill-doings.

It seemed to me that there was more sorrow than anger in his rigid and

contained countenance. Once he looked up at me with a gleam of

something like humour in his eyes.

“Well, Jonathan Small,” said Holmes, lighting a cigar, “I am sorry that

it has come to this.”

“And so am I, sir,” he answered, frankly. “I don’t believe that I can

swing over the job. I give you my word on the book that I never raised

hand against Mr. Sholto. It was that little hell-hound Tonga who shot

one of his cursed darts into him. I had no part in it, sir. I was as

grieved as if it had been my blood-relation. I welted the little devil

with the slack end of the rope for it, but it was done, and I could not

undo it again.”

“Have a cigar,” said Holmes; “and you had best take a pull out of my

flask, for you are very wet. How could you expect so small and weak a

man as this black fellow to overpower Mr. Sholto and hold him while you

were climbing the rope?”

“You seem to know as much about it as if you were there, sir. The truth

is that I hoped to find the room clear. I knew the habits of the house

pretty well, and it was the time when Mr. Sholto usually went down to

his supper. I shall make no secret of the business. The best defence

that I can make is just the simple truth. Now, if it had been the old

major I would have swung for him with a light heart. I would have

thought no more of knifing him than of smoking this cigar. But it’s

cursed hard that I should be lagged over this young Sholto, with whom I

had no quarrel whatever.”

“You are under the charge of Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard. He

is going to bring you up to my rooms, and I shall ask you for a true

account of the matter. You must make a clean breast of it, for if you

do I hope that I may be of use to you. I think I can prove that the

poison acts so quickly that the man was dead before ever you reached

the room.”

“That he was, sir. I never got such a turn in my life as when I saw him

grinning at me with his head on his shoulder as I climbed through the

window. It fairly shook me, sir. I’d have half killed Tonga for it if

he had not scrambled off. That was how he came to leave his club, and

some of his darts too, as he tells me, which I dare say helped to put

you on our track; though how you kept on it is more than I can tell. I

don’t feel no malice against you for it. But it does seem a queer

thing,” he added, with a bitter smile, “that I who have a fair claim to

nigh upon half a million of money should spend the first half of my

life building a breakwater in the Andamans, and am like to spend the

other half digging drains at Dartmoor. It was an evil day for me when

first I clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the

Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the

man who owned it. To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought

fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life.”

At this moment Athelney Jones thrust his broad face and heavy shoulders

into the tiny cabin. “Quite a family party,” he remarked. “I think I

shall have a pull at that flask, Holmes. Well, I think we may all

congratulate each other. Pity we didn’t take the other alive; but there

was no choice. I say, Holmes, you must confess that you cut it rather

fine. It was all we could do to overhaul her.”

“All is well that ends well,” said Holmes. “But I certainly did not

know that the \_Aurora\_ was such a clipper.”

“Smith says she is one of the fastest launches on the river, and that

if he had had another man to help him with the engines we should never

have caught her. He swears he knew nothing of this Norwood business.”

“Neither he did,” cried our prisoner,—“not a word. I chose his launch

because I heard that she was a flier. We told him nothing, but we paid

him well, and he was to get something handsome if we reached our

vessel, the \_Esmeralda\_, at Gravesend, outward bound for the Brazils.”

“Well, if he has done no wrong we shall see that no wrong comes to him.

If we are pretty quick in catching our men, we are not so quick in

condemning them.” It was amusing to notice how the consequential Jones

was already beginning to give himself airs on the strength of the

capture. From the slight smile which played over Sherlock Holmes’s

face, I could see that the speech had not been lost upon him.

“We will be at Vauxhall Bridge presently,” said Jones, “and shall land

you, Dr. Watson, with the treasure-box. I need hardly tell you that I

am taking a very grave responsibility upon myself in doing this. It is

most irregular; but of course an agreement is an agreement. I must,

however, as a matter of duty, send an inspector with you, since you

have so valuable a charge. You will drive, no doubt?”

“Yes, I shall drive.”

“It is a pity there is no key, that we may make an inventory first. You

will have to break it open. Where is the key, my man?”

“At the bottom of the river,” said Small, shortly.

“Hum! There was no use your giving this unnecessary trouble. We have

had work enough already through you. However, doctor, I need not warn

you to be careful. Bring the box back with you to the Baker Street

rooms. You will find us there, on our way to the station.”

They landed me at Vauxhall, with my heavy iron box, and with a bluff,

genial inspector as my companion. A quarter of an hour’s drive brought

us to Mrs. Cecil Forrester’s. The servant seemed surprised at so late a

visitor. Mrs. Cecil Forrester was out for the evening, she explained,

and likely to be very late. Miss Morstan, however, was in the

drawing-room: so to the drawing-room I went, box in hand, leaving the

obliging inspector in the cab.

She was seated by the open window, dressed in some sort of white

diaphanous material, with a little touch of scarlet at the neck and

waist. The soft light of a shaded lamp fell upon her as she leaned back

in the basket chair, playing over her sweet, grave face, and tinting

with a dull, metallic sparkle the rich coils of her luxuriant hair. One

white arm and hand drooped over the side of the chair, and her whole

pose and figure spoke of an absorbing melancholy. At the sound of my

foot-fall she sprang to her feet, however, and a bright flush of

surprise and of pleasure coloured her pale cheeks.

“I heard a cab drive up,” she said. “I thought that Mrs. Forrester had

come back very early, but I never dreamed that it might be you. What

news have you brought me?”

“I have brought something better than news,” said I, putting down the

box upon the table and speaking jovially and boisterously, though my

heart was heavy within me. “I have brought you something which is worth

all the news in the world. I have brought you a fortune.”

She glanced at the iron box. “Is that the treasure, then?” she asked,

coolly enough.

“Yes, this is the great Agra treasure. Half of it is yours and half is

Thaddeus Sholto’s. You will have a couple of hundred thousand each.

Think of that! An annuity of ten thousand pounds. There will be few

richer young ladies in England. Is it not glorious?”

I think that I must have been rather overacting my delight, and that

she detected a hollow ring in my congratulations, for I saw her

eyebrows rise a little, and she glanced at me curiously.

“If I have it,” said she, “I owe it to you.”

“No, no,” I answered, “not to me, but to my friend Sherlock Holmes.

With all the will in the world, I could never have followed up a clue

which has taxed even his analytical genius. As it was, we very nearly

lost it at the last moment.”

“Pray sit down and tell me all about it, Dr. Watson,” said she.

I narrated briefly what had occurred since I had seen her

last,—Holmes’s new method of search, the discovery of the \_Aurora\_, the

appearance of Athelney Jones, our expedition in the evening, and the

wild chase down the Thames. She listened with parted lips and shining

eyes to my recital of our adventures. When I spoke of the dart which

had so narrowly missed us, she turned so white that I feared that she

was about to faint.

“It is nothing,” she said, as I hastened to pour her out some water. “I

am all right again. It was a shock to me to hear that I had placed my

friends in such horrible peril.”

“That is all over,” I answered. “It was nothing. I will tell you no

more gloomy details. Let us turn to something brighter. There is the

treasure. What could be brighter than that? I got leave to bring it

with me, thinking that it would interest you to be the first to see

it.”

“It would be of the greatest interest to me,” she said. There was no

eagerness in her voice, however. It had struck her, doubtless, that it

might seem ungracious upon her part to be indifferent to a prize which

had cost so much to win.

“What a pretty box!” she said, stooping over it. “This is Indian work,

I suppose?”

“Yes; it is Benares metal-work.”

“And so heavy!” she exclaimed, trying to raise it. “The box alone must

be of some value. Where is the key?”

“Small threw it into the Thames,” I answered. “I must borrow Mrs.

Forrester’s poker.” There was in the front a thick and broad hasp,

wrought in the image of a sitting Buddha. Under this I thrust the end

of the poker and twisted it outward as a lever. The hasp sprang open

with a loud snap. With trembling fingers I flung back the lid. We both

stood gazing in astonishment. The box was empty!

No wonder that it was heavy. The iron-work was two-thirds of an inch

thick all round. It was massive, well made, and solid, like a chest

constructed to carry things of great price, but not one shred or crumb

of metal or jewelry lay within it. It was absolutely and completely

empty.

“The treasure is lost,” said Miss Morstan, calmly.

As I listened to the words and realised what they meant, a great shadow

seemed to pass from my soul. I did not know how this Agra treasure had

weighed me down, until now that it was finally removed. It was selfish,

no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realise nothing save that the

golden barrier was gone from between us. “Thank God!” I ejaculated from

my very heart.

She looked at me with a quick, questioning smile. “Why do you say

that?” she asked.

“Because you are within my reach again,” I said, taking her hand. She

did not withdraw it. “Because I love you, Mary, as truly as ever a man

loved a woman. Because this treasure, these riches, sealed my lips. Now

that they are gone I can tell you how I love you. That is why I said,

‘Thank God.’”

“Then I say, ‘Thank God,’ too,” she whispered, as I drew her to my

side. Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained

one.

Chapter XII

The Strange Story of Jonathan Small

A very patient man was that inspector in the cab, for it was a weary

time before I rejoined him. His face clouded over when I showed him the

empty box.

“There goes the reward!” said he, gloomily. “Where there is no money

there is no pay. This night’s work would have been worth a tenner each

to Sam Brown and me if the treasure had been there.”

“Mr. Thaddeus Sholto is a rich man,” I said. “He will see that you are

rewarded, treasure or no.”

The inspector shook his head despondently, however. “It’s a bad job,”

he repeated; “and so Mr. Athelney Jones will think.”

His forecast proved to be correct, for the detective looked blank

enough when I got to Baker Street and showed him the empty box. They

had only just arrived, Holmes, the prisoner, and he, for they had

changed their plans so far as to report themselves at a station upon

the way. My companion lounged in his arm-chair with his usual listless

expression, while Small sat stolidly opposite to him with his wooden

leg cocked over his sound one. As I exhibited the empty box he leaned

back in his chair and laughed aloud.

“This is your doing, Small,” said Athelney Jones, angrily.

“Yes, I have put it away where you shall never lay hand upon it,” he

cried, exultantly. “It is my treasure; and if I can’t have the loot

I’ll take darned good care that no one else does. I tell you that no

living man has any right to it, unless it is three men who are in the

Andaman convict-barracks and myself. I know now that I cannot have the

use of it, and I know that they cannot. I have acted all through for

them as much as for myself. It’s been the sign of four with us always.

Well I know that they would have had me do just what I have done, and

throw the treasure into the Thames rather than let it go to kith or kin

of Sholto or of Morstan. It was not to make them rich that we did for

Achmet. You’ll find the treasure where the key is, and where little

Tonga is. When I saw that your launch must catch us, I put the loot

away in a safe place. There are no rupees for you this journey.”

“You are deceiving us, Small,” said Athelney Jones, sternly. “If you

had wished to throw the treasure into the Thames it would have been

easier for you to have thrown box and all.”

“Easier for me to throw, and easier for you to recover,” he answered,

with a shrewd, sidelong look. “The man that was clever enough to hunt

me down is clever enough to pick an iron box from the bottom of a

river. Now that they are scattered over five miles or so, it may be a

harder job. It went to my heart to do it, though. I was half mad when

you came up with us. However, there’s no good grieving over it. I’ve

had ups in my life, and I’ve had downs, but I’ve learned not to cry

over spilled milk.”

“This is a very serious matter, Small,” said the detective. “If you had

helped justice, instead of thwarting it in this way, you would have had

a better chance at your trial.”

“Justice!” snarled the ex-convict. “A pretty justice! Whose loot is

this, if it is not ours? Where is the justice that I should give it up

to those who have never earned it? Look how I have earned it! Twenty

long years in that fever-ridden swamp, all day at work under the

mangrove-tree, all night chained up in the filthy convict-huts, bitten

by mosquitoes, racked with ague, bullied by every cursed black-faced

policeman who loved to take it out of a white man. That was how I

earned the Agra treasure; and you talk to me of justice because I

cannot bear to feel that I have paid this price only that another may

enjoy it! I would rather swing a score of times, or have one of Tonga’s

darts in my hide, than live in a convict’s cell and feel that another

man is at his ease in a palace with the money that should be mine.”

Small had dropped his mask of stoicism, and all this came out in a wild

whirl of words, while his eyes blazed, and the handcuffs clanked

together with the impassioned movement of his hands. I could

understand, as I saw the fury and the passion of the man, that it was

no groundless or unnatural terror which had possessed Major Sholto when

he first learned that the injured convict was upon his track.

“You forget that we know nothing of all this,” said Holmes quietly. “We

have not heard your story, and we cannot tell how far justice may

originally have been on your side.”

“Well, sir, you have been very fair-spoken to me, though I can see that

I have you to thank that I have these bracelets upon my wrists. Still,

I bear no grudge for that. It is all fair and above-board. If you want

to hear my story I have no wish to hold it back. What I say to you is

God’s truth, every word of it. Thank you; you can put the glass beside

me here, and I’ll put my lips to it if I am dry.

“I am a Worcestershire man myself,—born near Pershore. I dare say you

would find a heap of Smalls living there now if you were to look. I

have often thought of taking a look round there, but the truth is that

I was never much of a credit to the family, and I doubt if they would

be so very glad to see me. They were all steady, chapel-going folk,

small farmers, well-known and respected over the country-side, while I

was always a bit of a rover. At last, however, when I was about

eighteen, I gave them no more trouble, for I got into a mess over a

girl, and could only get out of it again by taking the Queen’s shilling

and joining the 3rd Buffs, which was just starting for India.

“I wasn’t destined to do much soldiering, however. I had just got past

the goose-step, and learned to handle my musket, when I was fool enough

to go swimming in the Ganges. Luckily for me, my company sergeant, John

Holder, was in the water at the same time, and he was one of the finest

swimmers in the service. A crocodile took me, just as I was half-way

across, and nipped off my right leg as clean as a surgeon could have

done it, just above the knee. What with the shock and the loss of

blood, I fainted, and should have drowned if Holder had not caught hold

of me and paddled for the bank. I was five months in hospital over it,

and when at last I was able to limp out of it with this timber toe

strapped to my stump I found myself invalided out of the army and

unfitted for any active occupation.

“I was, as you can imagine, pretty down on my luck at this time, for I

was a useless cripple though not yet in my twentieth year. However, my

misfortune soon proved to be a blessing in disguise. A man named Abel

White, who had come out there as an indigo-planter, wanted an overseer

to look after his coolies and keep them up to their work. He happened

to be a friend of our colonel’s, who had taken an interest in me since

the accident. To make a long story short, the colonel recommended me

strongly for the post and, as the work was mostly to be done on

horseback, my leg was no great obstacle, for I had enough knee left to

keep good grip on the saddle. What I had to do was to ride over the

plantation, to keep an eye on the men as they worked, and to report the

idlers. The pay was fair, I had comfortable quarters, and altogether I

was content to spend the remainder of my life in indigo-planting. Mr.

Abel White was a kind man, and he would often drop into my little

shanty and smoke a pipe with me, for white folk out there feel their

hearts warm to each other as they never do here at home.

“Well, I was never in luck’s way long. Suddenly, without a note of

warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. One month India lay as still

and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were

two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a

perfect hell. Of course you know all about it, gentlemen,—a deal more

than I do, very like, since reading is not in my line. I only know what

I saw with my own eyes. Our plantation was at a place called Muttra,

near the border of the Northwest Provinces. Night after night the whole

sky was alight with the burning bungalows, and day after day we had

small companies of Europeans passing through our estate with their

wives and children, on their way to Agra, where were the nearest

troops. Mr. Abel White was an obstinate man. He had it in his head that

the affair had been exaggerated, and that it would blow over as

suddenly as it had sprung up. There he sat on his veranda, drinking

whiskey-pegs and smoking cheroots, while the country was in a blaze

about him. Of course we stuck by him, I and Dawson, who, with his wife,

used to do the book-work and the managing. Well, one fine day the crash

came. I had been away on a distant plantation, and was riding slowly

home in the evening, when my eye fell upon something all huddled

together at the bottom of a steep nullah. I rode down to see what it

was, and the cold struck through my heart when I found it was Dawson’s

wife, all cut into ribbons, and half eaten by jackals and native dogs.

A little further up the road Dawson himself was lying on his face,

quite dead, with an empty revolver in his hand and four Sepoys lying

across each other in front of him. I reined up my horse, wondering

which way I should turn, but at that moment I saw thick smoke curling

up from Abel White’s bungalow and the flames beginning to burst through

the roof. I knew then that I could do my employer no good, but would

only throw my own life away if I meddled in the matter. From where I

stood I could see hundreds of the black fiends, with their red coats

still on their backs, dancing and howling round the burning house. Some

of them pointed at me, and a couple of bullets sang past my head; so I

broke away across the paddy-fields, and found myself late at night safe

within the walls at Agra.

“As it proved, however, there was no great safety there, either. The

whole country was up like a swarm of bees. Wherever the English could

collect in little bands they held just the ground that their guns

commanded. Everywhere else they were helpless fugitives. It was a fight

of the millions against the hundreds; and the cruellest part of it was

that these men that we fought against, foot, horse, and gunners, were

our own picked troops, whom we had taught and trained, handling our own

weapons, and blowing our own bugle-calls. At Agra there were the 3rd

Bengal Fusiliers, some Sikhs, two troops of horse, and a battery of

artillery. A volunteer corps of clerks and merchants had been formed,

and this I joined, wooden leg and all. We went out to meet the rebels

at Shahgunge early in July, and we beat them back for a time, but our

powder gave out, and we had to fall back upon the city.

“Nothing but the worst news came to us from every side,—which is not to

be wondered at, for if you look at the map you will see that we were

right in the heart of it. Lucknow is rather better than a hundred miles

to the east, and Cawnpore about as far to the south. From every point

on the compass there was nothing but torture and murder and outrage.

“The city of Agra is a great place, swarming with fanatics and fierce

devil-worshippers of all sorts. Our handful of men were lost among the

narrow, winding streets. Our leader moved across the river, therefore,

and took up his position in the old fort at Agra. I don’t know if any

of you gentlemen have ever read or heard anything of that old fort. It

is a very queer place,—the queerest that ever I was in, and I have been

in some rum corners, too. First of all, it is enormous in size. I

should think that the enclosure must be acres and acres. There is a

modern part, which took all our garrison, women, children, stores, and

everything else, with plenty of room over. But the modern part is

nothing like the size of the old quarter, where nobody goes, and which

is given over to the scorpions and the centipedes. It is all full of

great deserted halls, and winding passages, and long corridors twisting

in and out, so that it is easy enough for folk to get lost in it. For

this reason it was seldom that any one went into it, though now and

again a party with torches might go exploring.

“The river washes along the front of the old fort, and so protects it,

but on the sides and behind there are many doors, and these had to be

guarded, of course, in the old quarter as well as in that which was

actually held by our troops. We were short-handed, with hardly men

enough to man the angles of the building and to serve the guns. It was

impossible for us, therefore, to station a strong guard at every one of

the innumerable gates. What we did was to organise a central

guard-house in the middle of the fort, and to leave each gate under the

charge of one white man and two or three natives. I was selected to

take charge during certain hours of the night of a small isolated door

upon the southwest side of the building. Two Sikh troopers were placed

under my command, and I was instructed if anything went wrong to fire

my musket, when I might rely upon help coming at once from the central

guard. As the guard was a good two hundred paces away, however, and as

the space between was cut up into a labyrinth of passages and

corridors, I had great doubts as to whether they could arrive in time

to be of any use in case of an actual attack.

“Well, I was pretty proud at having this small command given me, since

I was a raw recruit, and a game-legged one at that. For two nights I

kept the watch with my Punjaubees. They were tall, fierce-looking

chaps, Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan by name, both old fighting-men

who had borne arms against us at Chilian-wallah. They could talk

English pretty well, but I could get little out of them. They preferred

to stand together and jabber all night in their queer Sikh lingo. For

myself, I used to stand outside the gateway, looking down on the broad,

winding river and on the twinkling lights of the great city. The

beating of drums, the rattle of tomtoms, and the yells and howls of the

rebels, drunk with opium and with bang, were enough to remind us all

night of our dangerous neighbours across the stream. Every two hours

the officer of the night used to come round to all the posts, to make

sure that all was well.

“The third night of my watch was dark and dirty, with a small, driving

rain. It was dreary work standing in the gateway hour after hour in

such weather. I tried again and again to make my Sikhs talk, but

without much success. At two in the morning the rounds passed, and

broke for a moment the weariness of the night. Finding that my

companions would not be led into conversation, I took out my pipe, and

laid down my musket to strike the match. In an instant the two Sikhs

were upon me. One of them snatched my firelock up and levelled it at my

head, while the other held a great knife to my throat and swore between

his teeth that he would plunge it into me if I moved a step.

“My first thought was that these fellows were in league with the

rebels, and that this was the beginning of an assault. If our door were

in the hands of the Sepoys the place must fall, and the women and

children be treated as they were in Cawnpore. Maybe you gentlemen think

that I am just making out a case for myself, but I give you my word

that when I thought of that, though I felt the point of the knife at my

throat, I opened my mouth with the intention of giving a scream, if it

was my last one, which might alarm the main guard. The man who held me

seemed to know my thoughts; for, even as I braced myself to it, he

whispered, ‘Don’t make a noise. The fort is safe enough. There are no

rebel dogs on this side of the river.’ There was the ring of truth in

what he said, and I knew that if I raised my voice I was a dead man. I

could read it in the fellow’s brown eyes. I waited, therefore, in

silence, to see what it was that they wanted from me.

“‘Listen to me, Sahib,’ said the taller and fiercer of the pair, the

one whom they called Abdullah Khan. ‘You must either be with us now or

you must be silenced forever. The thing is too great a one for us to

hesitate. Either you are heart and soul with us on your oath on the

cross of the Christians, or your body this night shall be thrown into

the ditch and we shall pass over to our brothers in the rebel army.

There is no middle way. Which is it to be, death or life? We can only

give you three minutes to decide, for the time is passing, and all must

be done before the rounds come again.’

“‘How can I decide?’ said I. ‘You have not told me what you want of me.

But I tell you now that if it is anything against the safety of the

fort I will have no truck with it, so you can drive home your knife and

welcome.’

“‘It is nothing against the fort,’ said he. ‘We only ask you to do that

which your countrymen come to this land for. We ask you to be rich. If

you will be one of us this night, we will swear to you upon the naked

knife, and by the threefold oath which no Sikh was ever known to break,

that you shall have your fair share of the loot. A quarter of the

treasure shall be yours. We can say no fairer.’

“‘But what is the treasure, then?’ I asked. ‘I am as ready to be rich

as you can be, if you will but show me how it can be done.’

“‘You will swear, then,’ said he, ‘by the bones of your father, by the

honour of your mother, by the cross of your faith, to raise no hand and

speak no word against us, either now or afterwards?’

“‘I will swear it,’ I answered, ‘provided that the fort is not

endangered.’

“‘Then my comrade and I will swear that you shall have a quarter of the

treasure which shall be equally divided among the four of us.’

“‘There are but three,’ said I.

“‘No; Dost Akbar must have his share. We can tell the tale to you while

we await them. Do you stand at the gate, Mahomet Singh, and give notice

of their coming. The thing stands thus, Sahib, and I tell it to you

because I know that an oath is binding upon a Feringhee, and that we

may trust you. Had you been a lying Hindoo, though you had sworn by all

the gods in their false temples, your blood would have been upon the

knife, and your body in the water. But the Sikh knows the Englishman,

and the Englishman knows the Sikh. Hearken, then, to what I have to

say.

“‘There is a rajah in the northern provinces who has much wealth,

though his lands are small. Much has come to him from his father, and

more still he has set by himself, for he is of a low nature and hoards

his gold rather than spend it. When the troubles broke out he would be

friends both with the lion and the tiger,—with the Sepoy and with the

Company’s Raj. Soon, however, it seemed to him that the white men’s day

was come, for through all the land he could hear of nothing but of

their death and their overthrow. Yet, being a careful man, he made such

plans that, come what might, half at least of his treasure should be

left to him. That which was in gold and silver he kept by him in the

vaults of his palace, but the most precious stones and the choicest

pearls that he had he put in an iron box, and sent it by a trusty

servant who, under the guise of a merchant, should take it to the fort

at Agra, there to lie until the land is at peace. Thus, if the rebels

won he would have his money, but if the Company conquered his jewels

would be saved to him. Having thus divided his hoard, he threw himself

into the cause of the Sepoys, since they were strong upon his borders.

By doing this, mark you, Sahib, his property becomes the due of those

who have been true to their salt.

“‘This pretended merchant, who travels under the name of Achmet, is now

in the city of Agra, and desires to gain his way into the fort. He has

with him as travelling-companion my foster-brother Dost Akbar, who

knows his secret. Dost Akbar has promised this night to lead him to a

side-postern of the fort, and has chosen this one for his purpose. Here

he will come presently, and here he will find Mahomet Singh and myself

awaiting him. The place is lonely, and none shall know of his coming.

The world shall know of the merchant Achmet no more, but the great

treasure of the rajah shall be divided among us. What say you to it,

Sahib?’

“In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and a sacred thing;

but it is very different when there is fire and blood all round you and

you have been used to meeting death at every turn. Whether Achmet the

merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the

talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I

might do in the old country with it, and how my folk would stare when

they saw their ne’er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold

moidores. I had, therefore, already made up my mind. Abdullah Khan,

however, thinking that I hesitated, pressed the matter more closely.

“‘Consider, Sahib,’ said he, ‘that if this man is taken by the

commandant he will be hung or shot, and his jewels taken by the

government, so that no man will be a rupee the better for them. Now,

since we do the taking of him, why should we not do the rest as well?

The jewels will be as well with us as in the Company’s coffers. There

will be enough to make every one of us rich men and great chiefs. No

one can know about the matter, for here we are cut off from all men.

What could be better for the purpose? Say again, then, Sahib, whether

you are with us, or if we must look upon you as an enemy.’

“‘I am with you heart and soul,’ said I.

“‘It is well,’ he answered, handing me back my firelock. ‘You see that

we trust you, for your word, like ours, is not to be broken. We have

now only to wait for my brother and the merchant.’

“‘Does your brother know, then, of what you will do?’ I asked.

“‘The plan is his. He has devised it. We will go to the gate and share

the watch with Mahomet Singh.’

“The rain was still falling steadily, for it was just the beginning of

the wet season. Brown, heavy clouds were drifting across the sky, and

it was hard to see more than a stone-cast. A deep moat lay in front of

our door, but the water was in places nearly dried up, and it could

easily be crossed. It was strange to me to be standing there with those

two wild Punjaubees waiting for the man who was coming to his death.

“Suddenly my eye caught the glint of a shaded lantern at the other side

of the moat. It vanished among the mound-heaps, and then appeared again

coming slowly in our direction.

“‘Here they are!’ I exclaimed.

“‘You will challenge him, Sahib, as usual,’ whispered Abdullah. ‘Give

him no cause for fear. Send us in with him, and we shall do the rest

while you stay here on guard. Have the lantern ready to uncover, that

we may be sure that it is indeed the man.’

“The light had flickered onwards, now stopping and now advancing, until

I could see two dark figures upon the other side of the moat. I let

them scramble down the sloping bank, splash through the mire, and climb

half-way up to the gate, before I challenged them.

“‘Who goes there?’ said I, in a subdued voice.

“‘Friends,’ came the answer. I uncovered my lantern and threw a flood

of light upon them. The first was an enormous Sikh, with a black beard

which swept nearly down to his cummerbund. Outside of a show I have

never seen so tall a man. The other was a little, fat, round fellow,

with a great yellow turban, and a bundle in his hand, done up in a

shawl. He seemed to be all in a quiver with fear, for his hands

twitched as if he had the ague, and his head kept turning to left and

right with two bright little twinkling eyes, like a mouse when he

ventures out from his hole. It gave me the chills to think of killing

him, but I thought of the treasure, and my heart set as hard as a flint

within me. When he saw my white face he gave a little chirrup of joy

and came running up towards me.

“‘Your protection, Sahib,’ he panted,—‘your protection for the unhappy

merchant Achmet. I have travelled across Rajpootana that I might seek

the shelter of the fort at Agra. I have been robbed and beaten and

abused because I have been the friend of the Company. It is a blessed

night this when I am once more in safety,—I and my poor possessions.’

“‘What have you in the bundle?’ I asked.

“‘An iron box,’ he answered, ‘which contains one or two little family

matters which are of no value to others, but which I should be sorry to

lose. Yet I am not a beggar; and I shall reward you, young Sahib, and

your governor also, if he will give me the shelter I ask.’

“I could not trust myself to speak longer with the man. The more I

looked at his fat, frightened face, the harder did it seem that we

should slay him in cold blood. It was best to get it over.

“‘Take him to the main guard,’ said I. The two Sikhs closed in upon him

on each side, and the giant walked behind, while they marched in

through the dark gateway. Never was a man so compassed round with

death. I remained at the gateway with the lantern.

“I could hear the measured tramp of their footsteps sounding through

the lonely corridors. Suddenly it ceased, and I heard voices, and a

scuffle, with the sound of blows. A moment later there came, to my

horror, a rush of footsteps coming in my direction, with the loud

breathing of a running man. I turned my lantern down the long, straight

passage, and there was the fat man, running like the wind, with a smear

of blood across his face, and close at his heels, bounding like a

tiger, the great black-bearded Sikh, with a knife flashing in his hand.

I have never seen a man run so fast as that little merchant. He was

gaining on the Sikh, and I could see that if he once passed me and got

to the open air he would save himself yet. My heart softened to him,

but again the thought of his treasure turned me hard and bitter. I cast

my firelock between his legs as he raced past, and he rolled twice over

like a shot rabbit. Ere he could stagger to his feet the Sikh was upon

him, and buried his knife twice in his side. The man never uttered moan

nor moved muscle, but lay were he had fallen. I think myself that he

may have broken his neck with the fall. You see, gentlemen, that I am

keeping my promise. I am telling you every work of the business just

exactly as it happened, whether it is in my favour or not.”

He stopped, and held out his manacled hands for the whiskey-and-water

which Holmes had brewed for him. For myself, I confess that I had now

conceived the utmost horror of the man, not only for this cold-blooded

business in which he had been concerned, but even more for the somewhat

flippant and careless way in which he narrated it. Whatever punishment

was in store for him, I felt that he might expect no sympathy from me.

Sherlock Holmes and Jones sat with their hands upon their knees, deeply

interested in the story, but with the same disgust written upon their

faces. He may have observed it, for there was a touch of defiance in

his voice and manner as he proceeded.

“It was all very bad, no doubt,” said he. “I should like to know how

many fellows in my shoes would have refused a share of this loot when

they knew that they would have their throats cut for their pains.

Besides, it was my life or his when once he was in the fort. If he had

got out, the whole business would come to light, and I should have been

court-martialled and shot as likely as not; for people were not very

lenient at a time like that.”

“Go on with your story,” said Holmes, shortly.

“Well, we carried him in, Abdullah, Akbar, and I. A fine weight he was,

too, for all that he was so short. Mahomet Singh was left to guard the

door. We took him to a place which the Sikhs had already prepared. It

was some distance off, where a winding passage leads to a great empty

hall, the brick walls of which were all crumbling to pieces. The earth

floor had sunk in at one place, making a natural grave, so we left

Achmet the merchant there, having first covered him over with loose

bricks. This done, we all went back to the treasure.

“It lay where he had dropped it when he was first attacked. The box was

the same which now lies open upon your table. A key was hung by a

silken cord to that carved handle upon the top. We opened it, and the

light of the lantern gleamed upon a collection of gems such as I have

read of and thought about when I was a little lad at Pershore. It was

blinding to look upon them. When we had feasted our eyes we took them

all out and made a list of them. There were one hundred and forty-three

diamonds of the first water, including one which has been called, I

believe, ‘the Great Mogul’ and is said to be the second largest stone

in existence. Then there were ninety-seven very fine emeralds, and one

hundred and seventy rubies, some of which, however, were small. There

were forty carbuncles, two hundred and ten sapphires, sixty-one agates,

and a great quantity of beryls, onyxes, cats’-eyes, turquoises, and

other stones, the very names of which I did not know at the time,

though I have become more familiar with them since. Besides this, there

were nearly three hundred very fine pearls, twelve of which were set in

a gold coronet. By the way, these last had been taken out of the chest

and were not there when I recovered it.

“After we had counted our treasures we put them back into the chest and

carried them to the gateway to show them to Mahomet Singh. Then we

solemnly renewed our oath to stand by each other and be true to our

secret. We agreed to conceal our loot in a safe place until the country

should be at peace again, and then to divide it equally among

ourselves. There was no use dividing it at present, for if gems of such

value were found upon us it would cause suspicion, and there was no

privacy in the fort nor any place where we could keep them. We carried

the box, therefore, into the same hall where we had buried the body,

and there, under certain bricks in the best-preserved wall, we made a

hollow and put our treasure. We made careful note of the place, and

next day I drew four plans, one for each of us, and put the sign of the

four of us at the bottom, for we had sworn that we should each always

act for all, so that none might take advantage. That is an oath that I

can put my hand to my heart and swear that I have never broken.

“Well, there’s no use my telling you gentlemen what came of the Indian

mutiny. After Wilson took Delhi and Sir Colin relieved Lucknow the back

of the business was broken. Fresh troops came pouring in, and Nana

Sahib made himself scarce over the frontier. A flying column under

Colonel Greathed came round to Agra and cleared the Pandies away from

it. Peace seemed to be settling upon the country, and we four were

beginning to hope that the time was at hand when we might safely go off

with our shares of the plunder. In a moment, however, our hopes were

shattered by our being arrested as the murderers of Achmet.

“It came about in this way. When the rajah put his jewels into the

hands of Achmet he did it because he knew that he was a trusty man.

They are suspicious folk in the East, however: so what does this rajah

do but take a second even more trusty servant and set him to play the

spy upon the first? This second man was ordered never to let Achmet out

of his sight, and he followed him like his shadow. He went after him

that night and saw him pass through the doorway. Of course he thought

he had taken refuge in the fort, and applied for admission there

himself next day, but could find no trace of Achmet. This seemed to him

so strange that he spoke about it to a sergeant of guides, who brought

it to the ears of the commandant. A thorough search was quickly made,

and the body was discovered. Thus at the very moment that we thought

that all was safe we were all four seized and brought to trial on a

charge of murder,—three of us because we had held the gate that night,

and the fourth because he was known to have been in the company of the

murdered man. Not a word about the jewels came out at the trial, for

the rajah had been deposed and driven out of India: so no one had any

particular interest in them. The murder, however, was clearly made out,

and it was certain that we must all have been concerned in it. The

three Sikhs got penal servitude for life, and I was condemned to death,

though my sentence was afterwards commuted into the same as the others.

“It was rather a queer position that we found ourselves in then. There

we were all four tied by the leg and with precious little chance of

ever getting out again, while we each held a secret which might have

put each of us in a palace if we could only have made use of it. It was

enough to make a man eat his heart out to have to stand the kick and

the cuff of every petty jack-in-office, to have rice to eat and water

to drink, when that gorgeous fortune was ready for him outside, just

waiting to be picked up. It might have driven me mad; but I was always

a pretty stubborn one, so I just held on and bided my time.

“At last it seemed to me to have come. I was changed from Agra to

Madras, and from there to Blair Island in the Andamans. There are very

few white convicts at this settlement, and, as I had behaved well from

the first, I soon found myself a sort of privileged person. I was given

a hut in Hope Town, which is a small place on the slopes of Mount

Harriet, and I was left pretty much to myself. It is a dreary,

fever-stricken place, and all beyond our little clearings was infested

with wild cannibal natives, who were ready enough to blow a poisoned

dart at us if they saw a chance. There was digging, and ditching, and

yam-planting, and a dozen other things to be done, so we were busy

enough all day; though in the evening we had a little time to

ourselves. Among other things, I learned to dispense drugs for the

surgeon, and picked up a smattering of his knowledge. All the time I

was on the lookout for a chance of escape; but it is hundreds of miles

from any other land, and there is little or no wind in those seas: so

it was a terribly difficult job to get away.

“The surgeon, Dr. Somerton, was a fast, sporting young chap, and the

other young officers would meet in his rooms of an evening and play

cards. The surgery, where I used to make up my drugs, was next to his

sitting-room, with a small window between us. Often, if I felt

lonesome, I used to turn out the lamp in the surgery, and then,

standing there, I could hear their talk and watch their play. I am fond

of a hand at cards myself, and it was almost as good as having one to

watch the others. There was Major Sholto, Captain Morstan, and

Lieutenant Bromley Brown, who were in command of the native troops, and

there was the surgeon himself, and two or three prison-officials,

crafty old hands who played a nice sly safe game. A very snug little

party they used to make.

“Well, there was one thing which very soon struck me, and that was that

the soldiers used always to lose and the civilians to win. Mind, I

don’t say that there was anything unfair, but so it was. These

prison-chaps had done little else than play cards ever since they had

been at the Andamans, and they knew each other’s game to a point, while

the others just played to pass the time and threw their cards down

anyhow. Night after night the soldiers got up poorer men, and the

poorer they got the more keen they were to play. Major Sholto was the

hardest hit. He used to pay in notes and gold at first, but soon it

came to notes of hand and for big sums. He sometimes would win for a

few deals, just to give him heart, and then the luck would set in

against him worse than ever. All day he would wander about as black as

thunder, and he took to drinking a deal more than was good for him.

“One night he lost even more heavily than usual. I was sitting in my

hut when he and Captain Morstan came stumbling along on the way to

their quarters. They were bosom friends, those two, and never far

apart. The major was raving about his losses.

“‘It’s all up, Morstan,’ he was saying, as they passed my hut. ‘I shall

have to send in my papers. I am a ruined man.’

“‘Nonsense, old chap!’ said the other, slapping him upon the shoulder.

‘I’ve had a nasty facer myself, but—’ That was all I could hear, but it

was enough to set me thinking.

“A couple of days later Major Sholto was strolling on the beach: so I

took the chance of speaking to him.

“‘I wish to have your advice, major,’ said I.

“‘Well, Small, what is it?’ he asked, taking his cheroot from his lips.

“‘I wanted to ask you, sir,’ said I, ‘who is the proper person to whom

hidden treasure should be handed over. I know where half a million

worth lies, and, as I cannot use it myself, I thought perhaps the best

thing that I could do would be to hand it over to the proper

authorities, and then perhaps they would get my sentence shortened for

me.’

“‘Half a million, Small?’ he gasped, looking hard at me to see if I was

in earnest.

“‘Quite that, sir,—in jewels and pearls. It lies there ready for any

one. And the queer thing about it is that the real owner is outlawed

and cannot hold property, so that it belongs to the first comer.’

“‘To government, Small,’ he stammered,—‘to government.’ But he said it

in a halting fashion, and I knew in my heart that I had got him.

“‘You think, then, sir, that I should give the information to the

Governor-General?’ said I, quietly.

“‘Well, well, you must not do anything rash, or that you might repent.

Let me hear all about it, Small. Give me the facts.’

“I told him the whole story, with small changes so that he could not

identify the places. When I had finished he stood stock still and full

of thought. I could see by the twitch of his lip that there was a

struggle going on within him.

“‘This is a very important matter, Small,’ he said, at last. ‘You must

not say a word to any one about it, and I shall see you again soon.’

“Two nights later he and his friend Captain Morstan came to my hut in

the dead of the night with a lantern.

“‘I want you just to let Captain Morstan hear that story from your own

lips, Small,’ said he.

“I repeated it as I had told it before.

“‘It rings true, eh?’ said he. ‘It’s good enough to act upon?’

“Captain Morstan nodded.

“‘Look here, Small,’ said the major. ‘We have been talking it over, my

friend here and I, and we have come to the conclusion that this secret

of yours is hardly a government matter, after all, but is a private

concern of your own, which of course you have the power of disposing of

as you think best. Now, the question is, what price would you ask for

it? We might be inclined to take it up, and at least look into it, if

we could agree as to terms.’ He tried to speak in a cool, careless way,

but his eyes were shining with excitement and greed.

“‘Why, as to that, gentlemen,’ I answered, trying also to be cool, but

feeling as excited as he did, ‘there is only one bargain which a man in

my position can make. I shall want you to help me to my freedom, and to

help my three companions to theirs. We shall then take you into

partnership, and give you a fifth share to divide between you.’

“‘Hum!’ said he. ‘A fifth share! That is not very tempting.’

“‘It would come to fifty thousand apiece,’ said I.

“‘But how can we gain your freedom? You know very well that you ask an

impossibility.’

“‘Nothing of the sort,’ I answered. ‘I have thought it all out to the

last detail. The only bar to our escape is that we can get no boat fit

for the voyage, and no provisions to last us for so long a time. There

are plenty of little yachts and yawls at Calcutta or Madras which would

serve our turn well. Do you bring one over. We shall engage to get

aboard her by night, and if you will drop us on any part of the Indian

coast you will have done your part of the bargain.’

“‘If there were only one,’ he said.

“‘None or all,’ I answered. ‘We have sworn it. The four of us must

always act together.’

“‘You see, Morstan,’ said he, ‘Small is a man of his word. He does not

flinch from his friend. I think we may very well trust him.’

“‘It’s a dirty business,’ the other answered. ‘Yet, as you say, the

money would save our commissions handsomely.’

“‘Well, Small,’ said the major, ‘we must, I suppose, try and meet you.

We must first, of course, test the truth of your story. Tell me where

the box is hid, and I shall get leave of absence and go back to India

in the monthly relief-boat to inquire into the affair.’

“‘Not so fast,’ said I, growing colder as he got hot. ‘I must have the

consent of my three comrades. I tell you that it is four or none with

us.’

“‘Nonsense!’ he broke in. ‘What have three black fellows to do with our

agreement?’

“‘Black or blue,’ said I, ‘they are in with me, and we all go

together.’

“Well, the matter ended by a second meeting, at which Mahomet Singh,

Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar were all present. We talked the matter

over again, and at last we came to an arrangement. We were to provide

both the officers with charts of the part of the Agra fort and mark the

place in the wall where the treasure was hid. Major Sholto was to go to

India to test our story. If he found the box he was to leave it there,

to send out a small yacht provisioned for a voyage, which was to lie

off Rutland Island, and to which we were to make our way, and finally

to return to his duties. Captain Morstan was then to apply for leave of

absence, to meet us at Agra, and there we were to have a final division

of the treasure, he taking the major’s share as well as his own. All

this we sealed by the most solemn oaths that the mind could think or

the lips utter. I sat up all night with paper and ink, and by the

morning I had the two charts all ready, signed with the sign of

four,—that is, of Abdullah, Akbar, Mahomet, and myself.

“Well, gentlemen, I weary you with my long story, and I know that my

friend Mr. Jones is impatient to get me safely stowed in chokey. I’ll

make it as short as I can. The villain Sholto went off to India, but he

never came back again. Captain Morstan showed me his name among a list

of passengers in one of the mail-boats very shortly afterwards. His

uncle had died, leaving him a fortune, and he had left the army, yet he

could stoop to treat five men as he had treated us. Morstan went over

to Agra shortly afterwards, and found, as we expected, that the

treasure was indeed gone. The scoundrel had stolen it all, without

carrying out one of the conditions on which we had sold him the secret.

From that day I lived only for vengeance. I thought of it by day and I

nursed it by night. It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with

me. I cared nothing for the law,—nothing for the gallows. To escape, to

track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat,—that was my one

thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my

mind than the slaying of Sholto.

“Well, I have set my mind on many things in this life, and never one

which I did not carry out. But it was weary years before my time came.

I have told you that I had picked up something of medicine. One day

when Dr. Somerton was down with a fever a little Andaman Islander was

picked up by a convict-gang in the woods. He was sick to death, and had

gone to a lonely place to die. I took him in hand, though he was as

venomous as a young snake, and after a couple of months I got him all

right and able to walk. He took a kind of fancy to me then, and would

hardly go back to his woods, but was always hanging about my hut. I

learned a little of his lingo from him, and this made him all the

fonder of me.

“Tonga—for that was his name—was a fine boatman, and owned a big, roomy

canoe of his own. When I found that he was devoted to me and would do

anything to serve me, I saw my chance of escape. I talked it over with

him. He was to bring his boat round on a certain night to an old wharf

which was never guarded, and there he was to pick me up. I gave him

directions to have several gourds of water and a lot of yams,

cocoa-nuts, and sweet potatoes.

“He was stanch and true, was little Tonga. No man ever had a more

faithful mate. At the night named he had his boat at the wharf. As it

chanced, however, there was one of the convict-guard down there,—a vile

Pathan who had never missed a chance of insulting and injuring me. I

had always vowed vengeance, and now I had my chance. It was as if fate

had placed him in my way that I might pay my debt before I left the

island. He stood on the bank with his back to me, and his carbine on

his shoulder. I looked about for a stone to beat out his brains with,

but none could I see. Then a queer thought came into my head and showed

me where I could lay my hand on a weapon. I sat down in the darkness

and unstrapped my wooden leg. With three long hops I was on him. He put

his carbine to his shoulder, but I struck him full, and knocked the

whole front of his skull in. You can see the split in the wood now

where I hit him. We both went down together, for I could not keep my

balance, but when I got up I found him still lying quiet enough. I made

for the boat, and in an hour we were well out at sea. Tonga had brought

all his earthly possessions with him, his arms and his gods. Among

other things, he had a long bamboo spear, and some Andaman cocoa-nut

matting, with which I made a sort of sail. For ten days we were beating

about, trusting to luck, and on the eleventh we were picked up by a

trader which was going from Singapore to Jiddah with a cargo of Malay

pilgrims. They were a rum crowd, and Tonga and I soon managed to settle

down among them. They had one very good quality: they let you alone and

asked no questions.

“Well, if I were to tell you all the adventures that my little chum and

I went through, you would not thank me, for I would have you here until

the sun was shining. Here and there we drifted about the world,

something always turning up to keep us from London. All the time,

however, I never lost sight of my purpose. I would dream of Sholto at

night. A hundred times I have killed him in my sleep. At last, however,

some three or four years ago, we found ourselves in England. I had no

great difficulty in finding where Sholto lived, and I set to work to

discover whether he had realised the treasure, or if he still had it. I

made friends with someone who could help me,—I name no names, for I

don’t want to get any one else in a hole,—and I soon found that he

still had the jewels. Then I tried to get at him in many ways; but he

was pretty sly, and had always two prize-fighters, besides his sons and

his khitmutgar, on guard over him.

“One day, however, I got word that he was dying. I hurried at once to

the garden, mad that he should slip out of my clutches like that, and,

looking through the window, I saw him lying in his bed, with his sons

on each side of him. I’d have come through and taken my chance with the

three of them, only even as I looked at him his jaw dropped, and I knew

that he was gone. I got into his room that same night, though, and I

searched his papers to see if there was any record of where he had

hidden our jewels. There was not a line, however: so I came away,

bitter and savage as a man could be. Before I left I bethought me that

if I ever met my Sikh friends again it would be a satisfaction to know

that I had left some mark of our hatred; so I scrawled down the sign of

the four of us, as it had been on the chart, and I pinned it on his

bosom. It was too much that he should be taken to the grave without

some token from the men whom he had robbed and befooled.

“We earned a living at this time by my exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs

and other such places as the black cannibal. He would eat raw meat and

dance his war-dance: so we always had a hatful of pennies after a day’s

work. I still heard all the news from Pondicherry Lodge, and for some

years there was no news to hear, except that they were hunting for the

treasure. At last, however, came what we had waited for so long. The

treasure had been found. It was up at the top of the house, in Mr.

Bartholomew Sholto’s chemical laboratory. I came at once and had a look

at the place, but I could not see how with my wooden leg I was to make

my way up to it. I learned, however, about a trap-door in the roof, and

also about Mr. Sholto’s supper-hour. It seemed to me that I could

manage the thing easily through Tonga. I brought him out with me with a

long rope wound round his waist. He could climb like a cat, and he soon

made his way through the roof, but, as ill luck would have it,

Bartholomew Sholto was still in the room, to his cost. Tonga thought he

had done something very clever in killing him, for when I came up by

the rope I found him strutting about as proud as a peacock. Very much

surprised was he when I made at him with the rope’s end and cursed him

for a little blood-thirsty imp. I took the treasure-box and let it

down, and then slid down myself, having first left the sign of the four

upon the table, to show that the jewels had come back at last to those

who had most right to them. Tonga then pulled up the rope, closed the

window, and made off the way that he had come.

“I don’t know that I have anything else to tell you. I had heard a

waterman speak of the speed of Smith’s launch the \_Aurora\_, so I

thought she would be a handy craft for our escape. I engaged with old

Smith, and was to give him a big sum if he got us safe to our ship. He

knew, no doubt, that there was some screw loose, but he was not in our

secrets. All this is the truth, and if I tell it to you, gentlemen, it

is not to amuse you,—for you have not done me a very good turn,—but it

is because I believe the best defence I can make is just to hold back

nothing, but let all the world know how badly I have myself been served

by Major Sholto, and how innocent I am of the death of his son.”

“A very remarkable account,” said Sherlock Holmes. “A fitting wind-up

to an extremely interesting case. There is nothing at all new to me in

the latter part of your narrative, except that you brought your own

rope. That I did not know. By the way, I had hoped that Tonga had lost

all his darts; yet he managed to shoot one at us in the boat.”

“He had lost them all, sir, except the one which was in his blow-pipe

at the time.”

“Ah, of course,” said Holmes. “I had not thought of that.”

“Is there any other point which you would like to ask about?” asked the

convict, affably.

“I think not, thank you,” my companion answered.

“Well, Holmes,” said Athelney Jones, “You are a man to be humoured, and

we all know that you are a connoisseur of crime, but duty is duty, and

I have gone rather far in doing what you and your friend asked me. I

shall feel more at ease when we have our story-teller here safe under

lock and key. The cab still waits, and there are two inspectors

downstairs. I am much obliged to you both for your assistance. Of

course you will be wanted at the trial. Good-night to you.”

“Good-night, gentlemen both,” said Jonathan Small.

“You first, Small,” remarked the wary Jones as they left the room.

“I’ll take particular care that you don’t club me with your wooden leg,

whatever you may have done to the gentleman at the Andaman Isles.”

“Well, and there is the end of our little drama,” I remarked, after we

had set some time smoking in silence. “I fear that it may be the last

investigation in which I shall have the chance of studying your

methods. Miss Morstan has done me the honour to accept me as a husband

in prospective.”

He gave a most dismal groan. “I feared as much,” said he. “I really

cannot congratulate you.”

I was a little hurt. “Have you any reason to be dissatisfied with my

choice?” I asked.

“Not at all. I think she is one of the most charming young ladies I

ever met, and might have been most useful in such work as we have been

doing. She had a decided genius that way: witness the way in which she

preserved that Agra plan from all the other papers of her father. But

love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to

that true cold reason which I place above all things. I should never

marry myself, lest I bias my judgment.”

“I trust,” said I, laughing, “that my judgment may survive the ordeal.

But you look weary.”

“Yes, the reaction is already upon me. I shall be as limp as a rag for

a week.”

“Strange,” said I, “how terms of what in another man I should call

laziness alternate with your fits of splendid energy and vigour.”

“Yes,” he answered, “there are in me the makings of a very fine loafer

and also of a pretty spry sort of fellow. I often think of those lines

of old Goethe,—

Schade dass die Natur nur \_einen\_ Mensch aus Dir schuf,

Denn zum würdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff.

“By the way, \_à propos\_ of this Norwood business, you see that they

had, as I surmised, a confederate in the house, who could be none other

than Lal Rao, the butler: so Jones actually has the undivided honour of

having caught one fish in his great haul.”

“The division seems rather unfair,” I remarked. “You have done all the

work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit,

pray what remains for you?”

“For me,” said Sherlock Holmes, “there still remains the

cocaine-bottle.” And he stretched his long white hand up for it.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SIGN OF THE FOUR \*\*\*

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will

be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright

law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works,

so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United

States without permission and without paying copyright

royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part

of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project

Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™

concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark,

and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following

the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use

of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for

copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very

easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation

of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project

Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may

do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected

by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark

license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free

distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work

(or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project

Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full

Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at

www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™

electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™

electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to

and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property

(trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all

the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or

destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your

possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a

Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound

by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person

or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be

used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who

agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few

things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See

paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project

Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this

agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™

electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the

Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection

of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual

works in the collection are in the public domain in the United

States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the

United States and you are located in the United States, we do not

claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing,

displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as

all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope

that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting

free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™

works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the

Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily

comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the

same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when

you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern

what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are

in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States,

check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this

agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing,

distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any

other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no

representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any

country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other

immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear

prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work

on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the

phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed,

performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most

other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions

whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms

of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online

at www.gutenberg.org. If you

are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws

of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is

derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not

contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the

copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in

the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are

redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project

Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply

either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or

obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™

trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted

with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution

must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any

additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms

will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works

posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the

beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™

License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this

work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this

electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without

prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with

active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project

Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary,

compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including

any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access

to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format

other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official

version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website

(www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense

to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means

of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain

Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the

full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying,

performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works

unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing

access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

provided that:

• You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from

the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method

you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed

to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has

agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid

within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are

legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty

payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in

Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg

Literary Archive Foundation.”

• You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies

you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he

does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™

License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all

copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue

all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™

works.

• You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of

any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the

electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of

receipt of the work.

• You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free

distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project

Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than

are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing

from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of

the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set

forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable

effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread

works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project

Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™

electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may

contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate

or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other

intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or

other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or

cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right

of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project

Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project

Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all

liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal

fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT

LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE

PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE

TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE

LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR

INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH

DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a

defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can

receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a

written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you

received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium

with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you

with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in

lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person

or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second

opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If

the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing

without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth

in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO

OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT

LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied

warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of

damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement

violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the

agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or

limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or

unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the

remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the

trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone

providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in

accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the

production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™

electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses,

including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of

the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this

or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or

additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any

Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of

electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of

computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It

exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations

from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the

assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s

goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will

remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure

and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future

generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see

Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit

501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the

state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal

Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification

number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by

U.S. federal laws and your state’s laws.

The Foundation’s business office is located at 809 North 1500 West,

Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up

to date contact information can be found at the Foundation’s website

and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg

Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread

public support and donations to carry out its mission of

increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be

freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest

array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations

($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt

status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating

charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United

States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a

considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up

with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations

where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND

DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state

visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we

have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition

against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who

approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make

any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from

outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation

methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other

ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To

donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate.

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project

Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be

freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and

distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of

volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed

editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in

the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not

necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper

edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search

facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™,

including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to

subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.