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*** **START** OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE **ADVENTURES** OF SHERLOCK HOLMES ***

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THE **ADVENTURES** OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

by

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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ADVENTURE I. A **SCANDAL** IN BOHEMIA

I.

To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her **sex**. It was not that he felt any emotion **akin** to **love** for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were **abhorrent** to his **cold**, **precise** but admirably **balanced** mind. He was, I take it, the most **perfect reasoning** and observing **machine** that the world has seen, but as a **lover** he would have placed himself in a false position. He never **spoke** of the softer **passions**, **save** with a gibe and a **sneer**. They were **admirable** things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and **actions**. But for the trained reasoner to admit such **intrusions** into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a **distracting** factor which might throw a **doubt** upon all his mental **results**. **Grit** in a sensitive instrument, or a **crack** in one of his own high-power

lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other. My own complete happiness, and the home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to absorb all my attention, while Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature. He was still, as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime, and occupied his immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation in following out those clues, and clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland. Beyond these signs of his activity, however, which I merely shared with all the readers of the daily press, I knew little of my former friend and companion.

One night—it was on the twentieth of March, 1888—I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem. I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars, and indicated a spirit case and a gasogene in the corner. Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular

introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half **pounds** since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have **thought** a little more. Just a **trifle** more, I **fancy**, Watson. And in **practice** again, I observe. You did not tell me that you **intended** to go into harness."

"Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most **clumsy** and careless **servant** girl?"

"My **dear** Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is **true** that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a **dreadful mess**, but as I have **changed** my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out."

He **chuckled** to himself and rubbed his **long, nervous** hands together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he; "my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight **strikes** it, the leather is **scored** by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to **remove** crusted **mud** from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly **malignant** boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey. As to your **practice**, if a **gentleman** walks into my rooms **smelling** of iodoform, with a **black** mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to **show** where he has **secreted** his stethoscope, I must be **dull**, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the **medical profession**."

I could not help **laughing** at the **ease** with which he **explained** his process of deduction. "When I hear you give your **reasons**," I remarked, "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your **reasoning** I am baffled until you **explain** your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as **good** as yours."

"Quite so," he answered, lighting a **cigarette**, and throwing himself down into an armchair. "You see, but you do not observe. The **distinction** is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which **lead** up from the hall to this room."

"Frequently."

"How often?"

"Well, some hundreds of **times**."

"Then how many are there?"

"How many? I don't know."

"Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed. By-the-way, since you are **interested** in these little **problems**, and since you are **good** enough to **chronicle** one or two of my **trifling** experiences, you may be **interested** in this." He threw over a sheet of thick, pink-tinted note-paper which had been **lying** open upon the table. "It came by the last post," said he. "Read it aloud."

The note was undated, and without either **signature** or address.

"There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight o'clock," it said, "a **gentleman** who desires to **consult** you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the royal houses of Europe have **shown** that you are one who may safely be **trusted** with matters which are of an **importance** which can hardly be **exaggerated**. This **account** of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your **visitor wear** a mask."

"This is indeed a **mystery**," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital **mistake** to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist **facts** to suit **theories**, instead of **theories** to suit **facts**. But the note itself. What do you deduce from it?"

I **carefully** examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written.

"The man who wrote it was presumably well to do," I remarked, endeavouring to imitate my **companion's** processes. "Such paper could not be bought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly strong and **stiff**."

"Peculiar—that is the very **word**," said Holmes. "It is not an English paper at all. Hold it up to the light."

I did so, and saw a large "E" with a **small** "g," a "P," and a large "G" with a **small** "t" woven into the texture of the paper.

"What do you make of that?" asked Holmes.

"The name of the maker, no **doubt**; or his monogram, rather."

"Not at all. The 'G' with the **small** 't' stands for

'Gesellschaft,' which is the German for 'Company.' It is a customary contraction like our 'Co.' 'P,' of course, stands for 'Papier.' Now for the 'Eg.' Let us glance at our Continental Gazetteer."

He took down a heavy brown volume from his shelves. "Eglow, Eglonitz—here we are, Egria. It is in a German-speaking country—in Bohemia, not far from Carlsbad. **Remarkable** as being the scene of the **death** of Wallenstein, and for its numerous

glass-factories and paper-mills.' Ha, ha, my **boy**, what do you make of that?" His eyes **sparkled**, and he sent up a great **blue triumphant** cloud from his **cigarette**.

"The paper was made in Bohemia," I said.

"Precisely. And the man who wrote the note is a German. Do you note the peculiar construction of the sentence—'This **account** of you we have from all quarters received.' A Frenchman or Russian could not have written that. It is the German who is so uncourteous to his verbs. It only **remains**, therefore, to discover what is wanted by this German who writes upon Bohemian paper and prefers **wearing** a mask to **showing** his face. And here he comes, if I am not **mistaken**, to resolve all our **doubts**."

As he **spoke** there was the sharp sound of **horses'** hoofs and **grating** wheels against the curb, followed by a sharp **pull** at the bell. Holmes whistled.

"A pair, by the sound," said he. "Yes," he continued, glancing out of the window. "A nice little brougham and a pair of **beauties**. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece. There's **money** in this **case**, Watson, if there is nothing else."

"I think that I had better go, Holmes."

"Not a bit, **Doctor**. Stay where you are. I am **lost** without my Boswell. And this **promises** to be **interesting**. It would be a **pity** to miss it."

"But your client—"

"Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he comes. Sit down in that armchair, **Doctor**, and give us your best **attention**."

A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and in the passage, paused **immediately** outside the door. Then there was a loud and **authoritative** tap.

"Come in!" said Holmes.

A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six inches in height, with the chest and limbs of a Hercules. His dress was rich with a **richness** which would, in England, be looked upon as **akin** to **bad** taste. Heavy bands of astrakhan were **slashed** across the sleeves and fronts of his double-breasted coat, while the deep **blue** cloak which was thrown over his **shoulders** was lined with flame-coloured **silk** and secured at the neck with a brooch which consisted of a single flaming beryl. Boots which **extended halfway** up his **calves**, and which were trimmed at the **tops** with rich brown fur, completed the **impression** of **barbaric** opulence which was **suggested** by his whole appearance. He carried a broad-brimmed hat in his hand, while he wore across the upper part of his face, **extending** down past the cheekbones, a **black** vizard mask, which he had apparently adjusted that very moment, for his hand was still raised to it as he entered. From the lower

part of the face he appeared to be a man of strong character, with a thick, hanging lip, and a **long**, straight chin suggestive of resolution pushed to the length of obstinacy.

"You had my note?" he asked with a deep harsh voice and a **strongly marked** German accent. "I told you that I would call." He looked from one to the other of us, as if **uncertain** which to address.

"**Pray** take a seat," said Holmes. "This is my **friend** and colleague, Dr. Watson, who is occasionally **good** enough to help me in my **cases**. Whom have I the honour to address?"

"You may address me as the **Count** Von Kramm, a Bohemian **nobleman**. I understand that this **gentleman**, your **friend**, is a man of honour and **discretion**, whom I may **trust** with a matter of the most extreme **importance**. If not, I should much **prefer** to **communicate** with you alone."

I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me back into my chair. "It is both, or none," said he. "You may say before this **gentleman** anything which you may say to me."

The **Count** shrugged his broad **shoulders**. "Then I must begin," said he, "by binding you both to **absolute secrecy** for two years; at the end of that **time** the matter will be of no **importance**. At **present** it is not too much to say that it is of such **weight** it may have an **influence** upon European history."

"I **promise**," said Holmes.

"And I."

"You will **excuse** this mask," continued our strange **visitor**. "The **august** person who **employs** me wishes his agent to be **unknown** to you, and I may **confess** at once that the **title** by which I have just called myself is not exactly my own."

"I was aware of it," said Holmes dryly.

"The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every **precaution** has to be taken to quench what might **grow** to be an **immense scandal** and seriously compromise one of the reigning families of Europe. To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House of Ormstein, hereditary **kings** of Bohemia."

"I was also aware of that," murmured Holmes, settling himself down in his armchair and closing his eyes.

Our **visitor** glanced with some apparent **surprise** at the **languid, lounging** figure of the man who had been no **doubt** depicted to him as the most **incisive** reasoner and most **energetic** agent in Europe. Holmes slowly reopened his eyes and looked impatiently at his **gigantic** client.

"If your **Majesty** would condescend to state your **case**," he remarked, "I should be better able to **advise** you."

The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in **uncontrollable agitation**. Then, with a gesture of desperation, he

tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground. "You are right," he cried; "I am the King. Why should I attempt to conceal it?"

"Why, indeed?" murmured Holmes. "Your Majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia."

"But you can understand," said our strange visitor, sitting down once more and passing his hand over his high white forehead, "you can understand that I am not accustomed to doing such business in my own person. Yet the matter was so delicate that I could not confide it to an agent without putting myself in his power. I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting you."

"Then, pray consult," said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

"The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you."

"Kindly look her up in my index, Doctor," murmured Holmes without opening his eyes. For many years he had adopted a system of docketing all paragraphs concerning men and things, so that it was difficult to name a subject or a person on which he could not at once furnish information. In this case I found her biography sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes.

"Let me see!" said Holmes. "Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Contralto—hum! La Scala, hum! Prima donna Imperial Opera of Warsaw—yes! Retired from operatic stage—ha! Living in London—quite so! Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled with this young person, wrote her some compromising letters, and is now desirous of getting those letters back."

"Precisely so. But how—"

"Was there a secret marriage?"

"None."

"No legal papers or certificates?"

"None."

"Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?"

"There is the writing."

"Pooh, pooh! Forgery."

"My private note-paper."

"Stolen."

"My own seal."

"Imitated."

"My photograph."

"Bought."

"We were both in the photograph."

"Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion."

"I was mad-insane."

"You have compromised yourself seriously."

"I was only Crown Prince then. I was young. I am but thirty now."

"It must be recovered."

"We have tried and failed."

"Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought."

"She will not sell."

"Stolen, then."

"Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. Twice she has been waylaid. There has been no result."

"No sign of it?"

"Absolutely none."

Holmes laughed. "It is quite a pretty little problem," said he.

"But a very serious one to me," returned the King reproachfully.

"Very, indeed. And what does she propose to do with the photograph?"

"To ruin me."

"But how?"

"I am about to be married."

"So I have heard."

"To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia. You may know the strict principles of her family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of a doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end."

"And Irene Adler?"

"Threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I know that she will do it. You do not know her, but she has a soul of steel. She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather than I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go—none."

"You are sure that she has not sent it yet?"

"I am sure."

"And why?"

"Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the betrothal was publicly proclaimed. That will be next Monday."

"Oh, then we have three days yet," said Holmes with a yawn. "That is very fortunate, as I have one or two matters of importance to look into just at present. Your Majesty will, of course, stay in London for the present?"

"Certainly. You will find me at the Langham under the name of the Count Von Kramm."

"Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress."

"Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety."

"Then, as to money?"

"You have carte blanche."

"Absolutely?"

"I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph."

"And for present expenses?"

The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak and laid it on the table.

"There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes," he said.

Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and handed it to him.

"And Mademoiselle's address?" he asked.

"Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood."

Holmes took a note of it. "One other question," said he. "Was the photograph a cabinet?"

"It was."

"Then, good-night, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon have some good news for you. And good-night, Watson," he added, as the wheels of the royal brougham rolled down the street. "If you will be good enough to call to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock I should like to chat this little matter over with you."

II.

At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own.

Indeed, apart from the nature of the investigation which my friend had on hand, there was something in his masterly grasp of a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most inextricable mysteries. So accustomed was I to his invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter into my head.

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an

inflamed face and **disreputable** clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my **friend's amazing** powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three **times** before I was certain that it was indeed he. With a nod he **vanished** into the bedroom, whence he emerged in five minutes tweed-suited and **respectable**, as of old. Putting his hands into his pockets, he stretched out his legs in front of the **fire** and **laughed heartily** for some minutes. "Well, really!" he **cried**, and then he choked and **laughed** again until he was **obliged to lie** back, **limp** and **helpless**, in the chair.

"What is it?"

"It's quite too funny. I am sure you could never **guess** how I **employed** my morning, or what I ended by doing."

"I can't imagine. I suppose that you have been **watching** the habits, and perhaps the house, of Miss Irene Adler."

"Quite so; but the **sequel** was rather unusual. I will tell you, however. I left the house a little after eight o'clock this morning in the character of a groom out of work. There is a **wonderful sympathy** and freemasonry among horsey men. Be one of them, and you will know all that there is to know. I soon **found** Briony Lodge. It is a bijou villa, with a **garden** at the back, but built out in front right up to the road, two stories. Chubb lock to the door. Large sitting-room on the right side, well furnished, with **long** windows almost to the floor, and those preposterous English window fasteners which a **child** could open. Behind there was nothing **remarkable**, **save** that the passage window could be reached from the **top** of the coach-house. I walked round it and examined it closely from every point of view, but without noting anything else of **interest**.

"I then **lounded** down the street and **found**, as I **expected**, that there was a mews in a lane which runs down by one wall of the **garden**. I lent the ostlers a hand in rubbing down their **horses**, and received in **exchange** twopence, a glass of half and half, two **fills** of shag **tobacco**, and as much **information** as I could desire about Miss Adler, to say nothing of half a dozen other people in the neighbourhood in whom I was not in the least **interested**, but whose biographies I was compelled to listen to."

"And what of Irene Adler?" I asked.

"Oh, she has turned all the men's heads down in that part. She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. So say the Serpentine-mews, to a man. She lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day, and returns at seven sharp for **dinner**. Seldom goes out at other **times**, except when she sings. Has only one male **visitor**, but a **good deal** of him. He is **dark**, handsome, and dashing, never calls less than once a day, and often twice. He is a Mr. Godfrey Norton, of the Inner Temple. See

the **advantages** of a cabman as a confidant. They had driven him home a dozen **times** from Serpentine-mews, and knew all about him. When I had listened to all they had to tell, I began to walk up and down near Briony Lodge once more, and to think over my **plan** of campaign.

"This Godfrey Norton was evidently an **important** factor in the matter. He was a **lawyer**. That sounded **ominous**. What was the relation between them, and what the object of his repeated **visits**? Was she his client, his **friend**, or his **mistress**? If the former, she had probably transferred the photograph to his keeping. If the latter, it was less likely. On the issue of this **question** **depended** whether I should **continue** my work at Briony Lodge, or turn my **attention** to the **gentleman's** chambers in the Temple. It was a delicate point, and it widened the field of my **inquiry**. I **fear** that I **bore** you with these details, but I have to let you see my little **difficulties**, if you are to understand the situation."

"I am following you closely," I answered.

"I was still **balancing** the matter in my mind when a hansom **cab** drove up to Briony Lodge, and a **gentleman** sprang out. He was a **remarkably** handsome man, **dark**, aquiline, and moustached—evidently the man of whom I had heard. He appeared to be in a great **hurry**, **shouted** to the cabman to **wait**, and brushed past the maid who opened the door with the air of a man who was thoroughly at home.

"He was in the house about half an hour, and I could **catch** glimpses of him in the windows of the sitting-room, pacing up and down, **talking** excitedly, and waving his arms. Of her I could see nothing. Presently he emerged, looking even more flurried than before. As he stepped up to the **cab**, he **pulled** a **gold watch** from his pocket and looked at it **earnestly**, 'Drive like the **devil**,' he **shouted**, 'first to **Gross** Hankey's in **Regent** Street, and then to the **Church** of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. Half a guinea if you do it in twenty minutes!'

"Away they went, and I was just wondering whether I should not do well to follow them when up the lane came a neat little landau, the coachman with his coat only half-buttoned, and his tie under his ear, while all the tags of his harness were sticking out of the buckles. It hadn't **pulled** up before she **shot** out of the hall door and into it. I only caught a glimpse of her at the moment, but she was a **lovely** woman, with a face that a man might **die** for.

"'The **Church** of St. Monica, **John**,' she **cried**, 'and half a **sovereign** if you reach it in twenty minutes.'

"This was quite too **good** to **lose**, Watson. I was just **balancing** whether I should run for it, or whether I should perch behind her landau when a **cab** came through the street. The driver looked

twice at such a **shabby** fare, but I jumped in before he could object. 'The **Church** of St. Monica,' said I, 'and half a **sovereign** if you reach it in twenty minutes.' It was twenty-five minutes to twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind. "My cabby drove fast. I don't think I ever drove faster, but the others were there before us. The **cab** and the landau with their steaming **horses** were in front of the door when I **arrived**. I paid the man and **hurried** into the **church**. There was not a soul there **save** the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who seemed to be expostulating with them. They were all three standing in a knot in front of the altar. I **lounged** up the side aisle like any other **idler** who has dropped into a **church**. **Suddenly**, to my **surprise**, the three at the altar faced round to me, and Godfrey Norton came running as hard as he could towards me.

"Thank **God**," he **cried**. 'You'll do. Come! Come!'

"What then?" I asked.

"Come, man, come, only three minutes, or it **won't** be **legal**."

"I was half-dragged up to the altar, and before I knew where I was I **found** myself **mumbling** responses which were whispered in my ear, and **vouching** for things of which I knew nothing, and generally **assisting** in the secure tying up of Irene Adler, **spinster**, to Godfrey Norton, bachelor. It was all done in an instant, and there was the **gentleman** thanking me on the one side and the lady on the other, while the clergyman **beamed** on me in front. It was the most preposterous position in which I ever **found** myself in my life, and it was the **thought** of it that **started** me **laughing** just now. It seems that there had been some informality about their license, that the clergyman absolutely **refused** to **marry** them without a **witness** of some sort, and that my **lucky** appearance **saved** the **bridegroom** from having to **sally** out into the streets in search of a best man. The **bride** gave me a **sovereign**, and I mean to **wear** it on my watch-chain in memory of the occasion."

"This is a very **unexpected** turn of affairs," said I; "and what then?"

"Well, I **found** my **plans** very seriously **menaced**. It looked as if the pair might take an immediate **departure**, and so necessitate very prompt and **energetic measures** on my part. At the **church** door, however, they separated, he driving back to the Temple, and she to her own house. 'I shall drive out in the park at five as **usual**,' she said as she left him. I heard no more. They drove away in different directions, and I went off to make my own arrangements."

"Which are?"

"Some **cold** beef and a glass of **beer**," he answered, ringing the bell. "I have been too busy to think of **food**, and I am likely to

be busier still this evening. By the way, Doctor, I shall want your co-operation."

"I shall be delighted."

"You don't mind breaking the law?"

"Not in the least."

"Nor running a chance of arrest?"

"Not in a good cause."

"Oh, the cause is excellent!"

"Then I am your man."

"I was sure that I might rely on you."

"But what is it you wish?"

"When Mrs. Turner has brought in the tray I will make it clear to you. Now," he said as he turned hungrily on the simple fare that our landlady had provided, "I must discuss it while I eat, for I have not much time. It is nearly five now. In two hours we must be on the scene of action. Miss Irene, or Madame, rather, returns from her drive at seven. We must be at Briony Lodge to meet her."

"And what then?"

"You must leave that to me. I have already arranged what is to occur. There is only one point on which I must insist. You must not interfere, come what may. You understand?"

"I am to be neutral?"

"To do nothing whatever. There will probably be some small unpleasantness. Do not join in it. It will end in my being conveyed into the house. Four or five minutes afterwards the sitting-room window will open. You are to station yourself close to that open window."

"Yes."

"You are to watch me, for I will be visible to you."

"Yes."

"And when I raise my hand—so—you will throw into the room what I give you to throw, and will, at the same time, raise the cry of fire. You quite follow me?"

"Entirely."

"It is nothing very formidable," he said, taking a long cigar-shaped roll from his pocket. "It is an ordinary plumber's smoke-rocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting. Your task is confined to that. When you raise your cry of fire, it will be taken up by quite a number of people. You may then walk to the end of the street, and I will rejoin you in ten minutes. I hope that I have made myself clear?"

"I am to remain neutral, to get near the window, to watch you, and at the signal to throw in this object, then to raise the cry of fire, and to wait you at the corner of the street."

"Precisely."

"Then you may entirely rely on me."

"That is **excellent**. I think, perhaps, it is almost **time** that I **prepare** for the new role I have to play."

He **disappeared** into his bedroom and returned in a few minutes in the character of an **amiable** and simple-minded Nonconformist clergyman. His broad **black** hat, his baggy trousers, his **white** tie, his **sympathetic smile**, and **general** look of peering and benevolent **curiosity** were such as Mr. **John** Hare alone could have equalled. It was not merely that Holmes **changed** his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed. The stage **lost** a fine actor, even as science **lost** an acute reasoner, when he became a **specialist** in **crime**.

It was a quarter past six when we left Baker Street, and it still wanted ten minutes to the hour when we **found** ourselves in Serpentine Avenue. It was already dusk, and the lamps were just being lighted as we paced up and down in front of Briony Lodge, **waiting** for the coming of its **occupant**. The house was just such as I had pictured it from Sherlock Holmes' **succinct** description, but the locality appeared to be less private than I **expected**. On the **contrary**, for a **small** street in a **quiet** neighbourhood, it was **remarkably animated**. There was a group of shabbily dressed men smoking and **laughing** in a corner, a scissors-grinder with his wheel, two guardsmen who were **flirting** with a nurse-girl, and several well-dressed **young** men who were **lounging** up and down with cigars in their **mouths**.

"You see," remarked Holmes, as we paced to and fro in front of the house, "this **marriage** rather simplifies matters. The photograph becomes a double-edged weapon now. The **chances** are that she would be as **averse** to its being seen by Mr. Godfrey Norton, as our client is to its coming to the eyes of his **princess**. Now the **question** is, Where are we to find the photograph?"

"Where, indeed?"

"It is most unlikely that she carries it about with her. It is **cabinet** size. Too large for easy **concealment** about a woman's dress. She knows that the **King** is capable of having her waylaid and searched. Two **attempts** of the sort have already been made. We may take it, then, that she does not carry it about with her."

"Where, then?"

"Her **banker** or her **lawyer**. There is that double **possibility**. But I am inclined to think neither. Women are naturally **secretive**, and they like to do their own **secreting**. Why should she hand it over to anyone else? She could **trust** her own **guardianship**, but she could not tell what indirect or political **influence** might be brought to **bear** upon a business man. Besides, remember that she had resolved to use it within a few days. It must be where she

can lay her hands upon it. It must be in her own house."

"But it has twice been burgled."

"Pshaw! They did not know how to look."

"But how will you look?"

"I will not look."

"What then?"

"I will get her to **show** me."

"But she will **refuse**."

"She will not be able to. But I hear the rumble of wheels. It is her carriage. Now carry out my orders to the **letter**."

As he **spoke** the gleam of the side-lights of a carriage came round the curve of the avenue. It was a smart little landau which rattled up to the door of Briony Lodge. As it **pulled** up, one of the **loafing** men at the corner dashed **forward** to open the door in the **hope** of **earning** a copper, but was **elbowed** away by another **loafer**, who had rushed up with the same intention. A **fierce quarrel broke** out, which was **increased** by the two guardsmen, who took sides with one of the loungers, and by the scissors-grinder, who was **equally hot** upon the other side. A blow was struck, and in an instant the lady, who had stepped from her carriage, was the centre of a little knot of **flushed** and **struggling** men, who struck savagely at each other with their fists and sticks. Holmes dashed into the crowd to **protect** the lady; but just as he reached her he gave a **cry** and dropped to the **ground**, with the blood running **freely** down his face. At his **fall** the guardsmen took to their **heels** in one direction and the loungers in the other, while a number of better-dressed people, who had **watched** the scuffle without taking part in it, crowded in to help the lady and to attend to the **injured** man. Irene Adler, as I will still call her, had **hurried** up the steps; but she stood at the **top** with her **superb** figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking back into the street.

"Is the poor **gentleman** much **hurt**?" she asked.

"He is dead," **cried** several voices.

"No, no, there's life in him!" **shouted** another. "But **he'll** be gone before you can get him to **hospital**."

"He's a brave **fellow**," said a woman. "They would have had the lady's purse and **watch** if it hadn't been for him. They were a **gang**, and a rough one, too. Ah, he's breathing now."

"He can't **lie** in the street. May we bring him in, marm?"

"Surely. Bring him into the sitting-room. There is a comfortable sofa. This way, please!"

Slowly and solemnly he was borne into Briony Lodge and laid out in the **principal** room, while I still observed the **proceedings** from my post by the window. The lamps had been lit, but the **blinds** had not been drawn, so that I could see Holmes as he lay

upon the **couch**. I do not know whether he was **seized** with compunction at that moment for the part he was playing, but I know that I never felt more **heartily ashamed** of myself in my life than when I saw the **beautiful creature** against whom I was **conspiring**, or the **grace** and kindness with which she **waited** upon the **injured** man. And yet it would be the blackest **treachery** to Holmes to draw back now from the part which he had intrusted to me. I hardened my heart, and took the smoke-rocket from under my ulster. After all, I **thought**, we are not **injuring** her. We are but **preventing** her from **injuring** another.

Holmes had sat up upon the **couch**, and I saw him **motion** like a man who is in need of air. A maid rushed across and threw open the window. At the same instant I saw him raise his hand and at the signal I tossed my **rocket** into the room with a **cry** of "Fire!" The **word** was no sooner out of my **mouth** than the whole crowd of spectators, well dressed and ill-gentlemen, ostlers, and servant-maids-joined in a **general shriek** of "Fire!" Thick clouds of smoke **curled** through the room and out at the open window. I caught a glimpse of rushing figures, and a moment later the voice of Holmes from within **assuring** them that it was a false **alarm**. **Slipping** through the **shouting** crowd I made my way to the corner of the street, and in ten minutes was **rejoiced** to find my **friend's** arm in mine, and to get away from the scene of **uproar**. He walked swiftly and in silence for some few minutes until we had turned down one of the **quiet** streets which **lead** towards the Edgeware Road.

"You did it very nicely, **Doctor**," he remarked. "Nothing could have been better. It is all right."

"You have the photograph?"

"I know where it is."

"And how did you find out?"

"She **showed** me, as I told you she would."

"I am still in the **dark**."

"I do not wish to make a **mystery**," said he, **laughing**. "The matter was perfectly simple. You, of course, saw that everyone in the street was an accomplice. They were all engaged for the evening."

"I **guessed** as much."

"Then, when the **row broke** out, I had a little moist red paint in the palm of my hand. I rushed **forward**, **fell** down, clapped my hand to my face, and became a piteous **spectacle**. It is an old **trick**."

"That also I could fathom."

"Then they carried me in. She was **bound** to have me in. What else could she do? And into her sitting-room, which was the very room which I **suspected**. It lay between that and her bedroom, and I was determined to see which. They laid me on a **couch**, I **motioned** for air, they were compelled to open the window, and you had your

chance.”

”How did that help you?”

”It was all-important. When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it. In the case of the Darlington substitution scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsworth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. Now it was clear to me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious to her than what we are in quest of. She would rush to secure it. The alarm of fire was admirably done. The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half-drew it out. When I cried out that it was a false alarm, she replaced it, glanced at the rocket, rushed from the room, and I have not seen her since. I rose, and, making my excuses, escaped from the house. I hesitated whether to attempt to secure the photograph at once; but the coachman had come in, and as he was watching me narrowly it seemed safer to wait. A little over-precipitance may ruin all.”

”And now?” I asked.

”Our quest is practically finished. I shall call with the King to-morrow, and with you, if you care to come with us. We will be shown into the sitting-room to wait for the lady, but it is probable that when she comes she may find neither us nor the photograph. It might be a satisfaction to his Majesty to regain it with his own hands.”

”And when will you call?”

”At eight in the morning. She will not be up, so that we shall have a clear field. Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage may mean a complete change in her life and habits. I must wire to the King without delay.”

We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said:

”Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes.”

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by.

”I’ve heard that voice before,” said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. ”Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been.”

III.

I slept at Baker Street that night, and we were engaged upon our toast and coffee in the morning when the King of Bohemia rushed

into the room.

"You have really got it!" he **cried**, grasping Sherlock Holmes by either **shoulder** and looking eagerly into his face.

"Not yet."

"But you have **hopes**?"

"I have **hopes**."

"Then, come. I am all **impatience** to be gone."

"We must have a **cab**."

"No, my brougham is **waiting**."

"Then that will **simplify** matters." We descended and **started** off once more for Briony Lodge.

"Irene Adler is married," remarked Holmes.

"Married! When?"

"Yesterday."

"But to whom?"

"To an English **lawyer** named Norton."

"But she could not **love** him."

"I am in **hopes** that she does."

"And why in **hopes**?"

"Because it would spare your **Majesty** all **fear** of future **annoyance**. If the lady **loves** her husband, she does not **love** your **Majesty**. If she does not **love** your **Majesty**, there is no **reason** why she should interfere with your **Majesty's plan**."

"It is **true**. And yet—Well! I wish she had been of my own station! What a queen she would have made!" He **relapsed** into a **moody** silence, which was not **broken** until we drew up in Serpentine Avenue.

The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood upon the steps. She **watched** us with a **sardonic** eye as we stepped from the brougham.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?" said she.

"I am Mr. Holmes," answered my **companion**, looking at her with a **questioning** and rather **startled** gaze.

"Indeed! My **mistress** told me that you were likely to call. She left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train from Charing **Cross** for the Continent."

"What!" Sherlock Holmes **staggered** back, **white** with **chagrin** and **surprise**. "Do you mean that she has left England?"

"Never to return."

"And the papers?" asked the **King** hoarsely. "All is **lost**."

"We shall see." He pushed past the **servant** and rushed into the drawing-room, followed by the **King** and myself. The furniture was scattered about in every direction, with dismantled shelves and open drawers, as if the lady had hurriedly ransacked them before her flight. Holmes rushed at the bell-pull, tore back a **small** sliding shutter, and, **plunging** in his hand, **pulled** out a

photograph and a letter. The photograph was of Irene Adler herself in evening dress, the letter was superscribed to "Sherlock Holmes, Esq. To be left till called for." My friend tore it open and we all three read it together. It was dated at midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:
 "MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES,—You really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had been told that if the King employed an agent it would certainly be you. And your address had been given me. Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know. Even after I became suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind old clergyman. But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran up stairs, got into my walking-clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed.
 "Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Temple to see my husband.
 "We both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by so formidable an antagonist; so you will find the nest empty when you call to-morrow. As to the photograph, your client may rest in peace. I love and am loved by a better man than he. The King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and to preserve a weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might take in the future. I leave a photograph which he might care to possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,
 "Very truly yours,
 "IRENE NORTON, née ADLER."
 "What a woman—oh, what a woman!" cried the King of Bohemia, when we had all three read this epistle. "Did I not tell you how quick and resolute she was? Would she not have made an admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?"
 "From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty," said Holmes coldly. "I am sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty's business to a more successful conclusion."
 "On the contrary, my dear sir," cried the King; "nothing could be more successful. I know that her word is inviolate. The photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire."
 "I am glad to hear your Majesty say so."
 "I am immensely indebted to you. Pray tell me in what way I can

reward you. This ring—" He slipped an emerald snake ring from his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.

"Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly," said Holmes.

"You have but to name it."

"This photograph!"

The King stared at him in amazement.

"Irene's photograph!" he cried. "Certainly, if you wish it."

"I thank your Majesty. Then there is no more to be done in the matter. I have the honour to wish you a very good-morning." He bowed, and, turning away without observing the hand which the King had stretched out to him, he set off in my company for his chambers.

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of the woman.

ADVENTURE II. THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

I had called upon my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one day in the autumn of last year and found him in deep conversation with a very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman with fiery red hair. With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson," he said cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair and gave a bob of greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair and putting his fingertips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I

observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we went into the very simple **problem presented** by Miss Mary Sutherland, that for strange effects and **extraordinary** combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more **daring** than any **effort** of the imagination."

"A **proposition** which I took the **liberty** of **doubting**."

"You did, **Doctor**, but none the less you must come round to my view, for otherwise I shall keep on piling **fact** upon **fact** on you until your **reason breaks** down under them and acknowledges me to be right. Now, Mr. Jabez Wilson here has been **good** enough to call upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which **promises** to be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some **time**. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most **unique** things are very often connected not with the larger but with the **smaller crimes**, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for **doubt** whether any positive **crime** has been committed. As far as I have heard it is **impossible** for me to say whether the **present case** is an instance of **crime** or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great **kindness** to recommence your narrative. I ask you not merely because my **friend** Dr. Watson has not heard the opening part but also because the peculiar nature of the story makes me **anxious** to have every possible detail from your lips. As a **rule**, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events, I am able to **guide** myself by the thousands of other similar **cases** which occur to my memory. In the **present** instance I am **forced** to admit that the **facts** are, to the best of my belief, **unique**."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some little **pride** and **pulled** a **dirty** and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the advertisement column, with his head thrust **forward** and the paper flattened out upon his knee, I took a **good** look at the man and endeavoured, after the fashion of my **companion**, to read the indications which might be **presented** by his dress or appearance. I did not **gain** very much, however, by my inspection. Our **visitor bore** every mark of being an average **commonplace** British tradesman, **obese**, **pompous**, and slow. He wore rather baggy grey **shepherd's** check trousers, a not over-clean **black** frock-coat, unbuttoned in the front, and a **drab** waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A **frayed** top-hat and a **faded** brown overcoat with a wrinkled **velvet** collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing **remarkable** about the man **save** his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme **chagrin** and

discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances.

"Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

"How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour. It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed."

"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin."

"Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?"

"What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk?"

"Well, but China?"

"The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."

Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. "Well, I never!" said he. "I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it, after all."

"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake in explaining. 'Omne ignotum pro magnifico,' you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, I have got it now," he answered with his thick red finger planted halfway down the column. "Here it is. This is what began it all. You just read it for yourself, sir."

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

"TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE: On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, U. S. A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a

salary of 4 pounds a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. "And now, Mr. Wilson, off you go at scratch and tell us all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note, Doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is The Morning Chronicle of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson?"

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead; "I have a small pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but that he is willing to come for half wages so as to learn the business."

"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth, either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employé who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. "Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault, but on the whole he's a good worker. There's no vice in him."

"He is still with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple cooking and keeps the place clean—that's all I have in the house, for I am a widower and never had any family. We live very quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads and pay our debts, if we do nothing more."

"The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

"'I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'

"'Why that?' I asks.

"'Why,' says he, 'here's another vacancy on the League of the Red-headed Men. It's worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits' end what to do with the money. If my hair would only change colour, here's a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.'

"'Why, what is it, then?' I asked. You see, Mr. Holmes, I am a very stay-at-home man, and as my business came to me instead of my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting my foot over the door-mat. In that way I didn't know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

"'Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men?' he asked with his eyes open.

"'Never.'

"'Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.'

"'And what are they worth?' I asked.

"'Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere very much with one's other occupations.'

"'Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears, for the business has not been over-good for some years, and an extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.'

"'Tell me all about it,' said I.

"'Well,' said he, showing me the advertisement, 'you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men; so when he died it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that colour. From all I hear it is splendid pay and very little to do.'

"'But,' said I, 'there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.'

"'Not so many as you might think,' he answered. 'You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use your

applying if your hair is light red, or **dark** red, or anything but **real** bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr. Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be **worth** your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred **pounds**.'

"Now, it is a **fact**, **gentlemen**, as you may see for yourselves, that my hair is of a very **full** and rich tint, so that it seemed to me that if there was to be any **competition** in the matter I stood as **good** a **chance** as any man that I had ever met. Vincent Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I **thought** he might **prove** useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for the day and to come right away with me. He was very willing to have a **holiday**, so we shut the business up and **started** off for the address that was given us in the advertisement.

"I never **hope** to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. From north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in his hair had tramped into the city to answer the advertisement. **Fleet** Street was choked with red-headed folk, and **Pope's Court** looked like a coster's orange **barrow**. I should not have **thought** there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. Every shade of colour they were—straw, **lemon**, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay; but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the **real** **vivid** flame-coloured tint. When I saw how many were **waiting**, I would have given it up in **despair**; but Spaulding would not hear of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and **pulled** and **butted** until he got me through the crowd, and right up to the steps which **led** to the office. There was a double stream upon the stair, some going up in **hope**, and some coming back dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could and soon **found** ourselves in the office."

"Your experience has been a most **entertaining** one," remarked Holmes as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. "**Pray continue** your very **interesting statement**."

"There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs and a **deal** table, behind which sat a **small** man with a head that was even redder than mine. He said a few **words** to each **candidate** as he came up, and then he always **managed** to find some **fault** in them which would **disqualify** them. Getting a **vacancy** did not seem to be such a very easy matter, after all. However, when our turn came the little man was much more favourable to me than to any of the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he might have a private **word** with us.

"'This is Mr. Jabez Wilson,' said my assistant, 'and he is willing to **fill** a **vacancy** in the **League**.'"

"'And he is admirably suited for it,' the other answered. 'He has

every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.' He took a step **backward**, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then **suddenly** he **plunged forward**, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my **success**.

"It would be **injustice** to hesitate,' said he. 'You will, however, I am sure, **excuse** me for taking an **obvious precaution**.' With that he **seized** my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I **yelled** with the **pain**. 'There is water in your eyes,' said he as he released me. 'I **perceive** that all is as it should be. But we have to be **careful**, for we have twice been **deceived** by wigs and once by paint. I could tell you **tales** of cobbler's wax which would **disgust** you with human nature.' He stepped over to the window and **shouted** through it at the **top** of his voice that the **vacancy** was **filled**. A **groan** of **disappointment** came up from below, and the folk all trooped away in different directions until there was not a red-head to be seen except my own and that of the manager.

"My name,' said he, 'is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our **noble benefactor**. Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?'

"I answered that I had not.

"His face **fell immediately**.

"Dear me!' he said gravely, 'that is very serious indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their **maintenance**. It is exceedingly **unfortunate** that you should be a bachelor.'

"My face lengthened at this, Mr. Holmes, for I **thought** that I was not to have the **vacancy** after all; but after thinking it over for a few minutes he said that it would be all right.

"In the **case** of another,' said he, 'the **objection** might be **fatal**, but we must stretch a point in favour of a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?'

"Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,' said I.

"Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!' said Vincent Spaulding. 'I should be able to look after that for you.'

"What would be the hours?' I asked.

"Ten to two.'

"Now a pawnbroker's business is mostly done of an evening, Mr. Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evening, which is just before pay-day; so it would suit me very well to **earn** a little in the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a **good** man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

"That would suit me very well," said I. "And the **pay**?"
 "Is 4 **pounds** a week."
 "And the work?"
 "Is **purely** nominal."
 "What do you call **purely** nominal?"
 "Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the **building**, the whole **time**. If you **leave**, you **forfeit** your whole position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that **time**."
 "It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of **leaving**," said I.
 "No **excuse** will avail," said Mr. Duncan Ross; "neither **sickness** nor business nor anything else. There you must stay, or you **lose** your billet."
 "And the work?"
 "Is to **copy** out the "Encyclopaedia Britannica." There is the first volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we **provide** this table and chair. Will you be **ready to-morrow**?"
 "Certainly," I answered.
 "Then, good-bye, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the **important** position which you have been **fortunate** enough to **gain**." He bowed me out of the room and I went home with my assistant, hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so **pleased** at my own **good fortune**.
 "Well, I **thought** over the matter all day, and by evening I was in low **spirits** again; for I had quite **persuaded** myself that the whole affair must be some great **hoax** or **fraud**, though what its object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would **pay** such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica.' Vincent Spaulding did what he could to **cheer** me up, but by bedtime I had **reasoned** myself out of the whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a quill-pen, and seven sheets of foolscap paper, I **started** off for **Pope's Court**.
 "Well, to my **surprise** and **delight**, everything was as right as possible. The table was set out **ready** for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross was there to see that I got **fairly** to work. He **started** me off upon the **letter A**, and then he left me; but he would drop in from **time to time** to see that all was right with me. At two o'clock he bade me good-day, **complimented** me upon the amount that I had written, and locked the door of the office after me.
 "This went on day after day, Mr. Holmes, and on Saturday the

manager came in and planked down four golden **sovereigns** for my week's work. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. By **degrees** Mr. Duncan Ross took to coming in only once of a morning, and then, after a **time**, he did not come in at all. Still, of course, I never **dared** to **leave** the room for an instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet was such a **good** one, and suited me so well, that I would not **risk** the **loss** of it.

"Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about **Abbots** and Archery and Armour and **Architecture** and Attica, and hoped with **diligence** that I might get on to the B's before very **long**. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had **pretty** nearly **filled** a shelf with my writings. And then **suddenly** the whole business came to an end."

"To an end?"

"Yes, **sir**. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as **usual** at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered on to the middle of the panel with a tack. Here it is, and you can read for yourself." He held up a piece of **white** cardboard about the size of a sheet of note-paper. It read in this fashion:

THE RED-HEADED **LEAGUE**

IS

DISSOLVED.

October 9, 1890.

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt **announcement** and the rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so **completely** overtopped every other consideration that we both burst out into a roar of **laughter**.

"I cannot see that there is anything very funny," **cried** our client, **flushing** up to the roots of his flaming head. "If you can do nothing better than **laugh** at me, I can go elsewhere."

"No, no," **cried** Holmes, **shoving** him back into the chair from which he had half risen. "I really wouldn't miss your **case** for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will **excuse** my saying so, something just a little funny about it. **Pray** what steps did you take when you **found** the card upon the door?"

"I was **staggered**, **sir**. I did not know what to do. Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. **Finally**, I went to the landlord, who is an **accountant** living on the ground-floor, and I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the Red-headed **League**. He said that he had never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan Ross was. He answered that the name was new to him.

"Well," said I, "the gentleman at No. 4."

"What, the red-headed man?"

"Yes."

"Oh," said he, "his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. He moved out yesterday."

"Where could I find him?"

"Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17 King Edward Street, near St. Paul's."

"I started off, Mr. Holmes, but when I got to that address it was a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever heard of either Mr. William Morris or Mr. Duncan Ross."

"And what did you do then?" asked Holmes.

"I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you."

"And you did very wisely," said Holmes. "Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear."

"Grave enough!" said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "Why, I have lost four pound a week."

"As far as you are personally concerned," remarked Holmes, "I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some 30 pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them."

"No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank—if it was a prank—upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two and thirty pounds."

"We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you. And, first, one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement—how long had he been with you?"

"About a month then."

"How did he come?"

"In answer to an advertisement."

"Was he the only applicant?"

"No, I had a dozen."

"Why did you pick him?"

"Because he was **handy** and would come **cheap**."

"At half-wages, in **fact**."

"Yes."

"What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?"

"**Small**, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a **white splash** of **acid** upon his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair in **considerable excitement**. "I **thought** as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?"

"Yes, **sir**. He told me that a gipsy had done it for him when he was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep **thought**. "He is still with you?"

"Oh, yes, **sir**; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your **absence**?"

"Nothing to **complain** of, **sir**. There's never very much to do of a morning."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be **happy** to give you an opinion upon the **subject** in the course of a day or two. To-day is Saturday, and I **hope** that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes when our **visitor** had left us, "what do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered frankly. "It is a most **mysterious** business."

"As a **rule**," said Holmes, "the more **bizarre** a thing is the less **mysterious** it proves to be. It is your **commonplace**, featureless **crimes** which are really puzzling, just as a **commonplace** face is the most **difficult** to identify. But I must be prompt over this matter."

"What are you going to do, then?" I asked.

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three pipe **problem**, and I **beg** that you **won't** speak to me for fifty minutes." He **curled** himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like **nose**, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his **black** clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird. I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and indeed was nodding myself, when he **suddenly** sprang out of his chair with the gesture of a man who has made up his mind and put his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at the St. James's Hall this afternoon," he remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your **patients** spare you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do to-day. My **practice** is never very absorbing."

"Then put on your hat and come. I am going through the City

first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that there is a **good deal** of German **music** on the programme, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!"

We travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a poky, little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy two-storied brick houses looked out into a **small** railed-in enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass and a few **clumps** of **faded** laurel-bushes made a hard **fight** against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown **board** with "JABEZ WILSON" in **white letters**, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business. Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side and looked it all over, with his eyes shining brightly between puckered lids. Then he walked slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. **Finally** he returned to the pawnbroker's, and, having thumped vigorously upon the **pavement** with his stick two or three **times**, he went up to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven **young fellow**, who asked him to step in.

"Thank you," said Holmes, "I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand."

"Third right, fourth left," answered the assistant promptly, closing the door.

"Smart **fellow**, that," observed Holmes as we walked away. "He is, in my **judgment**, the fourth smartest man in London, and for **daring** I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before."

"Evidently," said I, "Mr. Wilson's assistant **counts** for a **good deal** in this **mystery** of the Red-headed **League**. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him."

"Not him."

"What then?"

"The knees of his trousers."

"And what did you see?"

"What I **expected** to see."

"Why did you beat the **pavement**?"

"My **dear doctor**, this is a **time** for observation, not for **talk**. We are spies in an **enemy's** country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. Let us now **explore** the parts which **lie** behind it."

The road in which we **found** ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square **presented** as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was

one of the **main** arteries which conveyed the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the **immense** stream of **commerce** **flowing** in a double tide inward and **outward**, while the footpaths were **black** with the **hurrying** **swarm** of **pedestrians**. It was **difficult** to realise as we looked at the line of fine shops and **stately** business premises that they really abutted on the other side upon the **faded** and **stagnant** square which we had just **quitted**.

"Let me see," said Holmes, standing at the corner and glancing along the line, "I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a **hobby** of mine to have an exact **knowledge** of London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban **Bank**, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and McFarlane's carriage-building depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now, **Doctor**, we've done our work, so it's **time** we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is **sweetness** and delicacy and **harmony**, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums."

My **friend** was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable **performer** but a **composer** of no ordinary **merit**. All the afternoon he sat in the **stalls** wrapped in the most **perfect** **happiness**, gently waving his **long**, thin fingers in **time** to the **music**, while his gently **smiling** face and his **languid**, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed **criminal** agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often **thought**, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to **devouring** energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly **formidable** as when, for days on end, he had been **lounging** in his armchair amid his **improvisations** and his black-letter **editions**. Then it was that the **lust** of the **chase** would **suddenly** come upon him, and that his **brilliant** **reasoning** power would rise to the **level** of **intuition**, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose **knowledge** was not that of other **mortals**. When I saw him that afternoon so enwrapped in the **music** at St. James's Hall I felt that an **evil** **time** might be coming upon those whom he had set himself to hunt down.

"You want to go home, no **doubt**, **Doctor**," he remarked as we emerged.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This

business at Coburg Square is serious.”

”Why serious?”

”A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help to-night.”

”At what time?”

”Ten will be early enough.”

”I shall be at Baker Street at ten.”

”Very well. And, I say, Doctor, there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket.” He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque. As I drove home to my house in Kensington I thought over it all, from the extraordinary story of the red-headed copier of the ”Encyclopaedia” down to the visit to Saxe-Coburg Square, and the ominous words with which he had parted from me. What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed? Where were we going, and what were we to do? I had the hint from Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker’s assistant was a formidable man—a man who might play a deep game. I tried to puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair and set the matter aside until night should bring an explanation.

It was a quarter-past nine when I started from home and made my way across the Park, and so through Oxford Street to Baker Street. Two hansoms were standing at the door, and as I entered the passage I heard the sound of voices from above. On entering his room I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men, one of whom I recognised as Peter Jones, the official police agent, while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

”Ha! Our party is complete,” said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack.

”Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in to-night’s adventure.”

”We’re hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see,” said Jones in his consequential way. ”Our friend here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him to do the running down.”

"I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase," observed Mr. Merryweather gloomily.

"You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir," said the police agent loftily. "He has his own little methods, which are, if he won't mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him. It is not too much to say that once or twice, as in that business of the Sholto murder and the Agra treasure, he has been more nearly correct than the official force."

"Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right," said the stranger with deference. "Still, I confess that I miss my rubber. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber."

"I think you will find," said Sherlock Holmes, "that you will play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some 30,000 pounds; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands."

"John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a royal duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. I've been on his track for years and have never set eyes on him yet."

"I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night. I've had one or two little turns also with Mr. John Clay, and I agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is past ten, however, and quite time that we started. If you two will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the second."

Sherlock Holmes was not very communicative during the long drive and lay back in the cab humming the tunes which he had heard in the afternoon. We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets until we emerged into Farringdon Street.

"We are close there now," my friend remarked. "This fellow Merryweather is a bank director, and personally interested in the matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we are, and they are waiting for us."

We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had found ourselves in the morning. Our cabs were dismissed, and, following the guidance of Mr. Merryweather, we passed down a narrow passage and through a side door, which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr. Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all round with crates and massive boxes.

"You are not very vulnerable from above," Holmes remarked as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

"Nor from below," said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor. "Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!" he remarked, looking up in surprise.

"I must really ask you to be a little more quiet!" said Holmes severely. "You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?"

The solemn Mr. Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely the cracks between the stones. A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again and put his glass in his pocket.

"We have at least an hour before us," he remarked, "for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at present, Doctor—as no doubt you have divined—in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr. Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present."

"It is our French gold," whispered the director. "We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it."

"Your French gold?"

"Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources and borrowed for that purpose 30,000 napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The crate upon which I sit contains 2,000 napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the

directors have had misgivings upon the subject.”

”Which were very well justified,” observed Holmes. ”And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime Mr.

Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern.”

”And sit in the dark?”

”I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and I thought that, as we were a partie carrée, you might have your rubber after all. But I see that the enemy’s preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate, and do you conceal yourselves behind those. Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down.”

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front of his lantern and left us in pitch darkness—such an absolute darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment’s notice. To me, with my nerves worked up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the cold dank air of the vault.

”They have but one retreat,” whispered Holmes. ”That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?”

”I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door.”

”Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait.”

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterwards it was but an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to me that the night must have almost gone and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position; yet my nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper, heavier in-breath of the bulky Jones from the thin, sighing note of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then, without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the

centre of the little area of light. For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark again save the single lurid spark which marked a chink between the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending, tearing sound, one of the broad, white stones turned over upon its side and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed the light of a lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut, boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand on either side of the aperture, drew itself shoulder-high and waist-high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another instant he stood at the side of the hole and was hauling after him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the bags? Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!" Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes' hunting crop came down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone floor.

"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes blandly. "You have no chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered with the utmost coolness. "I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed! You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands,"

remarked our prisoner as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists.

"You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness, also, when you address me always to say 'sir' and 'please.'"

"All right," said Jones with a stare and a snigger. "Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your Highness to the police-station?"

"That is better," said John Clay serenely. He made a sweeping bow to the three of us and walked quietly off in the custody of the

detective.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Merryweather as we followed them from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained in the early hours of the morning as we sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street, "it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the 'Encyclopaedia,' must be to get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but, really, it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the colour of his accomplice's hair. The 4 pounds a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? They put in the advertisement, one rogue has the temporary office, the other rogue incites the man to apply for it, and together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and such an expenditure as they were at. It must, then, be something out of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant and found that I had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in London. He was doing something in the cellar—something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was

ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some **skirmishes**, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how **worn**, wrinkled, and **stained** they were. They **spoke** of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw the City and Suburban **Bank** abutted on our **friend's** premises, and felt that I had solved my **problem**. When you drove home after the concert I called upon Scotland Yard and upon the **chairman** of the **bank directors**, with the **result** that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their **attempt** to-night?" I asked.

"Well, when they closed their **League** offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson's presence—in other **words**, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was **essential** that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be **removed**. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their **escape**. For all these **reasons** I **expected** them to come to-night."

"You **reasoned** it out beautifully," I **exclaimed** in unfeigned **admiration**. "It is so **long** a chain, and yet every link rings true."

"It **saved** me from ennui," he answered, **yawning**. "Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is **spent** in one **long effort** to **escape** from the **commonplaces** of **existence**. These little **problems** help me to do so."

"And you are a **benefactor** of the race," said I.

He shrugged his **shoulders**. "Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use," he remarked. "'L'homme c'est rien—l'oeuvre c'est tout,' as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand."

ADVENTURE III. A CASE OF IDENTITY

"My **dear fellow**," said Sherlock Holmes as we sat on either side of the **fire** in his **lodgings** at Baker Street, "life is infinitely **stranger** than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not **dare** to conceive the things which are really mere **commonplaces** of **existence**. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently **remove** the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange **coincidences**, the **plannings**, the cross-purposes, the **wonderful** chains of events, working through generations, and **leading** to the most outré **results**, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and **foreseen** conclusions most **stale** and **unprofitable**."

"And yet I am not **convinced** of it," I answered. "The **cases** which

come to light in the papers are, as a **rule**, bald enough, and **vulgar** enough. We have in our **police** reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the **result** is, it must be **confessed**, neither fascinating nor **artistic**."

"A certain selection and **discretion** must be used in producing a realistic effect," remarked Holmes. "This is wanting in the **police** report, where more **stress** is laid, perhaps, upon the platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an observer contain the **vital** essence of the whole matter. **Depend** upon it, there is nothing so **unnatural** as the **commonplace**."

I **smiled** and shook my head. "I can quite understand your thinking so," I said. "Of course, in your position of **unofficial adviser** and **helper** to everybody who is absolutely puzzled, throughout three continents, you are brought in **contact** with all that is strange and **bizarre**. But here"—I picked up the morning paper from the ground—"let us put it to a practical test. Here is the first heading upon which I come. 'A husband's **cruelty** to his wife.' There is half a column of print, but I know without **reading** it that it is all perfectly **familiar** to me. There is, of course, the other woman, the drink, the push, the blow, the **bruise**, the **sympathetic** sister or landlady. The crudest of **writers** could invent nothing more **crude**."

"Indeed, your example is an **unfortunate** one for your **argument**," said Holmes, taking the paper and glancing his eye down it. "This is the Dundas separation **case**, and, as it happens, I was engaged in clearing up some **small** points in connection with it. The husband was a teetotaler, there was no other woman, and the conduct **complained** of was that he had drifted into the habit of winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling them at his wife, which, you will allow, is not an **action** likely to occur to the imagination of the average story-teller. Take a pinch of snuff, **Doctor**, and acknowledge that I have **scored** over you in your example."

He held out his snuffbox of old **gold**, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid. Its splendour was in such contrast to his homely ways and simple life that I could not help commenting upon it.

"Ah," said he, "I forgot that I had not seen you for some weeks. It is a little souvenir from the **King** of Bohemia in return for my **assistance** in the **case** of the Irene Adler papers."

"And the ring?" I asked, glancing at a **remarkable brilliant** which **sparkled** upon his finger.

"It was from the reigning family of Holland, though the matter in which I **served** them was of such delicacy that I cannot **confide** it even to you, who have been **good** enough to **chronicle** one or two of my little **problems**."

"And have you any on hand just now?" I asked with interest. "Some ten or twelve, but none which present any feature of interest. They are important, you understand, without being interesting. Indeed, I have found that it is usually in unimportant matters that there is a field for the observation, and for the quick analysis of cause and effect which gives the charm to an investigation. The larger crimes are apt to be the simpler, for the bigger the crime the more obvious, as a rule, is the motive. In these cases, save for one rather intricate matter which has been referred to me from Marseilles, there is nothing which presents any features of interest. It is possible, however, that I may have something better before very many minutes are over, for this is one of my clients, or I am much mistaken."

He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted blinds gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that on the pavement opposite there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa round her neck, and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was tilted in a coquettish Duchess of Devonshire fashion over her ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous, hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated backward and forward, and her fingers fidgeted with her glove buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of the swimmer who leaves the bank, she hurried across the road, and we heard the sharp clang of the bell.

"I have seen those symptoms before," said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. "Oscillation upon the pavement always means an affaire de coeur. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts."

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and the boy in buttons entered to announce Miss Mary Sutherland, while the lady herself loomed behind his small black figure like a full-sailed merchant-man behind a tiny pilot boat. Sherlock Holmes welcomed her with the easy courtesy for which he was remarkable, and, having closed the door and bowed her into an armchair, he looked her over in the minute and yet abstracted fashion which was peculiar to him.

"Do you not find," he said, "that with your short sight it is a little trying to do so much typewriting?"

"I did at first," she answered, "but now I know where the letters are without looking." Then, suddenly realising the full purport

of his words, she gave a violent start and looked up, with fear and astonishment upon her broad, good-humoured face. "You've heard about me, Mr. Holmes," she cried, "else how could you know all that?"

"Never mind," said Holmes, laughing; "it is my business to know things. Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others overlook. If not, why should you come to consult me?"

"I came to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherege, whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had given him up for dead. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as much for me. I'm not rich, but still I have a hundred a year in my own right, besides the little that I make by the machine, and I would give it all to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?" asked Sherlock Holmes, with his finger-tips together and his eyes to the ceiling.

Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss Mary Sutherland. "Yes, I did bang out of the house," she said, "for it made me angry to see the easy way in which Mr. Windibank—that is, my father—took it all. He would not go to the police, and he would not go to you, and so at last, as he would do nothing and kept on saying that there was no harm done, it made me mad, and I just on with my things and came right away to you."

"Your father," said Holmes, "your stepfather, surely, since the name is different."

"Yes, my stepfather. I call him father, though it sounds funny, too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself."

"And your mother is alive?"

"Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. I wasn't best pleased, Mr. Holmes, when she married again so soon after father's death, and a man who was nearly fifteen years younger than herself. Father was a plumber in the Tottenham Court Road, and he left a tidy business behind him, which mother carried on with Mr. Hardy, the foreman; but when Mr. Windibank came he made her sell the business, for he was very superior, being a traveller in wines. They got 4700 pounds for the goodwill and interest, which wasn't near as much as father could have got if he had been alive."

I had expected to see Sherlock Holmes impatient under this rambling and inconsequential narrative, but, on the contrary, he had listened with the greatest concentration of attention.

"Your own little income," he asked, "does it come out of the business?"

"Oh, no, sir. It is quite separate and was left me by my uncle Ned in Auckland. It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4 1/2 per cent. Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can

only touch the interest."

"You interest me extremely," said Holmes. "And since you draw so large a sum as a hundred a year, with what you earn into the bargain, you no doubt travel a little and indulge yourself in every way. I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely upon an income of about 60 pounds."

"I could do with much less than that, Mr. Holmes, but you understand that as long as I live at home I don't wish to be a burden to them, and so they have the use of the money just while I am staying with them. Of course, that is only just for the time. Mr. Windibank draws my interest every quarter and pays it over to mother, and I find that I can do pretty well with what I earn at typewriting. It brings me twopence a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day."

"You have made your position very clear to me," said Holmes.

"This is my friend, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Kindly tell us now all about your connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel."

A flush stole over Miss Sutherland's face, and she picked nervously at the fringe of her jacket. "I met him first at the gasfitters' ball," she said. "They used to send father tickets when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and sent them to mother. Mr. Windibank did not wish us to go. He never did wish us to go anywhere. He would get quite mad if I wanted so much as to join a Sunday-school treat. But this time I was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to prevent? He said the folk were not fit for us to know, when all father's friends were to be there. And he said that I had nothing fit to wear, when I had my purple plush that I had never so much as taken out of the drawer. At last, when nothing else would do, he went off to France upon the business of the firm, but we went, mother and I, with Mr. Hardy, who used to be our foreman, and it was there I met Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"I suppose," said Holmes, "that when Mr. Windibank came back from France he was very annoyed at your having gone to the ball."

"Oh, well, he was very good about it. He laughed, I remember, and shrugged his shoulders, and said there was no use denying anything to a woman, for she would have her way."

"I see. Then at the gasfitters' ball you met, as I understand, a gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Yes, sir. I met him that night, and he called next day to ask if we had got home all safe, and after that we met him—that is to say, Mr. Holmes, I met him twice for walks, but after that father came back again, and Mr. Hosmer Angel could not come to the house any more."

"No?"

"Well, you know **father** didn't like anything of the sort. He wouldn't have any **visitors** if he could help it, and he used to say that a woman should be **happy** in her own family circle. But then, as I used to say to **mother**, a woman wants her own circle to begin with, and I had not got mine yet."

"But how about Mr. Hosmer **Angel**? Did he make no **attempt** to see you?"

"Well, **father** was going off to France again in a week, and Hosmer wrote and said that it would be safer and better not to see each other until he had gone. We could write in the meantime, and he used to write every day. I took the **letters** in in the morning, so there was no need for **father** to know."

"Were you engaged to the **gentleman** at this **time**?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. We were engaged after the first walk that we took. Hosmer—Mr. Angel—was a **cashier** in an office in Leadenhall Street—and—"

"What office?"

"That's the **worst** of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know."

"Where did he live, then?"

"He slept on the premises."

"And you don't know his address?"

"No—except that it was Leadenhall Street."

"Where did you address your **letters**, then?"

"To the Leadenhall Street Post Office, to be left till called for. He said that if they were sent to the office he would be chaffed by all the other clerks about having **letters** from a lady, so I **offered** to typewrite them, like he did his, but he wouldn't have that, for he said that when I wrote them they seemed to come from me, but when they were typewritten he always felt that the **machine** had come between us. That will just **show** you how fond he was of me, Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think of."

"It was most suggestive," said Holmes. "It has **long** been an **axiom** of mine that the little things are infinitely the most **important**. Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer **Angel**?"

"He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. He would rather walk with me in the evening than in the daylight, for he said that he hated to be conspicuous. Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. Even his voice was gentle. He'd had the quinsy and **swollen** glands when he was **young**, he told me, and it had left him with a weak throat, and a hesitating, whispering fashion of **speech**. He was always well dressed, very neat and plain, but his eyes were weak, just as mine are, and he wore tinted glasses against the **glare**."

"Well, and what **happened** when Mr. Windibank, your stepfather, returned to France?"

"Mr. Hosmer **Angel** came to the house again and proposed that we

should marry before father came back. He was in dreadful earnest and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would always be true to him. Mother said he was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion. Mother was all in his favour from the first and was even fonder of him than I was. Then, when they talked of marrying within the week, I began to ask about father; but they both said never to mind about father, but just to tell him afterwards, and mother said she would make it all right with him. I didn't quite like that, Mr. Holmes. It seemed funny that I should ask his leave, as he was only a few years older than me; but I didn't want to do anything on the sly, so I wrote to father at Bordeaux, where the company has its French offices, but the letter came back to me on the very morning of the wedding."

"It missed him, then?"

"Yes, sir; for he had started to England just before it arrived."

"Ha! that was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for the Friday. Was it to be in church?"

"Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour's, near King's Cross, and we were to have breakfast afterwards at the St. Pancras Hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were two of us he put us both into it and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked there was no one there! The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him."

"It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated," said Holmes.

"Oh, no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened, I was to be true; and that even if something quite unforeseen occurred to separate us, I was always to remember that I was pledged to him, and that he would claim his pledge sooner or later. It seemed strange talk for a wedding-morning, but what has happened since gives a meaning to it."

"Most certainly it does. Your own opinion is, then, that some unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?"

"Yes, sir. I believe that he foresaw some danger, or else he would not have talked so. And then I think that what he foresaw happened."

"But you have no notion as to what it could have been?"

"None."

"One more question. How did your mother take the matter?"

"She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter again."

"And your father? Did you tell him?"

"Yes; and he seemed to think, with me, that something had happened, and that I should hear of Hosmer again. As he said, what interest could anyone have in bringing me to the doors of the church, and then leaving me? Now, if he had borrowed my money, or if he had married me and got my money settled on him, there might be some reason, but Hosmer was very independent about money and never would look at a shilling of mine. And yet, what could have happened? And why could he not write? Oh, it drives me half-mad to think of it, and I can't sleep a wink at night." She pulled a little handkerchief out of her muff and began to sob heavily into it.

"I shall glance into the case for you," said Holmes, rising, "and I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. Let the weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind dwell upon it further. Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel vanish from your memory, as he has done from your life."

"Then you don't think I'll see him again?"

"I fear not."

"Then what has happened to him?"

"You will leave that question in my hands. I should like an accurate description of him and any letters of his which you can spare."

"I advertised for him in last Saturday's Chronicle," said she.

"Here is the slip and here are four letters from him."

"Thank you. And your address?"

"No. 31 Lyon Place, Camberwell."

"Mr. Angel's address you never had, I understand. Where is your father's place of business?"

"He travels for Westhouse Marbank, the great claret importers of Fenchurch Street."

"Thank you. You have made your statement very clearly. You will leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given you. Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it to affect your life."

"You are very kind, Mr. Holmes, but I cannot do that. I shall be true to Hosmer. He shall find me ready when he comes back."

For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which compelled our respect. She laid her little bundle of papers upon the table and went her way, with a promise to come again whenever she might be summoned.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for a few minutes with his fingertips

still pressed together, his legs stretched out in front of him, and his gaze directed upward to the ceiling. Then he took down from the rack the old and oily clay pipe, which was to him as a counsellor, and, having lit it, he leaned back in his chair, with the thick blue cloud-wreaths spinning up from him, and a look of infinite languor in his face.

"Quite an interesting study, that maiden," he observed. "I found her more interesting than her little problem, which, by the way, is rather a trite one. You will find parallel cases, if you consult my index, in Andover in '77, and there was something of the sort at The Hague last year. Old as is the idea, however, there were one or two details which were new to me. But the maiden herself was most instructive."

"You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me," I remarked.

"Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring you to realise the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot-lace. Now, what did you gather from that woman's appearance? Describe it."

"Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were greyish and were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn't observe. She had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way."

Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly together and chuckled.

"Pon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for colour. Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. As you observe, this woman had plush upon her sleeves, which is a most useful material for showing traces. The double line a little above the wrist, where the typewritist presses against the table, was beautifully defined. The sewing-machine, of the hand type, leaves a similar mark, but only on the left arm, and on the side of it farthest from the thumb, instead of being right across the broadest part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and, observing the dint of a pince-nez at either side of her nose, I

ventured a remark upon short sight and typewriting, which seemed to surprise her."

"It surprised me."

"But, surely, it was obvious. I was then much surprised and interested on glancing down to observe that, though the boots which she was wearing were not unlike each other, they were really odd ones; the one having a slightly decorated toe-cap, and the other a plain one. One was buttoned only in the two lower buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and fifth. Now, when you see that a young lady, otherwise neatly dressed, has come away from home with odd boots, half-buttoned, it is no great deduction to say that she came away in a hurry."

"And what else?" I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by my friend's incisive reasoning.

"I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving home but after being fully dressed. You observed that her right glove was torn at the forefinger, but you did not apparently see that both glove and finger were stained with violet ink. She had written in a hurry and dipped her pen too deep. It must have been this morning, or the mark would not remain clear upon the finger. All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back to business, Watson. Would you mind reading me the advertised description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

I held the little printed slip to the light.

"Missing," it said, "on the morning of the fourteenth, a gentleman named Hosmer Angel. About five ft. seven in. in height; strongly built, sallow complexion, black hair, a little bald in the centre, bushy, black side-whiskers and moustache; tinted glasses, slight infirmity of speech. Was dressed, when last seen, in black frock-coat faced with silk, black waistcoat, gold Albert chain, and grey Harris tweed trousers, with brown gaiters over elastic-sided boots. Known to have been employed in an office in Leadenhall Street. Anybody bringing—"

"That will do," said Holmes. "As to the letters," he continued, glancing over them, "they are very commonplace. Absolutely no clue in them to Mr. Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. There is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike you."

"They are typewritten," I remarked.

"Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. Look at the neat little 'Hosmer Angel' at the bottom. There is a date, you see, but no superscription except Leadenhall Street, which is rather vague. The point about the signature is very suggestive—in fact, we may call it conclusive."

"Of what?"

"My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it

bears upon the case?"

"I cannot say that I do unless it were that he wished to be able to deny his signature if an action for breach of promise were instituted."

"No, that was not the point. However, I shall write two letters, which should settle the matter. One is to a firm in the City, the other is to the young lady's stepfather, Mr. Windibank, asking him whether he could meet us here at six o'clock tomorrow evening. It is just as well that we should do business with the male relatives. And now, Doctor, we can do nothing until the answers to those letters come, so we may put our little problem upon the shelf for the interim."

I had had so many reasons to believe in my friend's subtle powers of reasoning and extraordinary energy in action that I felt that he must have some solid grounds for the assured and easy demeanour with which he treated the singular mystery which he had been called upon to fathom. Once only had I known him to fail, in the case of the King of Bohemia and of the Irene Adler photograph; but when I looked back to the weird business of the Sign of Four, and the extraordinary circumstances connected with the Study in Scarlet, I felt that it would be a strange tangle indeed which he could not unravel.

I left him then, still puffing at his black clay pipe, with the conviction that when I came again on the next evening I would find that he held in his hands all the clues which would lead up to the identity of the disappearing bridegroom of Miss Mary Sutherland.

A professional case of great gravity was engaging my own attention at the time, and the whole of next day I was busy at the bedside of the sufferer. It was not until close upon six o'clock that I found myself free and was able to spring into a hansom and drive to Baker Street, half afraid that I might be too late to assist at the dénouement of the little mystery. I found Sherlock Holmes alone, however, half asleep, with his long, thin form curled up in the recesses of his armchair. A formidable array of bottles and test-tubes, with the pungent cleanly smell of hydrochloric acid, told me that he had spent his day in the chemical work which was so dear to him.

"Well, have you solved it?" I asked as I entered.

"Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta."

"No, no, the mystery!" I cried.

"Oh, that! I thought of the salt that I have been working upon. There was never any mystery in the matter, though, as I said yesterday, some of the details are of interest. The only drawback is that there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel."

"Who was he, then, and what was his object in deserting Miss

Sutherland?"

The question was hardly out of my mouth, and Holmes had not yet opened his lips to reply, when we heard a heavy footfall in the passage and a tap at the door.

"This is the girl's stepfather, Mr. James Windibank," said Holmes. "He has written to me to say that he would be here at six. Come in!"

The man who entered was a sturdy, middle-sized fellow, some thirty years of age, clean-shaven, and sallow-skinned, with a bland, insinuating manner, and a pair of wonderfully sharp and penetrating grey eyes. He shot a questioning glance at each of us, placed his shiny top-hat upon the sideboard, and with a slight bow sidled down into the nearest chair.

"Good-evening, Mr. James Windibank," said Holmes. "I think that this typewritten letter is from you, in which you made an appointment with me for six o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I am afraid that I am a little late, but I am not quite my own master, you know. I am sorry that Miss Sutherland has troubled you about this little matter, for I think it is far better not to wash linen of the sort in public. It was quite against my wishes that she came, but she is a very excitable, impulsive girl, as you may have noticed, and she is not easily controlled when she has made up her mind on a point. Of course, I did not mind you so much, as you are not connected with the official police, but it is not pleasant to have a family misfortune like this noised abroad. Besides, it is a useless expense, for how could you possibly find this Hosmer Angel?"

"On the contrary," said Holmes quietly; "I have every reason to believe that I will succeed in discovering Mr. Hosmer Angel." Mr. Windibank gave a violent start and dropped his gloves. "I am delighted to hear it," he said.

"It is a curious thing," remarked Holmes, "that a typewriter has really quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting. Unless they are quite new, no two of them write exactly alike. Some letters get more worn than others, and some wear only on one side. Now, you remark in this note of yours, Mr. Windibank, that in every case there is some little slurring over of the 'e,' and a slight defect in the tail of the 'r.' There are fourteen other characteristics, but those are the more obvious."

"We do all our correspondence with this machine at the office, and no doubt it is a little worn," our visitor answered, glancing keenly at Holmes with his bright little eyes.

"And now I will show you what is really a very interesting study, Mr. Windibank," Holmes continued. "I think of writing another little monograph some of these days on the typewriter and its relation to crime. It is a subject to which I have devoted some

little attention. I have here four letters which purport to come from the missing man. They are all typewritten. In each case, not only are the 'e's' slurred and the 'r's' tailless, but you will observe, if you care to use my magnifying lens, that the fourteen other characteristics to which I have alluded are there as well." Mr. Windibank sprang out of his chair and picked up his hat. "I cannot waste time over this sort of fantastic talk, Mr. Holmes," he said. "If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know when you have done it."

"Certainly," said Holmes, stepping over and turning the key in the door. "I let you know, then, that I have caught him!"

"What! where?" shouted Mr. Windibank, turning white to his lips and glancing about him like a rat in a trap.

"Oh, it won't do—really it won't," said Holmes suavely. "There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. It is quite too transparent, and it was a very bad compliment when you said that it was impossible for me to solve so simple a question. That's right! Sit down and let us talk it over."

Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a glitter of moisture on his brow. "It—it's not actionable," he stammered.

"I am very much afraid that it is not. But between ourselves, Windibank, it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me. Now, let me just run over the course of events, and you will contradict me if I go wrong."

The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is utterly crushed. Holmes stuck his feet up on the corner of the mantelpiece and, leaning back with his hands in his pockets, began talking, rather to himself, as it seemed, than to us.

"The man married a woman very much older than himself for her money," said he, "and he enjoyed the use of the money of the daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable sum, for people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it. The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate and warm-hearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. But soon he found that that would not answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. What does her clever stepfather do then? He conceives an

idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself, covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with a moustache and a pair of bushy whiskers, sunk that clear voice into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the girl's short sight, he appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off other lovers by making love himself."

"It was only a joke at first," groaned our visitor. "We never thought that she would have been so carried away."

"Very likely not. However that may be, the young lady was very decidedly carried away, and, having quite made up her mind that her stepfather was in France, the suspicion of treachery never for an instant entered her mind. She was flattered by the gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the loudly expressed admiration of her mother. Then Mr. Angel began to call, for it was obvious that the matter should be pushed as far as it would go if a real effect were to be produced. There were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the girl's affections from turning towards anyone else. But the deception could not be kept up forever. These pretended journeys to France were rather cumbrous. The thing to do was clearly to bring the business to an end in such a dramatic manner that it would leave a permanent impression upon the young lady's mind and prevent her from looking upon any other suitor for some time to come. Hence those vows of fidelity exacted upon a Testament, and hence also the allusions to a possibility of something happening on the very morning of the wedding. James Windibank wished Miss Sutherland to be so bound to Hosmer Angel, and so uncertain as to his fate, that for ten years to come, at any rate, she would not listen to another man. As far as the church door he brought her, and then, as he could go no farther, he conveniently vanished away by the old trick of stepping in at one door of a four-wheeler and out at the other. I think that was the chain of events, Mr. Windibank!"

Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a cold sneer upon his pale face.

"It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes," said he, "but if you are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to know that it is you who are breaking the law now, and not me. I have done nothing actionable from the first, but as long as you keep that door locked you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal constraint."

"The law cannot, as you say, touch you," said Holmes, unlocking and throwing open the door, "yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a

friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!" he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon the man's face, "it is not part of my duties to my client, but here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat myself to—" He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he could grasp it there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs, the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr. James Windibank running at the top of his speed down the road. "There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!" said Holmes, laughing, as he threw himself down into his chair once more. "That fellow will rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and ends on a gallows. The case has, in some respects, been not entirely devoid of interest."

"I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning," I remarked.

"Well, of course it was obvious from the first that this Mr. Hosmer Angel must have some strong object for his curious conduct, and it was equally clear that the only man who really profited by the incident, as far as we could see, was the stepfather. Then the fact that the two men were never together, but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was suggestive. So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice, which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. My suspicions were all confirmed by his peculiar action in typewriting his signature, which, of course, inferred that his handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognise even the smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same direction."

"And how did you verify them?"

"Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. I knew the firm for which this man worked. Having taken the printed description. I eliminated everything from it which could be the result of a disguise—the whiskers, the glasses, the voice, and I sent it to the firm, with a request that they would inform me whether it answered to the description of any of their travellers. I had already noticed the peculiarities of the typewriter, and I wrote to the man himself at his business address asking him if he would come here. As I expected, his reply was typewritten and revealed the same trivial but characteristic defects. The same post brought me a letter from Westhouse Marbank, of Fenchurch Street, to say that the description tallied in every respect with that of their employé, James Windibank. Voilà tout!"

"And Miss Sutherland?"

"If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old

Persian saying, 'There is **danger** for him who taketh the tiger cub, and **danger** also for whoso snatches a **delusion** from a woman.' There is as much **sense** in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much **knowledge** of the world."

ADVENTURE IV. THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY

We were seated at **breakfast** one morning, my wife and I, when the maid brought in a telegram. It was from Sherlock Holmes and ran in this way:

"Have you a couple of days to spare? Have just been wired for from the west of England in connection with Boscombe Valley **tragedy**. Shall be **glad** if you will come with me. Air and scenery **perfect**. Leave Paddington by the 11:15."

"What do you say, **dear?**" said my wife, looking across at me.

"Will you go?"

"I really don't know what to say. I have a **fairly long** list at **present**."

"Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking a little pale lately. I think that the **change** would do you **good**, and you are always so **interested** in Mr. Sherlock Holmes' **cases**."

"I should be **ungrateful** if I were not, seeing what I **gained** through one of them," I answered. "But if I am to go, I must pack at once, for I have only half an hour."

My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and **ready** traveller. My wants were few and simple, so that in less than the **time** stated I was in a **cab** with my valise, rattling away to Paddington Station. Sherlock Holmes was pacing up and down the platform, his tall, **gaunt** figure made even gaunter and taller by his **long** grey travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth **cap**.

"It is really very **good** of you to come, Watson," said he. "It makes a **considerable** difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local **aid** is always either **worthless** or else **biassed**. If you will keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets."

We had the carriage to ourselves **save** for an **immense litter** of papers which Holmes had brought with him. Among these he rummaged and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until we were past **Reading**. Then he **suddenly** rolled them all into a **gigantic** ball and tossed them up onto the **rack**.

"Have you heard anything of the **case?**" he asked.

"Not a **word**. I have not seen a paper for some days."

"The London press has not had very **full accounts**. I have just been looking through all the recent papers in order to **master** the particulars. It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple **cases** which are so extremely **difficult**."

"That sounds a little paradoxical."

"But it is profoundly **true**. Singularity is almost **invariably** a **clue**. The more featureless and **commonplace** a **crime** is, the more **difficult** it is to bring it home. In this **case**, however, they have **established** a very serious **case** against the son of the **murdered** man."

"It is a **murder**, then?"

"Well, it is **conjectured** to be so. I shall take nothing for **granted** until I have the **opportunity** of looking personally into it. I will **explain** the state of things to you, as far as I have been able to understand it, in a very few **words**."

"Boscombe Valley is a country district not very far from Ross, in Herefordshire. The largest **landed** proprietor in that part is a Mr. **John** Turner, who made his **money** in Australia and returned some years ago to the old country. One of the **farms** which he held, that of Hatherley, was let to Mr. Charles McCarthy, who was also an ex-Australian. The men had known each other in the colonies, so that it was not **unnatural** that when they came to settle down they should do so as near each other as possible. Turner was apparently the richer man, so McCarthy became his **tenant** but still remained, it seems, upon terms of **perfect equality**, as they were frequently together. McCarthy had one son, a lad of eighteen, and Turner had an only **daughter** of the same age, but neither of them had wives living. They appear to have **avoided** the society of the neighbouring English families and to have **led** retired lives, though both the McCarthys were fond of sport and were frequently seen at the race-meetings of the neighbourhood. McCarthy kept two servants—a man and a girl. Turner had a **considerable household**, some half-dozen at the least. That is as much as I have been able to gather about the families. Now for the **facts**."

"On June 3rd, that is, on Monday last, McCarthy left his house at Hatherley about three in the afternoon and walked down to the Boscombe **Pool**, which is a **small** lake formed by the spreading out of the stream which runs down the Boscombe Valley. He had been out with his serving-man in the morning at Ross, and he had told the man that he must **hurry**, as he had an appointment of **importance** to keep at three. From that appointment he never came back **alive**."

"From Hatherley Farm-house to the Boscombe **Pool** is a quarter of a mile, and two people saw him as he passed over this **ground**. One was an old woman, whose name is not mentioned, and the other was William Crowder, a game-keeper in the **employ** of Mr. Turner. Both these **witnesses** depose that Mr. McCarthy was walking alone. The game-keeper adds that within a few minutes of his seeing Mr. McCarthy pass he had seen his son, Mr. James McCarthy, going the same way with a **gun** under his arm. To the best of his belief, the

father was actually in sight at the time, and the son was following him. He thought no more of the matter until he heard in the evening of the tragedy that had occurred.

"The two McCarthys were seen after the time when William Crowder, the game-keeper, lost sight of them. The Boscombe Pool is thickly wooded round, with just a fringe of grass and of reeds round the edge. A girl of fourteen, Patience Moran, who is the daughter of the lodge-keeper of the Boscombe Valley estate, was in one of the woods picking flowers. She states that while she was there she saw, at the border of the wood and close by the lake, Mr. McCarthy and his son, and that they appeared to be having a violent quarrel. She heard Mr. McCarthy the elder using very strong language to his son, and she saw the latter raise up his hand as if to strike his father. She was so frightened by their violence that she ran away and told her mother when she reached home that she had left the two McCarthys quarrelling near Boscombe Pool, and that she was afraid that they were going to fight. She had hardly said the words when young Mr. McCarthy came running up to the lodge to say that he had found his father dead in the wood, and to ask for the help of the lodge-keeper. He was much excited, without either his gun or his hat, and his right hand and sleeve were observed to be stained with fresh blood. On following him they found the dead body stretched out upon the grass beside the pool. The head had been beaten in by repeated blows of some heavy and blunt weapon. The injuries were such as might very well have been inflicted by the butt-end of his son's gun, which was found lying on the grass within a few paces of the body. Under these circumstances the young man was instantly arrested, and a verdict of 'wilful murder' having been returned at the inquest on Tuesday, he was on Wednesday brought before the magistrates at Ross, who have referred the case to the next Assizes. Those are the main facts of the case as they came out before the coroner and the police-court."

"I could hardly imagine a more damning case," I remarked. "If ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal it does so here."

"Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing," answered Holmes thoughtfully. "It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different. It must be confessed, however, that the case looks exceedingly grave against the young man, and it is very possible that he is indeed the culprit. There are several people in the neighbourhood, however, and among them Miss Turner, the daughter of the neighbouring landowner, who believe in his innocence, and who have retained Lestrade, whom you may recollect

in connection with the **Study** in Scarlet, to work out the **case** in his **interest**. Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the **case** to me, and hence it is that two middle-aged **gentlemen** are flying westward at fifty miles an hour instead of quietly digesting their **breakfasts** at home."

"I am **afraid**," said I, "that the **facts** are so **obvious** that you will find little **credit** to be **gained** out of this **case**."

"There is nothing more **deceptive** than an **obvious fact**," he answered, **laughing**. "Besides, we may **chance** to **hit** upon some other **obvious facts** which may have been by no means **obvious** to Mr. Lestrade. You know me too well to think that I am **boasting** when I say that I shall either confirm or destroy his **theory** by means which he is quite incapable of **employing**, or even of understanding. To take the first example to hand, I very clearly **perceive** that in your bedroom the window is upon the right-hand side, and yet I **question** whether Mr. Lestrade would have noted even so self-evident a thing as that."

"How on earth—"

"My **dear fellow**, I know you well. I know the **military** neatness which characterises you. You shave every morning, and in this season you shave by the sunlight; but since your shaving is less and less complete as we get farther back on the left side, until it becomes positively slovenly as we get round the angle of the jaw, it is surely very clear that that side is less **illuminated** than the other. I could not imagine a man of your habits looking at himself in an equal light and being **satisfied** with such a **result**. I only **quote** this as a trivial example of observation and inference. Therein **lies** my métier, and it is just possible that it may be of some service in the **investigation** which **lies** before us. There are one or two minor points which were brought out in the inquest, and which are **worth** considering."

"What are they?"

"It appears that his **arrest** did not take place at once, but after the return to Hatherley **Farm**. On the **inspector** of constabulary **informing** him that he was a **prisoner**, he remarked that he was not **surprised** to hear it, and that it was no more than his **deserts**. This observation of his had the natural effect of **removing** any traces of **doubt** which might have remained in the minds of the **coroner's jury**."

"It was a **confession**," I ejaculated.

"No, for it was followed by a protestation of **innocence**."

"Coming on the **top** of such a **damning series** of events, it was at least a most **suspicious** remark."

"On the **contrary**," said Holmes, "it is the brightest **rift** which I can at **present** see in the clouds. However **innocent** he might be, he could not be such an **absolute** imbecile as not to see that the

circumstances were very black against him. Had he appeared surprised at his own arrest, or feigned indignation at it, I should have looked upon it as highly suspicious, because such surprise or anger would not be natural under the circumstances, and yet might appear to be the best policy to a scheming man. His frank acceptance of the situation marks him as either an innocent man, or else as a man of considerable self-restraint and firmness. As to his remark about his deserts, it was also not unnatural if you consider that he stood beside the dead body of his father, and that there is no doubt that he had that very day so far forgotten his filial duty as to bandy words with him, and even, according to the little girl whose evidence is so important, to raise his hand as if to strike him. The self-reproach and contrition which are displayed in his remark appear to me to be the signs of a healthy mind rather than of a guilty one."

I shook my head. "Many men have been hanged on far slighter evidence," I remarked.

"So they have. And many men have been wrongfully hanged."

"What is the young man's own account of the matter?"

"It is, I am afraid, not very encouraging to his supporters, though there are one or two points in it which are suggestive. You will find it here, and may read it for yourself."

He picked out from his bundle a copy of the local Herefordshire paper, and having turned down the sheet he pointed out the paragraph in which the unfortunate young man had given his own statement of what had occurred. I settled myself down in the corner of the carriage and read it very carefully. It ran in this way:

"Mr. James McCarthy, the only son of the deceased, was then called and gave evidence as follows: 'I had been away from home for three days at Bristol, and had only just returned upon the morning of last Monday, the 3rd. My father was absent from home at the time of my arrival, and I was informed by the maid that he had driven over to Ross with John Cobb, the groom. Shortly after my return I heard the wheels of his trap in the yard, and, looking out of my window, I saw him get out and walk rapidly out of the yard, though I was not aware in which direction he was going. I then took my gun and strolled out in the direction of the Boscombe Pool, with the intention of visiting the rabbit warren which is upon the other side. On my way I saw William Crowder, the game-keeper, as he had stated in his evidence; but he is mistaken in thinking that I was following my father. I had no idea that he was in front of me. When about a hundred yards from the pool I heard a cry of "Cooee!" which was a usual signal between my father and myself. I then hurried forward, and found

him standing by the pool. He appeared to be much surprised at seeing me and asked me rather roughly what I was doing there. A conversation ensued which led to high words and almost to blows, for my father was a man of a very violent temper. Seeing that his passion was becoming ungovernable, I left him and returned towards Hatherley Farm. I had not gone more than 150 yards, however, when I heard a hideous outcry behind me, which caused me to run back again. I found my father expiring upon the ground, with his head terribly injured. I dropped my gun and held him in my arms, but he almost instantly expired. I knelt beside him for some minutes, and then made my way to Mr. Turner's lodge-keeper, his house being the nearest, to ask for assistance. I saw no one near my father when I returned, and I have no idea how he came by his injuries. He was not a popular man, being somewhat cold and forbidding in his manners, but he had, as far as I know, no active enemies. I know nothing further of the matter.'

"The Coroner: Did your father make any statement to you before he died?

"Witness: He mumbled a few words, but I could only catch some allusion to a rat.

"The Coroner: What did you understand by that?

"Witness: It conveyed no meaning to me. I thought that he was delirious.

"The Coroner: What was the point upon which you and your father had this final quarrel?

"Witness: I should prefer not to answer.

"The Coroner: I am afraid that I must press it.

"Witness: It is really impossible for me to tell you. I can assure you that it has nothing to do with the sad tragedy which followed.

"The Coroner: That is for the court to decide. I need not point out to you that your refusal to answer will prejudice your case considerably in any future proceedings which may arise.

"Witness: I must still refuse.

"The Coroner: I understand that the cry of 'Cooee' was a common signal between you and your father?

"Witness: It was.

"The Coroner: How was it, then, that he uttered it before he saw you, and before he even knew that you had returned from Bristol?

"Witness (with considerable confusion): I do not know.

"A Juryman: Did you see nothing which aroused your suspicions when you returned on hearing the cry and found your father fatally injured?

"Witness: Nothing definite.

"The Coroner: What do you mean?

"Witness: I was so disturbed and excited as I rushed out into

the open, that I could think of nothing except of my father. Yet I have a vague impression that as I ran forward something lay upon the ground to the left of me. It seemed to me to be something grey in colour, a coat of some sort, or a plaid perhaps. When I rose from my father I looked round for it, but it was gone.

"Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?"

"Yes, it was gone."

"You cannot say what it was?"

"No, I had a feeling something was there."

"How far from the body?"

"A dozen yards or so."

"And how far from the edge of the wood?"

"About the same."

"Then if it was removed it was while you were within a dozen yards of it?"

"Yes, but with my back towards it."

"This concluded the examination of the witness."

"I see," said I as I glanced down the column, "that the coroner in his concluding remarks was rather severe upon young McCarthy. He calls attention, and with reason, to the discrepancy about his father having signalled to him before seeing him, also to his refusal to give details of his conversation with his father, and his singular account of his father's dying words. They are all, as he remarks, very much against the son."

Holmes laughed softly to himself and stretched himself out upon the cushioned seat. "Both you and the coroner have been at some pains," said he, "to single out the very strongest points in the young man's favour. Don't you see that you alternately give him credit for having too much imagination and too little? Too little, if he could not invent a cause of quarrel which would give him the sympathy of the jury; too much, if he evolved from his own inner consciousness anything so outré as a dying reference to a rat, and the incident of the vanishing cloth. No, sir, I shall approach this case from the point of view that what this young man says is true, and we shall see whither that hypothesis will lead us. And now here is my pocket Petrarch, and not another word shall I say of this case until we are on the scene of action. We lunch at Swindon, and I see that we shall be there in twenty minutes."

It was nearly four o'clock when we at last, after passing through the beautiful Stroud Valley, and over the broad gleaming Severn, found ourselves at the pretty little country-town of Ross. A lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking, was waiting for us upon the platform. In spite of the light brown dustcoat and leather-leggings which he wore in deference to his rustic

surroundings, I had no **difficulty** in recognising Lestrade, of Scotland Yard. With him we drove to the Hereford Arms where a room had already been engaged for us.

"I have ordered a carriage," said Lestrade as we sat over a cup of tea. "I knew your **energetic** nature, and that you would not be **happy** until you had been on the scene of the **crime**."

"It was very nice and complimentary of you," Holmes answered. "It is entirely a **question** of barometric **pressure**."

Lestrade looked **startled**. "I do not quite follow," he said.

"How is the glass? Twenty-nine, I see. No wind, and not a cloud in the **sky**. I have a caseful of **cigarettes** here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much **superior** to the **usual** country hotel **abomination**. I do not think that it is probable that I shall use the carriage to-night."

Lestrade **laughed** indulgently. "You have, no **doubt**, already formed your conclusions from the newspapers," he said. "The **case** is as plain as a pikestaff, and the more one goes into it the plainer it becomes. Still, of course, one can't **refuse** a lady, and such a very positive one, too. She has heard of you, and would have your opinion, though I repeatedly told her that there was nothing which you could do which I had not already done. Why, **bless** my soul! here is her carriage at the door."

He had hardly spoken before there rushed into the room one of the most **lovely young** women that I have ever seen in my life. Her violet eyes shining, her lips parted, a pink **flush** upon her cheeks, all **thought** of her natural **reserve lost** in her **overpowering excitement** and concern.

"Oh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" she **cried**, glancing from one to the other of us, and **finally**, with a woman's quick **intuition**, fastening upon my **companion**, "I am so **glad** that you have come. I have driven down to tell you so. I know that James didn't do it. I know it, and I want you to **start** upon your work knowing it, too. Never let yourself **doubt** upon that point. We have known each other since we were little **children**, and I know his **faults** as no one else does; but he is too tender-hearted to **hurt** a fly. Such a charge is **absurd** to anyone who really knows him."

"I **hope** we may clear him, Miss Turner," said Sherlock Holmes.

"You may rely upon my doing all that I can."

"But you have read the evidence. You have formed some conclusion? Do you not see some loophole, some **flaw**? Do you not yourself think that he is **innocent**?"

"I think that it is very probable."

"There, now!" she **cried**, throwing back her head and looking defiantly at Lestrade. "You hear! He gives me **hopes**."

Lestrade shrugged his **shoulders**. "I am **afraid** that my colleague has been a little quick in forming his conclusions," he said.

"But he is right. Oh! I know that he is right. James never did it. And about his quarrel with his father, I am sure that the reason why he would not speak about it to the coroner was because I was concerned in it."

"In what way?" asked Holmes.

"It is no time for me to hide anything. James and his father had many disagreements about me. Mr. McCarthy was very anxious that there should be a marriage between us. James and I have always loved each other as brother and sister; but of course he is young and has seen very little of life yet, and—and—well, he naturally did not wish to do anything like that yet. So there were quarrels, and this, I am sure, was one of them."

"And your father?" asked Holmes. "Was he in favour of such a union?"

"No, he was averse to it also. No one but Mr. McCarthy was in favour of it." A quick blush passed over her fresh young face as Holmes shot one of his keen, questioning glances at her.

"Thank you for this information," said he. "May I see your father if I call to-morrow?"

"I am afraid the doctor won't allow it."

"The doctor?"

"Yes, have you not heard? Poor father has never been strong for years back, but this has broken him down completely. He has taken to his bed, and Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck and that his nervous system is shattered. Mr. McCarthy was the only man alive who had known dad in the old days in Victoria."

"Ha! In Victoria! That is important."

"Yes, at the mines."

"Quite so; at the gold-mines, where, as I understand, Mr. Turner made his money."

"Yes, certainly."

"Thank you, Miss Turner. You have been of material assistance to me."

"You will tell me if you have any news to-morrow. No doubt you will go to the prison to see James. Oh, if you do, Mr. Holmes, do tell him that I know him to be innocent."

"I will, Miss Turner."

"I must go home now, for dad is very ill, and he misses me so if I leave him. Good-bye, and God help you in your undertaking." She hurried from the room as impulsively as she had entered, and we heard the wheels of her carriage rattle off down the street.

"I am ashamed of you, Holmes," said Lestrade with dignity after a few minutes' silence. "Why should you raise up hopes which you are bound to disappoint? I am not over-tender of heart, but I call it cruel."

"I think that I see my way to clearing James McCarthy," said

Holmes. "Have you an order to see him in **prison**?"

"Yes, but only for you and me."

"Then I shall reconsider my resolution about going out. We have still **time** to take a train to Hereford and see him to-night?"

"Ample."

"Then let us do so. Watson, I **fear** that you will find it very slow, but I shall only be away a couple of hours."

I walked down to the station with them, and then wandered through the streets of the little town, **finally** returning to the hotel, where I lay upon the sofa and tried to **interest** myself in a yellow-backed novel. The puny plot of the story was so thin, however, when compared to the deep **mystery** through which we were **groping**, and I **found** my **attention** wander so continually from the **action** to the **fact**, that I at last flung it across the room and gave myself up entirely to a consideration of the events of the day. Supposing that this **unhappy young** man's story were absolutely **true**, then what **hellish** thing, what absolutely **unforeseen** and **extraordinary calamity** could have occurred between the **time** when he parted from his **father**, and the moment when, drawn back by his **screams**, he rushed into the glade? It was something **terrible** and **deadly**. What could it be? Might not the nature of the **injuries** reveal something to my **medical** instincts? I rang the bell and called for the weekly **county** paper, which contained a verbatim **account** of the inquest. In the surgeon's deposition it was stated that the posterior third of the left **parietal** bone and the left half of the occipital bone had been **shattered** by a heavy blow from a blunt weapon. I **marked** the spot upon my own head. Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. That was to some extent in favour of the accused, as when seen **quarrelling** he was face to face with his **father**. Still, it did not go for very much, for the older man might have turned his back before the blow **fell**. Still, it might be **worth** while to call Holmes' **attention** to it. Then there was the peculiar **dying** reference to a **rat**. What could that mean? It could not be **delirium**. A man **dying** from a **sudden** blow does not commonly become **delirious**. No, it was more likely to be an **attempt** to **explain** how he met his **fate**. But what could it indicate? I cudgelled my brains to find some possible explanation. And then the **incident** of the grey cloth seen by **young** McCarthy. If that were **true** the **murderer** must have dropped some part of his dress, presumably his overcoat, in his flight, and must have had the hardihood to return and to carry it away at the instant when the son was kneeling with his back turned not a dozen paces off. What a tissue of **mysteries** and improbabilities the whole thing was! I did not wonder at Lestrade's opinion, and yet I had so much **faith** in Sherlock Holmes' insight that I could not **lose hope** as **long**

as every fresh fact seemed to strengthen his conviction of young McCarthy's innocence.

It was late before Sherlock Holmes returned. He came back alone, for Lestrade was staying in lodgings in the town.

"The glass still keeps very high," he remarked as he sat down.

"It is of importance that it should not rain before we are able to go over the ground. On the other hand, a man should be at his very best and keenest for such nice work as that, and I did not wish to do it when fagged by a long journey. I have seen young McCarthy."

"And what did you learn from him?"

"Nothing."

"Could he throw no light?"

"None at all. I was inclined to think at one time that he knew who had done it and was screening him or her, but I am convinced now that he is as puzzled as everyone else. He is not a very quick-witted youth, though comely to look at and, I should think, sound at heart."

"I cannot admire his taste," I remarked, "if it is indeed a fact that he was averse to a marriage with so charming a young lady as this Miss Turner."

"Ah, thereby hangs a rather painful tale. This fellow is madly, insanely, in love with her, but some two years ago, when he was only a lad, and before he really knew her, for she had been away five years at a boarding-school, what does the idiot do but get into the clutches of a barmaid in Bristol and marry her at a registry office? No one knows a word of the matter, but you can imagine how maddening it must be to him to be upbraided for not doing what he would give his very eyes to do, but what he knows to be absolutely impossible. It was sheer frenzy of this sort which made him throw his hands up into the air when his father, at their last interview, was goading him on to propose to Miss Turner. On the other hand, he had no means of supporting himself, and his father, who was by all accounts a very hard man, would have thrown him over utterly had he known the truth. It was with his barmaid wife that he had spent the last three days in Bristol, and his father did not know where he was. Mark that point. It is of importance. Good has come out of evil, however, for the barmaid, finding from the papers that he is in serious trouble and likely to be hanged, has thrown him over utterly and has written to him to say that she has a husband already in the Bermuda Dockyard, so that there is really no tie between them. I think that that bit of news has consoled young McCarthy for all that he has suffered."

"But if he is innocent, who has done it?"

"Ah! who? I would call your attention very particularly to two

points. One is that the murdered man had an appointment with someone at the pool, and that the someone could not have been his son, for his son was away, and he did not know when he would return. The second is that the murdered man was heard to cry 'Cooee!' before he knew that his son had returned. Those are the crucial points upon which the case depends. And now let us talk about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all minor matters until to-morrow."

There was no rain, as Holmes had foretold, and the morning broke bright and cloudless. At nine o'clock Lestrade called for us with the carriage, and we set off for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool.

"There is serious news this morning," Lestrade observed. "It is said that Mr. Turner, of the Hall, is so ill that his life is despaired of."

"An elderly man, I presume?" said Holmes.

"About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time. This business has had a very bad effect upon him. He was an old friend of McCarthy's, and, I may add, a great benefactor to him, for I have learned that he gave him Hatherley Farm rent free."

"Indeed! That is interesting," said Holmes.

"Oh, yes! In a hundred other ways he has helped him. Everybody about here speaks of his kindness to him."

"Really! Does it not strike you as a little singular that this McCarthy, who appears to have had little of his own, and to have been under such obligations to Turner, should still talk of marrying his son to Turner's daughter, who is, presumably, heiress to the estate, and that in such a very cocksure manner, as if it were merely a case of a proposal and all else would follow? It is the more strange, since we know that Turner himself was averse to the idea. The daughter told us as much. Do you not deduce something from that?"

"We have got to the deductions and the inferences," said Lestrade, winking at me. "I find it hard enough to tackle facts, Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies."

"You are right," said Holmes demurely; "you do find it very hard to tackle the facts."

"Anyhow, I have grasped one fact which you seem to find it difficult to get hold of," replied Lestrade with some warmth.

"And that is—"

"That McCarthy senior met his death from McCarthy junior and that all theories to the contrary are the merest moonshine."

"Well, moonshine is a brighter thing than fog," said Holmes, laughing. "But I am very much mistaken if this is not Hatherley Farm upon the left."

"Yes, that is it." It was a **widespread**, comfortable-looking **building**, two-storied, slate-roofed, with great yellow blotches of lichen upon the grey walls. The drawn **blinds** and the smokeless chimneys, however, gave it a **stricken** look, as though the **weight** of this **horror** still lay heavy upon it. We called at the door, when the maid, at Holmes' request, **showed** us the boots which her **master** wore at the **time** of his **death**, and also a pair of the son's, though not the pair which he had then had. Having **measured** these very **carefully** from seven or eight different points, Holmes desired to be **led** to the court-yard, from which we all followed the winding **track** which **led** to Boscombe **Pool**.

Sherlock Holmes was transformed when he was **hot** upon such a scent as this. Men who had only known the **quiet thinker** and logician of Baker Street would have failed to recognise him. His face **flushed** and **darkened**. His brows were drawn into two hard **black** lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely **glitter**. His face was bent downward, his **shoulders** bowed, his lips **compressed**, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his **long**, sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a **purely** animal **lust** for the **chase**, and his mind was so absolutely concentrated upon the matter before him that a **question** or remark **fell** unheeded upon his ears, or, at the most, only provoked a quick, **impatient snarl** in reply. Swiftly and silently he made his way along the **track** which ran through the **meadows**, and so by way of the woods to the Boscombe **Pool**. It was damp, marshy **ground**, as is all that district, and there were marks of many feet, both upon the path and amid the short grass which **bounded** it on either side. Sometimes Holmes would **hurry** on, sometimes stop dead, and once he made quite a little detour into the **meadow**. Lestrade and I walked behind him, the detective indifferent and **contemptuous**, while I **watched** my **friend** with the **interest** which sprang from the **conviction** that every one of his **actions** was directed towards a definite end.

The Boscombe **Pool**, which is a little reed-girt sheet of water some fifty yards across, is situated at the boundary between the Hatherley **Farm** and the private park of the wealthy Mr. Turner. Above the woods which lined it upon the farther side we could see the red, jutting **pinnacles** which **marked** the site of the rich landowner's dwelling. On the Hatherley side of the **pool** the woods **grew** very thick, and there was a narrow **belt** of sodden grass twenty paces across between the edge of the **trees** and the reeds which lined the lake. Lestrade **showed** us the exact spot at which the body had been **found**, and, indeed, so moist was the **ground**, that I could plainly see the traces which had been left by the **fall** of the **stricken** man. To Holmes, as I could see by his **eager** face and peering eyes, very many other things were to be read

upon the trampled grass. He ran round, like a dog who is **picking** up a scent, and then turned upon my **companion**.

"What did you go into the **pool** for?" he asked.

"I fished about with a rake. I **thought** there might be some weapon or other trace. But how on earth—"

"Oh, tut, tut! I have no **time**! That left foot of yours with its inward twist is all over the place. A mole could trace it, and there it vanishes among the reeds. Oh, how simple it would all have been had I been here before they came like a herd of buffalo and wallowed all over it. Here is where the party with the lodge-keeper came, and they have **covered** all **tracks** for six or eight feet round the body. But here are three separate **tracks** of the same feet." He drew out a lens and lay down upon his **waterproof** to have a better view, **talking** all the **time** rather to himself than to us. "These are **young** McCarthy's feet. Twice he was walking, and once he ran swiftly, so that the soles are deeply **marked** and the **heels** hardly visible. That **bears** out his story. He ran when he saw his **father** on the **ground**. Then here are the **father's** feet as he paced up and down. What is this, then? It is the butt-end of the **gun** as the son stood listening. And this? Ha, ha! What have we here? Tiptoes! tiptoes! Square, too, quite unusual boots! They come, they go, they come again—of course that was for the cloak. Now where did they come from?" He ran up and down, sometimes **losing**, sometimes finding the **track** until we were well within the edge of the wood and under the shadow of a great beech, the largest **tree** in the neighbourhood. Holmes traced his way to the farther side of this and lay down once more upon his face with a little **cry** of satisfaction. For a **long time** he remained there, turning over the leaves and dried sticks, gathering up what seemed to me to be **dust** into an envelope and examining with his lens not only the **ground** but even the **bark** of the **tree** as far as he could reach. A jagged **stone** was **lying** among the moss, and this also he **carefully** examined and **retained**. Then he followed a pathway through the wood until he came to the highroad, where all traces were **lost**.

"It has been a **case** of **considerable interest**," he remarked, returning to his natural manner. "I **fancy** that this grey house on the right must be the lodge. I think that I will go in and have a **word** with Moran, and perhaps write a little note. Having done that, we may drive back to our luncheon. You may walk to the **cab**, and I shall be with you presently."

It was about ten minutes before we regained our **cab** and drove back into Ross, Holmes still carrying with him the **stone** which he had picked up in the wood.

"This may **interest** you, Lestrade," he remarked, holding it out.

"The **murder** was done with it."

"I see no marks."

"There are none."

"How do you know, then?"

"The grass was **growing** under it. It had only lain there a few days. There was no sign of a place whence it had been taken. It corresponds with the **injuries**. There is no sign of any other weapon."

"And the **murderer**?"

"Is a tall man, left-handed, **limps** with the right leg, **wears** thick-soled shooting-boots and a grey cloak, smokes Indian cigars, uses a cigar-holder, and carries a blunt pen-knife in his pocket. There are several other indications, but these may be enough to **aid** us in our search."

Lestrade **laughed**. "I am **afraid** that I am still a sceptic," he said. "**Theories** are all very well, but we have to **deal** with a hard-headed British **jury**."

"Nous verrons," answered Holmes calmly. "You work your own method, and I shall work mine. I shall be busy this afternoon, and shall probably return to London by the evening train."

"And **leave** your **case unfinished**?"

"No, finished."

"But the **mystery**?"

"It is solved."

"Who was the **criminal**, then?"

"The **gentleman** I describe."

"But who is he?"

"Surely it would not be **difficult** to find out. This is not such a populous neighbourhood."

Lestrade shrugged his **shoulders**. "I am a practical man," he said, "and I really cannot undertake to go about the country looking for a left-handed **gentleman** with a game leg. I should become the laughing-stock of Scotland Yard."

"All right," said Holmes quietly. "I have given you the **chance**. Here are your **lodgings**. Good-bye. I shall drop you a line before I **leave**."

Having left Lestrade at his rooms, we drove to our hotel, where we **found** lunch upon the table. Holmes was silent and **buried** in **thought** with a **pained** expression upon his face, as one who finds himself in a perplexing position.

"Look here, Watson," he said when the cloth was cleared "just sit down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't know quite what to do, and I should value your **advice**. Light a cigar and let me expound."

"**Pray** do so."

"Well, now, in considering this **case** there are two points about **young** McCarthy's narrative which struck us both instantly,

although they impressed me in his favour and you against him. One was the **fact** that his **father** should, **according** to his **account**, **cry** 'Cooee!' before seeing him. The other was his singular **dying** reference to a **rat**. He **mumbled** several **words**, you understand, but that was all that caught the son's ear. Now from this double point our research must commence, and we will begin it by presuming that what the lad says is absolutely **true**."

"What of this 'Cooee!' then?"

"Well, obviously it could not have been meant for the son. The son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. It was mere **chance** that he was within earshot. The 'Cooee!' was meant to attract the **attention** of whoever it was that he had the appointment with. But 'Cooee' is a distinctly Australian **cry**, and one which is used between Australians. There is a strong **presumption** that the person whom McCarthy **expected** to meet him at Boscombe **Pool** was someone who had been in Australia."

"What of the **rat**, then?"

Sherlock Holmes took a folded paper from his pocket and flattened it out on the table. "This is a map of the Colony of Victoria," he said. "I wired to Bristol for it last night." He put his hand over part of the map. "What do you read?"

"ARAT," I read.

"And now?" He raised his hand.

"BALLARAT."

"Quite so. That was the **word** the man uttered, and of which his son only caught the last two syllables. He was trying to utter the name of his **murderer**. So and so, of Ballarat."

"It is **wonderful**!" I **exclaimed**.

"It is **obvious**. And now, you see, I had narrowed the field down considerably. The **possession** of a grey garment was a third point which, **granting** the son's **statement** to be correct, was a **certainty**. We have come now out of mere **vagueness** to the definite conception of an Australian from Ballarat with a grey cloak."

"Certainly."

"And one who was at home in the district, for the **pool** can only be approached by the **farm** or by the estate, where **strangers** could hardly wander."

"Quite so."

"Then comes our **expedition** of to-day. By an **examination** of the **ground** I **gained** the **trifling** details which I gave to that imbecile Lestrade, as to the personality of the **criminal**."

"But how did you **gain** them?"

"You know my method. It is **founded** upon the observation of **trifles**."

"His height I know that you might roughly judge from the length of his stride. His boots, too, might be told from their traces."

"Yes, they were peculiar boots."

"But his lameness?"

"The **impression** of his right foot was always less distinct than his left. He put less **weight** upon it. Why? Because he limped—he was lame."

"But his left-handedness."

"You were yourself struck by the nature of the **injury** as recorded by the surgeon at the inquest. The blow was struck from **immediately** behind, and yet was upon the left side. Now, how can that be unless it were by a left-handed man? He had stood behind that **tree** during the interview between the **father** and son. He had even smoked there. I **found** the **ash** of a cigar, which my **special knowledge** of **tobacco ashes** enables me to pronounce as an Indian cigar. I have, as you know, devoted some **attention** to this, and written a little monograph on the **ashes** of 140 different varieties of pipe, cigar, and **cigarette tobacco**. Having **found** the **ash**, I then looked round and discovered the stump among the moss where he had tossed it. It was an Indian cigar, of the variety which are rolled in Rotterdam."

"And the cigar-holder?"

"I could see that the end had not been in his **mouth**. Therefore he used a holder. The tip had been cut off, not bitten off, but the cut was not a **clean** one, so I deduced a blunt pen-knife."

"Holmes," I said, "you have drawn a net round this man from which he cannot **escape**, and you have **saved** an **innocent** human life as truly as if you had cut the cord which was hanging him. I see the direction in which all this points. The **culprit** is—"

"Mr. **John** Turner," **cried** the hotel waiter, opening the door of our sitting-room, and **ushering** in a **visitor**.

The man who entered was a strange and impressive figure. His slow, **limping** step and bowed **shoulders** gave the appearance of decrepitude, and yet his hard, deep-lined, craggy **features**, and his enormous limbs **showed** that he was **possessed** of unusual **strength** of body and of character. His tangled beard, grizzled hair, and **outstanding**, drooping eyebrows combined to give an air of **dignity** and power to his appearance, but his face was of an ashen **white**, while his lips and the corners of his nostrils were tinged with a shade of **blue**. It was clear to me at a glance that he was in the grip of some **deadly** and **chronic disease**.

"**Pray** sit down on the sofa," said Holmes gently. "You had my note?"

"Yes, the lodge-keeper brought it up. You said that you wished to see me here to **avoid scandal**."

"I **thought** people would **talk** if I went to the Hall."

"And why did you wish to see me?" He looked across at my **companion** with **despair** in his **weary** eyes, as though his **question**

was already answered.

"Yes," said Holmes, answering the look rather than the words. "It is so. I know all about McCarthy."

The old man sank his face in his hands. "God help me!" he cried.

"But I would not have let the young man come to harm. I give you my word that I would have spoken out if it went against him at the Assizes."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Holmes gravely.

"I would have spoken now had it not been for my dear girl. It would break her heart—it will break her heart when she hears that I am arrested."

"It may not come to that," said Holmes.

"What?"

"I am no official agent. I understand that it was your daughter who required my presence here, and I am acting in her interests. Young McCarthy must be got off, however."

"I am a dying man," said old Turner. "I have had diabetes for years. My doctor says it is a question whether I shall live a month. Yet I would rather die under my own roof than in a gaol." Holmes rose and sat down at the table with his pen in his hand and a bundle of paper before him. "Just tell us the truth," he said. "I shall jot down the facts. You will sign it, and Watson here can witness it. Then I could produce your confession at the last extremity to save young McCarthy. I promise you that I shall not use it unless it is absolutely needed."

"It's as well," said the old man; "it's a question whether I shall live to the Assizes, so it matters little to me, but I should wish to spare Alice the shock. And now I will make the thing clear to you; it has been a long time in the acting, but will not take me long to tell.

"You didn't know this dead man, McCarthy. He was a devil incarnate. I tell you that. God keep you out of the clutches of such a man as he. His grip has been upon me these twenty years, and he has blasted my life. I'll tell you first how I came to be in his power.

"It was in the early '60's at the diggings. I was a young chap then, hot-blooded and reckless, ready to turn my hand at anything; I got among bad companions, took to drink, had no luck with my claim, took to the bush, and in a word became what you would call over here a highway robber. There were six of us, and we had a wild, free life of it, sticking up a station from time to time, or stopping the wagons on the road to the diggings. Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I went under, and our party is still remembered in the colony as the Ballarat Gang.

"One day a gold convoy came down from Ballarat to Melbourne, and we lay in wait for it and attacked it. There were six troopers

and six of us, so it was a close thing, but we emptied four of their saddles at the first volley. Three of our boys were killed, however, before we got the swag. I put my pistol to the head of the wagon-driver, who was this very man McCarthy. I wish to the Lord that I had shot him then, but I spared him, though I saw his wicked little eyes fixed on my face, as though to remember every feature. We got away with the gold, became wealthy men, and made our way over to England without being suspected. There I parted from my old pals and determined to settle down to a quiet and respectable life. I bought this estate, which chanced to be in the market, and I set myself to do a little good with my money, to make up for the way in which I had earned it. I married, too, and though my wife died young she left me my dear little Alice. Even when she was just a baby her wee hand seemed to lead me down the right path as nothing else had ever done. In a word, I turned over a new leaf and did my best to make up for the past. All was going well when McCarthy laid his grip upon me.

"I had gone up to town about an investment, and I met him in Regent Street with hardly a coat to his back or a boot to his foot.

"'Here we are, Jack,' says he, touching me on the arm; 'we'll be as good as a family to you. There's two of us, me and my son, and you can have the keeping of us. If you don't—it's a fine, law-abiding country is England, and there's always a policeman within hail.'

"Well, down they came to the west country, there was no shaking them off, and there they have lived rent free on my best land ever since. There was no rest for me, no peace, no forgetfulness; turn where I would, there was his cunning, grinning face at my elbow. It grew worse as Alice grew up, for he soon saw I was more afraid of her knowing my past than of the police. Whatever he wanted he must have, and whatever it was I gave him without question, land, money, houses, until at last he asked a thing which I could not give. He asked for Alice.

"His son, you see, had grown up, and so had my girl, and as I was known to be in weak health, it seemed a fine stroke to him that his lad should step into the whole property. But there I was firm. I would not have his cursed stock mixed with mine; not that I had any dislike to the lad, but his blood was in him, and that was enough. I stood firm. McCarthy threatened. I braved him to do his worst. We were to meet at the pool midway between our houses to talk it over.

"When I went down there I found him talking with his son, so I smoked a cigar and waited behind a tree until he should be alone. But as I listened to his talk all that was black and bitter in me seemed to come uppermost. He was urging his son to marry my

daughter with as little regard for what she might think as if she were a slut from off the streets. It drove me mad to think that I and all that I held most dear should be in the power of such a man as this. Could I not snap the bond? I was already a dying and a desperate man. Though clear of mind and fairly strong of limb, I knew that my own fate was sealed. But my memory and my girl! Both could be saved if I could but silence that foul tongue. I did it, Mr. Holmes. I would do it again. Deeply as I have sinned, I have led a life of martyrdom to atone for it. But that my girl should be entangled in the same meshes which held me was more than I could suffer. I struck him down with no more compunction than if he had been some foul and venomous beast. His cry brought back his son; but I had gained the cover of the wood, though I was forced to go back to fetch the cloak which I had dropped in my flight. That is the true story, gentlemen, of all that occurred."

"Well, it is not for me to judge you," said Holmes as the old man signed the statement which had been drawn out. "I pray that we may never be exposed to such a temptation."

"I pray not, sir. And what do you intend to do?"

"In view of your health, nothing. You are yourself aware that you will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher court than the Assizes. I will keep your confession, and if McCarthy is condemned I shall be forced to use it. If not, it shall never be seen by mortal eye; and your secret, whether you be alive or dead, shall be safe with us."

"Farewell, then," said the old man solemnly. "Your own deathbeds, when they come, will be the easier for the thought of the peace which you have given to mine." Tottering and shaking in all his giant frame, he stumbled slowly from the room.

"God help us!" said Holmes after a long silence. "Why does fate play such tricks with poor, helpless worms? I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.'"

James McCarthy was acquitted at the Assizes on the strength of a number of objections which had been drawn out by Holmes and submitted to the defending counsel. Old Turner lived for seven months after our interview, but he is now dead; and there is every prospect that the son and daughter may come to live happily together in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their past.

ADVENTURE V. THE FIVE ORANGE PIPS

When I glance over my notes and records of the Sherlock Holmes cases between the years '82 and '90, I am faced by so many which present strange and interesting features that it is no easy matter to know which to choose and which to leave. Some, however,

have already **gained** publicity through the papers, and others have not **offered** a field for those peculiar qualities which my **friend** **possessed** in so high a **degree**, and which it is the object of these papers to **illustrate**. Some, too, have baffled his analytical skill, and would be, as narratives, beginnings without an ending, while others have been but partially cleared up, and have their explanations **founded** rather upon **conjecture** and **surmise** than on that **absolute logical proof** which was so **dear** to him. There is, however, one of these last which was so **remarkable** in its details and so **startling** in its **results** that I am tempted to give some **account** of it in **spite** of the **fact** that there are points in connection with it which never have been, and probably never will be, entirely cleared up.

The year '87 furnished us with a **long series** of **cases** of greater or less **interest**, of which I **retain** the records. Among my headings under this one twelve months I find an **account** of the **adventure** of the Paradol Chamber, of the Amateur Mendicant Society, who held a **luxurious** club in the lower vault of a furniture warehouse, of the **facts** connected with the **loss** of the British barque "Sophy Anderson", of the singular **adventures** of the Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and **finally** of the Camberwell **poisoning case**. In the latter, as may be remembered, Sherlock Holmes was able, by winding up the dead man's **watch**, to **prove** that it had been **wound** up two hours before, and that therefore the deceased had gone to bed within that time—a deduction which was of the greatest **importance** in clearing up the **case**. All these I may sketch out at some future date, but none of them **present** such singular **features** as the strange train of circumstances which I have now taken up my pen to describe. It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales had set in with exceptional **violence**. All day the wind had **screamed** and the rain had beaten against the windows, so that even here in the heart of great, hand-made London we were **forced** to raise our minds for the instant from the **routine** of life and to recognise the **presence** of those great elemental **forces** which **shriek** at mankind through the bars of his civilisation, like **untamed beasts** in a **cage**. As evening drew in, the **storm** grew higher and louder, and the wind **cried** and sobbed like a **child** in the chimney. Sherlock Holmes sat moodily at one side of the fireplace cross-indexing his records of **crime**, while I at the other was deep in one of Clark Russell's fine sea-stories until the **howl** of the gale from without seemed to blend with the text, and the **splash** of the rain to lengthen out into the **long** swash of the **sea** waves. My wife was on a **visit** to her **mother's**, and for a few days I was a dweller once more in my old quarters at Baker Street.

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. Who could come to-night? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage visitors."

"A client, then?"

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. He stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

"Come in!" said he.

The man who entered was young, some two-and-twenty at the outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of refinement and delicacy in his bearing. The streaming umbrella which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told of the fierce weather through which he had come. He looked about him anxiously in the glare of the lamp, and I could see that his face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is weighed down with some great anxiety.

"I owe you an apology," he said, raising his golden pince-nez to his eyes. "I trust that I am not intruding. I fear that I have brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug chamber."

"Give me your coat and umbrella," said Holmes. "They may rest here on the hook and will be dry presently. You have come up from the south-west, I see."

"Yes, from Horsham."

"That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is quite distinctive."

"I have come for advice."

"That is easily got."

"And help."

"That is not always so easy."

"I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I heard from Major Prendergast how you saved him in the Tankerville Club scandal."

"Ah, of course. He was wrongfully accused of cheating at cards."

"He said that you could solve anything."

"He said too much."

"That you are never beaten."

"I have been beaten four times—three times by men, and once by a woman."

"But what is that compared with the number of your successes?"

"It is true that I have been generally successful."

"Then you may be so with me."

"I beg that you will draw your chair up to the fire and favour me with some details as to your case."

"It is no ordinary one."

"None of those which come to me are. I am the last court of appeal."

"And yet I question, sir, whether, in all your experience, you have ever listened to a more mysterious and inexplicable chain of events than those which have happened in my own family."

"You fill me with interest," said Holmes. "Pray give us the essential facts from the commencement, and I can afterwards question you as to those details which seem to me to be most important."

The young man pulled his chair up and pushed his wet feet out towards the blaze.

"My name," said he, "is John Openshaw, but my own affairs have, as far as I can understand, little to do with this awful business. It is a hereditary matter; so in order to give you an idea of the facts, I must go back to the commencement of the affair."

"You must know that my grandfather had two sons—my uncle Elias and my father Joseph. My father had a small factory at Coventry, which he enlarged at the time of the invention of bicycling. He was a patentee of the Openshaw unbreakable tire, and his business met with such success that he was able to sell it and to retire upon a handsome competence."

"My uncle Elias emigrated to America when he was a young man and became a planter in Florida, where he was reported to have done very well. At the time of the war he fought in Jackson's army, and afterwards under Hood, where he rose to be a colonel. When Lee laid down his arms my uncle returned to his plantation, where he remained for three or four years. About 1869 or 1870 he came back to Europe and took a small estate in Sussex, near Horsham. He had made a very considerable fortune in the States, and his reason for leaving them was his aversion to the negroes, and his dislike of the Republican policy in extending the franchise to them. He was a singular man, fierce and quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring disposition. During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town. He had a garden and two or three fields round his house, and there he would take his exercise, though very often for weeks on end he would never leave his room. He drank a great deal of brandy and smoked very heavily, but he would see no society and did not want any friends, not even his own brother."

"He didn't mind me; in fact, he took a fancy to me, for at the time when he saw me first I was a youngster of twelve or so. This

would be in the year 1878, after he had been eight or nine years in England. He begged my father to let me live with him and he was very kind to me in his way. When he was sober he used to be fond of playing backgammon and draughts with me, and he would make me his representative both with the servants and with the tradespeople, so that by the time that I was sixteen I was quite master of the house. I kept all the keys and could go where I liked and do what I liked, so long as I did not disturb him in his privacy. There was one singular exception, however, for he had a single room, a lumber-room up among the attics, which was invariably locked, and which he would never permit either me or anyone else to enter. With a boy's curiosity I have peeped through the keyhole, but I was never able to see more than such a collection of old trunks and bundles as would be expected in such a room.

"One day—it was in March, 1883—a letter with a foreign stamp lay upon the table in front of the colonel's plate. It was not a common thing for him to receive letters, for his bills were all paid in ready money, and he had no friends of any sort. 'From India!' said he as he took it up, 'Pondicherry postmark! What can this be?' Opening it hurriedly, out there jumped five little dried orange pips, which pattered down upon his plate. I began to laugh at this, but the laugh was struck from my lips at the sight of his face. His lip had fallen, his eyes were protruding, his skin the colour of putty, and he glared at the envelope which he still held in his trembling hand, 'K. K. K.!' he shrieked, and then, 'My God, my God, my sins have overtaken me!'

"'What is it, uncle?' I cried.

"'Death,' said he, and rising from the table he retired to his room, leaving me palpitating with horror. I took up the envelope and saw scrawled in red ink upon the inner flap, just above the gum, the letter K three times repeated. There was nothing else save the five dried pips. What could be the reason of his overpowering terror? I left the breakfast-table, and as I ascended the stair I met him coming down with an old rusty key, which must have belonged to the attic, in one hand, and a small brass box, like a cashbox, in the other.

"'They may do what they like, but I'll checkmate them still,'

said he with an oath. 'Tell Mary that I shall want a fire in my room to-day, and send down to Fordham, the Horsham lawyer.'

"I did as he ordered, and when the lawyer arrived I was asked to step up to the room. The fire was burning brightly, and in the grate there was a mass of black, fluffy ashes, as of burned paper, while the brass box stood open and empty beside it. As I glanced at the box I noticed, with a start, that upon the lid was printed the treble K which I had read in the morning upon the

envelope.

"I wish you, John,' said my uncle, 'to witness my will. I leave my estate, with all its advantages and all its disadvantages, to my brother, your father, whence it will, no doubt, descend to you. If you can enjoy it in peace, well and good! If you find you cannot, take my advice, my boy, and leave it to your deadliest enemy. I am sorry to give you such a two-edged thing, but I can't say what turn things are going to take. Kindly sign the paper where Mr. Fordham shows you.'

"I signed the paper as directed, and the lawyer took it away with him. The singular incident made, as you may think, the deepest impression upon me, and I pondered over it and turned it every way in my mind without being able to make anything of it. Yet I could not shake off the vague feeling of dread which it left behind, though the sensation grew less keen as the weeks passed and nothing happened to disturb the usual routine of our lives. I could see a change in my uncle, however. He drank more than ever, and he was less inclined for any sort of society. Most of his time he would spend in his room, with the door locked upon the inside, but sometimes he would emerge in a sort of drunken frenzy and would burst out of the house and tear about the garden with a revolver in his hand, screaming out that he was afraid of no man, and that he was not to be cooped up, like a sheep in a pen, by man or devil. When these hot fits were over, however, he would rush tumultuously in at the door and lock and bar it behind him, like a man who can brazen it out no longer against the terror which lies at the roots of his soul. At such times I have seen his face, even on a cold day, glisten with moisture, as though it were new raised from a basin.

"Well, to come to an end of the matter, Mr. Holmes, and not to abuse your patience, there came a night when he made one of those drunken sallies from which he never came back. We found him, when we went to search for him, face downward in a little green-scummed pool, which lay at the foot of the garden. There was no sign of any violence, and the water was but two feet deep, so that the jury, having regard to his known eccentricity, brought in a verdict of 'suicide.' But I, who knew how he winced from the very thought of death, had much ado to persuade myself that he had gone out of his way to meet it. The matter passed, however, and my father entered into possession of the estate, and of some 14,000 pounds, which lay to his credit at the bank."

"One moment," Holmes interposed, "your statement is, I foresee, one of the most remarkable to which I have ever listened. Let me have the date of the reception by your uncle of the letter, and the date of his supposed suicide."

"The letter arrived on March 10, 1883. His death was seven weeks

later, upon the night of May 2nd."

"Thank you. Pray proceed."

"When my father took over the Horsham property, he, at my request, made a careful examination of the attic, which had been always locked up. We found the brass box there, although its contents had been destroyed. On the inside of the cover was a paper label, with the initials of K. K. K. repeated upon it, and 'Letters, memoranda, receipts, and a register' written beneath. These, we presume, indicated the nature of the papers which had been destroyed by Colonel Openshaw. For the rest, there was nothing of much importance in the attic save a great many scattered papers and note-books bearing upon my uncle's life in America. Some of them were of the war time and showed that he had done his duty well and had borne the repute of a brave soldier. Others were of a date during the reconstruction of the Southern states, and were mostly concerned with politics, for he had evidently taken a strong part in opposing the carpet-bag politicians who had been sent down from the North.

"Well, it was the beginning of '84 when my father came to live at Horsham, and all went as well as possible with us until the January of '85. On the fourth day after the new year I heard my father give a sharp cry of surprise as we sat together at the breakfast-table. There he was, sitting with a newly opened envelope in one hand and five dried orange pips in the outstretched palm of the other one. He had always laughed at what he called my cock-and-bull story about the colonel, but he looked very scared and puzzled now that the same thing had come upon himself.

"'Why, what on earth does this mean, John?' he stammered.

"My heart had turned to lead. 'It is K. K. K.,' said I.

"He looked inside the envelope. 'So it is,' he cried. 'Here are the very letters. But what is this written above them?'

"'Put the papers on the sundial,' I read, peeping over his shoulder.

"'What papers? What sundial?' he asked.

"'The sundial in the garden. There is no other,' said I; 'but the papers must be those that are destroyed.'

"'Pooh!' said he, gripping hard at his courage. 'We are in a civilised land here, and we can't have tomfoolery of this kind. Where does the thing come from?'

"'From Dundee,' I answered, glancing at the postmark.

"'Some preposterous practical joke,' said he. 'What have I to do with sundials and papers? I shall take no notice of such nonsense.'

"'I should certainly speak to the police,' I said.

"'And be laughed at for my pains. Nothing of the sort.'

”Then let me do so?”

”No, I forbid you. I won’t have a fuss made about such nonsense.”

”It was in vain to argue with him, for he was a very obstinate man. I went about, however, with a heart which was full of forebodings.

”On the third day after the coming of the letter my father went from home to visit an old friend of his, Major Freebody, who is in command of one of the forts upon Portsdown Hill. I was glad that he should go, for it seemed to me that he was farther from danger when he was away from home. In that, however, I was in error. Upon the second day of his absence I received a telegram from the major, imploring me to come at once. My father had fallen over one of the deep chalk-pits which abound in the neighbourhood, and was lying senseless, with a shattered skull. I hurried to him, but he passed away without having ever recovered his consciousness. He had, as it appears, been returning from Fareham in the twilight, and as the country was unknown to him, and the chalk-pit unfenced, the jury had no hesitation in bringing in a verdict of ‘death from accidental causes.’

Carefully as I examined every fact connected with his death, I was unable to find anything which could suggest the idea of murder. There were no signs of violence, no footmarks, no robbery, no record of strangers having been seen upon the roads. And yet I need not tell you that my mind was far from at ease, and that I was well-nigh certain that some foul plot had been woven round him.

”In this sinister way I came into my inheritance. You will ask me why I did not dispose of it? I answer, because I was well convinced that our troubles were in some way dependent upon an incident in my uncle’s life, and that the danger would be as pressing in one house as in another.

”It was in January, ’85, that my poor father met his end, and two years and eight months have elapsed since then. During that time I have lived happily at Horsham, and I had begun to hope that this curse had passed away from the family, and that it had ended with the last generation. I had begun to take comfort too soon, however; yesterday morning the blow fell in the very shape in which it had come upon my father.”

The young man took from his waistcoat a crumpled envelope, and turning to the table he shook out upon it five little dried orange pips.

”This is the envelope,” he continued. ”The postmark is London—eastern division. Within are the very words which were upon my father’s last message: ‘K. K. K.’; and then ‘Put the papers on the sundial.’”

"What have you done?" asked Holmes.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"To tell the truth"—he sank his face into his thin, white hands—"I have felt helpless. I have felt like one of those poor rabbits when the snake is writhing towards it. I seem to be in the grasp of some resistless, inexorable evil, which no foresight and no precautions can guard against."

"Tut! tut!" cried Sherlock Holmes. "You must act, man, or you are lost. Nothing but energy can save you. This is no time for despair."

"I have seen the police."

"Ah!"

"But they listened to my story with a smile. I am convinced that the inspector has formed the opinion that the letters are all practical jokes, and that the deaths of my relations were really accidents, as the jury stated, and were not to be connected with the warnings."

Holmes shook his clenched hands in the air. "Incredible imbecility!" he cried.

"They have, however, allowed me a policeman, who may remain in the house with me."

"Has he come with you to-night?"

"No. His orders were to stay in the house."

Again Holmes raved in the air.

"Why did you come to me," he cried, "and, above all, why did you not come at once?"

"I did not know. It was only to-day that I spoke to Major Prendergast about my troubles and was advised by him to come to you."

"It is really two days since you had the letter. We should have acted before this. You have no further evidence, I suppose, than that which you have placed before us—no suggestive detail which might help us?"

"There is one thing," said John Openshaw. He rummaged in his coat pocket, and, drawing out a piece of discoloured, blue-tinted paper, he laid it out upon the table. "I have some remembrance," said he, "that on the day when my uncle burned the papers I observed that the small, unburned margins which lay amid the ashes were of this particular colour. I found this single sheet upon the floor of his room, and I am inclined to think that it may be one of the papers which has, perhaps, fluttered out from among the others, and in that way has escaped destruction. Beyond the mention of pips, I do not see that it helps us much. I think myself that it is a page from some private diary. The writing is undoubtedly my uncle's."

Holmes moved the lamp, and we both bent over the sheet of paper, which **showed** by its ragged edge that it had indeed been **torn** from a book. It was headed, "**March**, 1869," and beneath were the following enigmatical notices:

"4th. Hudson came. Same old platform.

"7th. Set the pips on McCauley, Paramore, and **John** Swain, of St. Augustine.

"9th. McCauley cleared.

"10th. **John** Swain cleared.

"12th. **Visited** Paramore. All well."

"Thank you!" said Holmes, folding up the paper and returning it to our **visitor**. "And now you must on no **account** **lose** another instant. We cannot spare **time** even to discuss what you have told me. You must get home instantly and act."

"What shall I do?"

"There is but one thing to do. It must be done at once. You must put this piece of paper which you have **shown** us into the brass box which you have described. You must also put in a note to say that all the other papers were burned by your uncle, and that this is the only one which **remains**. You must assert that in such **words** as will carry **conviction** with them. Having done this, you must at once put the box out upon the **sundial**, as directed. Do you understand?"

"Entirely."

"Do not think of **revenge**, or anything of the sort, at **present**. I think that we may **gain** that by means of the **law**; but we have our web to weave, while theirs is already woven. The first consideration is to **remove** the pressing **danger** which threatens you. The second is to clear up the **mystery** and to **punish** the **guilty** parties."

"I thank you," said the **young** man, rising and **pulling** on his overcoat. "You have given me fresh life and **hope**. I shall certainly do as you **advise**."

"Do not **lose** an instant. And, above all, take care of yourself in the meanwhile, for I do not think that there can be a **doubt** that you are **threatened** by a very **real** and **imminent danger**. How do you go back?"

"By train from Waterloo."

"It is not yet nine. The streets will be crowded, so I **trust** that you may be in safety. And yet you cannot **guard** yourself too closely."

"I am armed."

"That is well. **To-morrow** I shall set to work upon your **case**."

"I shall see you at Horsham, then?"

"No, your **secret** **lies** in London. It is there that I shall **seek** it."

"Then I shall call upon you in a day, or in two days, with news as to the box and the papers. I shall take your **advice** in every particular." He shook hands with us and took his **leave**. Outside the wind still **screamed** and the rain **splashed** and **pattered** against the windows. This strange, **wild** story seemed to have come to us from amid the **mad** elements—blown in upon us like a sheet of sea-weed in a gale—and now to have been reabsorbed by them once more.

Sherlock Holmes sat for some **time** in silence, with his head **sunk forward** and his eyes bent upon the red **glow** of the **fire**. Then he lit his pipe, and leaning back in his chair he **watched** the **blue** smoke-rings as they **chased** each other up to the ceiling.

"I think, Watson," he remarked at last, "that of all our **cases** we have had none more fantastic than this."

"**Save**, perhaps, the Sign of Four."

"Well, yes. **Save**, perhaps, that. And yet this **John** Openshaw seems to me to be walking amid even greater **perils** than did the Sholtos."

"But have you," I asked, "formed any definite conception as to what these **perils** are?"

"There can be no **question** as to their nature," he answered.

"Then what are they? Who is this K. K. K., and why does he pursue this **unhappy** family?"

Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his **elbows** upon the arms of his chair, with his finger-tips together. "The ideal reasoner," he remarked, "would, when he had once been **shown** a single **fact** in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which **led** up to it but also all the **results** which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the **contemplation** of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a **series** of **incidents** should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after. We have not yet grasped the **results** which the **reason** alone can attain to. **Problems** may be solved in the **study** which have baffled all those who have sought a **solution** by the **aid** of their senses. To carry the **art**, however, to its highest pitch, it is necessary that the reasoner should be able to utilise all the **facts** which have come to his **knowledge**; and this in itself implies, as you will **readily** see, a **possession** of all **knowledge**, which, even in these days of free education and encyclopaedias, is a somewhat rare **accomplishment**. It is not so **impossible**, however, that a man should **possess** all **knowledge** which is likely to be useful to him in his work, and this I have endeavoured in my **case** to do. If I remember **rightly**, you on one occasion, in the early days of our **friendship**, defined my limits in a very **precise** fashion."

"Yes," I answered, **laughing**. "It was a singular document. Philosophy, astronomy, and **politics** were **marked** at zero, I remember. Botany **variable**, geology profound as regards the mud-stains from any region within fifty miles of town, chemistry eccentric, anatomy unsystematic, **sensational** literature and **crime** records **unique**, violin-player, boxer, swordsman, **lawyer**, and self-poisoner by **cocaine** and **tobacco**. Those, I think, were the **main** points of my analysis."

Holmes **grinned** at the last item. "Well," he said, "I say now, as I said then, that a man should keep his little brain-attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the **rest** he can put away in the lumber-room of his **library**, where he can get it if he wants it. Now, for such a **case** as the one which has been **submitted** to us to-night, we need certainly to muster all our resources. Kindly hand me down the **letter** K of the 'American Encyclopaedia' which stands upon the shelf beside you. Thank you. Now let us consider the situation and see what may be deduced from it. In the first place, we may **start** with a strong **presumption** that **Colonel** Openshaw had some very strong **reason** for **leaving** America. Men at his **time** of life do not **change** all their habits and **exchange willingly** the **charming** climate of Florida for the **lonely** life of an English provincial town. His extreme **love** of solitude in England suggests the idea that he was in **fear** of someone or something, so we may assume as a working **hypothesis** that it was **fear** of someone or something which drove him from America. As to what it was he **feared**, we can only deduce that by considering the **formidable letters** which were received by himself and his successors. Did you remark the postmarks of those **letters**?"

"The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the third from London."

"From East London. What do you deduce from that?"

"They are all seaports. That the **writer** was on **board** of a **ship**."

"**Excellent**. We have already a **clue**. There can be no **doubt** that the probability—the strong probability—is that the **writer** was on **board** of a **ship**. And now let us consider another point. In the **case** of Pondicherry, seven weeks elapsed between the **threat** and its fulfilment, in Dundee it was only some three or four days. Does that **suggest** anything?"

"A greater distance to travel."

"But the **letter** had also a greater distance to come."

"Then I do not see the point."

"There is at least a **presumption** that the vessel in which the man or men are is a sailing-ship. It looks as if they always send their singular **warning** or token before them when **starting** upon their mission. You see how quickly the **deed** followed the sign

when it came from Dundee. If they had come from Pondicherry in a steamer they would have arrived almost as soon as their letter. But, as a matter of fact, seven weeks elapsed. I think that those seven weeks represented the difference between the mail-boat which brought the letter and the sailing vessel which brought the writer."

"It is possible."

"More than that. It is probable. And now you see the deadly urgency of this new case, and why I urged young Openshaw to caution. The blow has always fallen at the end of the time which it would take the senders to travel the distance. But this one comes from London, and therefore we cannot count upon delay."

"Good God!" I cried. "What can it mean, this relentless persecution?"

"The papers which Openshaw carried are obviously of vital importance to the person or persons in the sailing-ship. I think that it is quite clear that there must be more than one of them. A single man could not have carried out two deaths in such a way as to deceive a coroner's jury. There must have been several in it, and they must have been men of resource and determination. Their papers they mean to have, be the holder of them who it may. In this way you see K. K. K. ceases to be the initials of an individual and becomes the badge of a society."

"But of what society?"

"Have you never—" said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and sinking his voice—"have you never heard of the Ku Klux Klan?"

"I never have."

Holmes turned over the leaves of the book upon his knee. "Here it is," said he presently:

"Ku Klux Klan. A name derived from the fanciful resemblance to the sound produced by cocking a rifle. This terrible secret society was formed by some ex-Confederate soldiers in the Southern states after the Civil War, and it rapidly formed local branches in different parts of the country, notably in Tennessee, Louisiana, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Its power was used for political purposes, principally for the terrorising of the negro voters and the murdering and driving from the country of those who were opposed to its views. Its outrages were usually preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic but generally recognised shape—a sprig of oak-leaves in some parts, melon seeds or orange pips in others. On receiving this the victim might either openly abjure his former ways, or might fly from the country. If he braved the matter out, death would unfailingly come upon him, and usually in some strange and unforeseen manner. So perfect was the organisation of the society, and so systematic its methods, that there is hardly a

case upon record where any man succeeded in braving it with impunity, or in which any of its outrages were traced home to the perpetrators. For some years the organisation flourished in spite of the efforts of the United States government and of the better classes of the community in the South. Eventually, in the year 1869, the movement rather suddenly collapsed, although there have been sporadic outbreaks of the same sort since that date.'

"You will observe," said Holmes, laying down the volume, "that the sudden breaking up of the society was coincident with the disappearance of Openshaw from America with their papers. It may well have been cause and effect. It is no wonder that he and his family have some of the more implacable spirits upon their track. You can understand that this register and diary may implicate some of the first men in the South, and that there may be many who will not sleep easy at night until it is recovered."

"Then the page we have seen—"

"Is such as we might expect. It ran, if I remember right, 'sent the pips to A, B, and C'—that is, sent the society's warning to them. Then there are successive entries that A and B cleared, or left the country, and finally that C was visited, with, I fear, a sinister result for C. Well, I think, Doctor, that we may let some light into this dark place, and I believe that the only chance young Openshaw has in the meantime is to do what I have told him. There is nothing more to be said or to be done to-night, so hand me over my violin and let us try to forget for half an hour the miserable weather and the still more miserable ways of our fellow-men."

It had cleared in the morning, and the sun was shining with a subdued brightness through the dim veil which hangs over the great city. Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came down.

"You will excuse me for not waiting for you," said he; "I have, I foresee, a very busy day before me in looking into this case of young Openshaw's."

"What steps will you take?" I asked.

"It will very much depend upon the results of my first inquiries. I may have to go down to Horsham, after all."

"You will not go there first?"

"No, I shall commence with the City. Just ring the bell and the maid will bring up your coffee."

As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and glanced my eye over it. It rested upon a heading which sent a chill to my heart.

"Holmes," I cried, "you are too late."

"Ah!" said he, laying down his cup, "I feared as much. How was it done?" He spoke calmly, but I could see that he was deeply moved.

"My eye caught the name of Openshaw, and the heading 'Tragedy Near Waterloo Bridge.' Here is the account:

"Between nine and ten last night Police-Constable Cook, of the H Division, on duty near Waterloo Bridge, heard a cry for help and a splash in the water. The night, however, was extremely dark and stormy, so that, in spite of the help of several passers-by, it was quite impossible to effect a rescue. The alarm, however, was given, and, by the aid of the water-police, the body was eventually recovered. It proved to be that of a young gentleman whose name, as it appears from an envelope which was found in his pocket, was John Openshaw, and whose residence is near Horsham. It is conjectured that he may have been hurrying down to catch the last train from Waterloo Station, and that in his haste and the extreme darkness he missed his path and walked over the edge of one of the small landing-places for river steamboats. The body exhibited no traces of violence, and there can be no doubt that the deceased had been the victim of an unfortunate accident, which should have the effect of calling the attention of the authorities to the condition of the riverside landing-stages." We sat in silence for some minutes, Holmes more depressed and shaken than I had ever seen him.

"That hurts my pride, Watson," he said at last. "It is a petty feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride. It becomes a personal matter with me now, and, if God sends me health, I shall set my hand upon this gang. That he should come to me for help, and that I should send him away to his death—!" He sprang from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable agitation, with a flush upon his sallow cheeks and a nervous clasp and unclasp of his long thin hands.

"They must be cunning devils," he exclaimed at last. "How could they have decoyed him down there? The Embankment is not on the direct line to the station. The bridge, no doubt, was too crowded, even on such a night, for their purpose. Well, Watson, we shall see who will win in the long run. I am going out now!"

"To the police?"

"No; I shall be my own police. When I have spun the web they may take the flies, but not before."

All day I was engaged in my professional work, and it was late in the evening before I returned to Baker Street. Sherlock Holmes had not come back yet. It was nearly ten o'clock before he entered, looking pale and worn. He walked up to the sideboard, and tearing a piece from the loaf he devoured it voraciously, washing it down with a long draught of water.

"You are hungry," I remarked.

"Starving. It had escaped my memory. I have had nothing since breakfast."

"Nothing?"

"Not a **bite**. I had no **time** to think of it."

"And how have you **succeeded**?"

"Well."

"You have a **clue**?"

"I have them in the **hollow** of my hand. **Young** Openshaw shall not **long** remain unavenged. Why, Watson, let us put their own **devilish** trade-mark upon them. It is well **thought** of!"

"What do you mean?"

He took an orange from the cupboard, and tearing it to pieces he squeezed out the pips upon the table. Of these he took five and thrust them into an envelope. On the inside of the **flap** he wrote "S. H. for J. O." Then he **sealed** it and addressed it to "**Captain** James Calhoun, Barque '**Lone Star**,' Savannah, Georgia."

"That will **await** him when he enters port," said he, **chuckling**.

"It may give him a sleepless night. He will find it as sure a **precursor** of his **fate** as Openshaw did before him."

"And who is this **Captain** Calhoun?"

"The **leader** of the **gang**. I shall have the others, but he first."

"How did you trace it, then?"

He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all **covered** with dates and names.

"I have **spent** the whole day," said he, "over Lloyd's registers and files of the old papers, following the future **career** of every vessel which touched at Pondicherry in January and February in '83. There were thirty-six **ships** of **fair** tonnage which were reported there during those months. Of these, one, the '**Lone Star**,' instantly attracted my **attention**, since, although it was reported as having cleared from London, the name is that which is given to one of the states of the Union."

"Texas, I think."

"I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the **ship** must have an American origin."

"What then?"

"I searched the Dundee records, and when I **found** that the barque '**Lone Star**' was there in January, '85, my **suspicion** became a **certainty**. I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at **present** in the port of London."

"Yes?"

"The '**Lone Star**' had **arrived** here last week. I went down to the Albert Dock and **found** that she had been taken down the river by the early tide this morning, homeward **bound** to Savannah. I wired to Gravesend and **learned** that she had passed some **time** ago, and as the wind is easterly I have no **doubt** that she is now past the Goodwins and not very far from the Isle of Wight."

"What will you do, then?"

"Oh, I have my hand upon him. He and the two mates, are as I learn, the only native-born Americans in the ship. The others are Finns and Germans. I know, also, that they were all three away from the ship last night. I had it from the stevedore who has been loading their cargo. By the time that their sailing-ship reaches Savannah the mail-boat will have carried this letter, and the cable will have informed the police of Savannah that these three gentlemen are badly wanted here upon a charge of murder." There is ever a flaw, however, in the best laid of human plans, and the murderers of John Openshaw were never to receive the orange pips which would show them that another, as cunning and as resolute as themselves, was upon their track. Very long and very severe were the equinoctial gales that year. We waited long for news of the "Lone Star" of Savannah, but none ever reached us. We did at last hear that somewhere far out in the Atlantic a shattered stern-post of a boat was seen swinging in the trough of a wave, with the letters "L. S." carved upon it, and that is all which we shall ever know of the fate of the "Lone Star."

ADVENTURE VI. THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED LIP

Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium. The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man.

One night—it was in June, '89—there came a ring to my bell, about the hour when a man gives his first yawn and glances at the clock. I sat up in my chair, and my wife laid her needle-work down in her lap and made a little face of disappointment.

"A patient!" said she. "You'll have to go out."

I groaned, for I was newly come back from a weary day.

We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps upon the linoleum. Our own door flew open, and a lady, clad in some dark-coloured stuff, with a black veil, entered the room.

"You will excuse my calling so late," she began, and then, suddenly losing her self-control, she ran forward, threw her arms about my wife's neck, and sobbed upon her shoulder. "Oh, I'm in such trouble!" she cried; "I do so want a little help."

"Why," said my wife, pulling up her veil, "it is Kate Whitney.

How you startled me, Kate! I had not an idea who you were when you came in."

"I didn't know what to do, so I came straight to you." That was always the way. Folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds to a light-house.

"It was very sweet of you to come. Now, you must have some wine and water, and sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. Or should you rather that I sent James off to bed?"

"Oh, no, no! I want the doctor's advice and help, too. It's about Isa. He has not been home for two days. I am so frightened about him!"

It was not the first time that she had spoken to us of her husband's trouble, to me as a doctor, to my wife as an old friend and school companion. We soothed and comforted her by such words as we could find. Did she know where her husband was? Was it possible that we could bring him back to her?

It seems that it was. She had the surest information that of late he had, when the fit was on him, made use of an opium den in the farthest east of the City. Hitherto his orgies had always been confined to one day, and he had come back, twitching and shattered, in the evening. But now the spell had been upon him eight-and-forty hours, and he lay there, doubtless among the dregs of the docks, breathing in the poison or sleeping off the effects. There he was to be found, she was sure of it, at the Bar of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane. But what was she to do? How could she, a young and timid woman, make her way into such a place and pluck her husband out from among the ruffians who surrounded him? There was the case, and of course there was but one way out of it. Might I not escort her to this place? And then, as a second thought, why should she come at all? I was Isa Whitney's medical adviser, and as such I had influence over him. I could manage it better if I were alone. I promised her on my word that I would send him home in a cab within two hours if he were indeed at the address which she had given me. And so in ten minutes I had left my armchair and cheery sitting-room behind me, and was speeding eastward in a hansom on a strange errand, as it seemed to me at the time, though the future only could show how strange it was to be.

But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my adventure. Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search.

Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in the centre by the ceaseless tread of drunken feet; and by the

light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the fore-castle of an emigrant ship.

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour. At the farther end was a small brazier of burning charcoal, beside which on a three-legged wooden stool there sat a tall, thin old man, with his jaw resting upon his two fists, and his elbows upon his knees, staring into the fire.

As I entered, a sallow Malay attendant had hurried up with a pipe for me and a supply of the drug, beckoning me to an empty berth. "Thank you. I have not come to stay," said I. "There is a friend of mine here, Mr. Isa Whitney, and I wish to speak with him." There was a movement and an exclamation from my right, and peering through the gloom, I saw Whitney, pale, haggard, and unkempt, staring out at me.

"My God! It's Watson," said he. He was in a pitiable state of reaction, with every nerve in a twitter. "I say, Watson, what o'clock is it?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Of what day?"

"Of Friday, June 19th."

"Good heavens! I thought it was Wednesday. It is Wednesday. What d'you want to frighten a chap for?" He sank his face onto his arms and began to sob in a high treble key.

"I tell you that it is Friday, man. Your wife has been waiting this two days for you. You should be ashamed of yourself!"

"So I am. But you've got mixed, Watson, for I have only been here a few hours, three pipes, four pipes—I forget how many. But I'll go home with you. I wouldn't frighten Kate—poor little Kate. Give me your hand! Have you a cab?"

"Yes, I have one waiting."

"Then I shall go in it. But I must owe something. Find what I owe, Watson. I am all off colour. I can do nothing for myself."

I walked down the narrow passage between the double row of sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying

fumes of the drug, and looking about for the manager. As I passed the tall man who sat by the brazier I felt a sudden pluck at my skirt, and a low voice whispered, "Walk past me, and then look back at me." The words fell quite distinctly upon my ear. I glanced down. They could only have come from the old man at my side, and yet he sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. He had turned his back so that none could see him but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes. He made a slight motion to me to approach him, and instantly, as he turned his face half round to the company once more, subsided into a doddering, loose-lipped senility.

"Holmes!" I whispered, "what on earth are you doing in this den?" "As low as you can," he answered; "I have excellent ears. If you would have the great kindness to get rid of that sottish friend of yours I should be exceedingly glad to have a little talk with you."

"I have a cab outside."

"Then pray send him home in it. You may safely trust him, for he appears to be too limp to get into any mischief. I should recommend you also to send a note by the cabman to your wife to say that you have thrown in your lot with me. If you will wait outside, I shall be with you in five minutes."

It was difficult to refuse any of Sherlock Holmes' requests, for they were always so exceedingly definite, and put forward with such a quiet air of mastery. I felt, however, that when Whitney was once confined in the cab my mission was practically accomplished; and for the rest, I could not wish anything better than to be associated with my friend in one of those singular adventures which were the normal condition of his existence. In a few minutes I had written my note, paid Whitney's bill, led him out to the cab, and seen him driven through the darkness. In a very short time a decrepit figure had emerged from the opium den, and I was walking down the street with Sherlock Holmes. For two streets he shuffled along with a bent back and an uncertain foot. Then, glancing quickly round, he straightened himself out and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I suppose, Watson," said he, "that you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections, and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical views."

"I was certainly surprised to find you there."

"But not more so than I to find you."

"I came to find a friend."

"And I to find an enemy."

"An enemy?"

"Yes; one of my natural enemies, or, shall I say, my natural prey. Briefly, Watson, I am in the midst of a very remarkable inquiry, and I have hoped to find a clue in the incoherent ramblings of these sots, as I have done before now. Had I been recognised in that den my life would not have been worth an hour's purchase; for I have used it before now for my own purposes, and the rascally Lascar who runs it has sworn to have vengeance upon me. There is a trap-door at the back of that building, near the corner of Paul's Wharf, which could tell some strange tales of what has passed through it upon the moonless nights."

"What! You do not mean bodies?"

"Ay, bodies, Watson. We should be rich men if we had 1000 pounds for every poor devil who has been done to death in that den. It is the vilest murder-trap on the whole riverside, and I fear that Neville St. Clair has entered it never to leave it more. But our trap should be here." He put his two forefingers between his teeth and whistled shrilly—a signal which was answered by a similar whistle from the distance, followed shortly by the rattle of wheels and the clink of horses' hoofs.

"Now, Watson," said Holmes, as a tall dog-cart dashed up through the gloom, throwing out two golden tunnels of yellow light from its side lanterns. "You'll come with me, won't you?"

"If I can be of use."

"Oh, a trusty comrade is always of use; and a chronicler still more so. My room at The Cedars is a double-bedded one."

"The Cedars?"

"Yes; that is Mr. St. Clair's house. I am staying there while I conduct the inquiry."

"Where is it, then?"

"Near Lee, in Kent. We have a seven-mile drive before us."

"But I am all in the dark."

"Of course you are. You'll know all about it presently. Jump up here. All right, John; we shall not need you. Here's half a crown. Look out for me to-morrow, about eleven. Give her her head. So long, then!"

He flicked the horse with his whip, and we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets, which widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad balustraded bridge, with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us. Beyond lay another dull wilderness of bricks and

mortar, its silence broken only by the heavy, regular footfall of the policeman, or the songs and shouts of some belated party of revellers. A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of the clouds. Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought, while I sat beside him, curious to learn what this new quest might be which seemed to tax his powers so sorely, and yet afraid to break in upon the current of his thoughts. We had driven several miles, and were beginning to get to the fringe of the belt of suburban villas, when he shook himself, shrugged his shoulders, and lit up his pipe with the air of a man who has satisfied himself that he is acting for the best.

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said he. "It makes you quite invaluable as a companion. 'Pon my word, it is a great thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are not over-pleasant. I was wondering what I should say to this dear little woman to-night when she meets me at the door."

"You forget that I know nothing about it."

"I shall just have time to tell you the facts of the case before we get to Lee. It seems absurdly simple, and yet, somehow I can get nothing to go upon. There's plenty of thread, no doubt, but I can't get the end of it into my hand. Now, I'll state the case clearly and concisely to you, Watson, and maybe you can see a spark where all is dark to me."

"Proceed, then."

"Some years ago—to be definite, in May, 1884—there came to Lee a gentleman, Neville St. Clair by name, who appeared to have plenty of money. He took a large villa, laid out the grounds very nicely, and lived generally in good style. By degrees he made friends in the neighbourhood, and in 1887 he married the daughter of a local brewer, by whom he now has two children. He had no occupation, but was interested in several companies and went into town as a rule in the morning, returning by the 5:14 from Cannon Street every night. Mr. St. Clair is now thirty-seven years of age, is a man of temperate habits, a good husband, a very affectionate father, and a man who is popular with all who know him. I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far as we have been able to ascertain, amount to 88 pounds 10s., while he has 220 pounds standing to his credit in the Capital and Counties Bank. There is no reason, therefore, to think that money troubles have been weighing upon his mind.

"Last Monday Mr. Neville St. Clair went into town rather earlier than usual, remarking before he started that he had two important commissions to perform, and that he would bring his little boy home a box of bricks. Now, by the merest chance, his wife

received a telegram upon this same Monday, very **shortly** after his **departure**, to the effect that a **small** parcel of **considerable** value which she had been **expecting** was **waiting** for her at the offices of the Aberdeen Shipping Company. Now, if you are well up in your London, you will know that the office of the company is in Fresno Street, which branches out of Upper Swandam Lane, where you **found** me to-night. Mrs. St. Clair had her lunch, **started** for the City, did some **shopping**, proceeded to the company's office, got her packet, and **found** herself at exactly 4:35 walking through Swandam Lane on her way back to the station. Have you followed me so far?"

"It is very clear."

"If you remember, Monday was an exceedingly **hot** day, and Mrs. St. Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the **hope** of seeing a **cab**, as she did not like the neighbourhood in which she **found** herself. While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she **suddenly** heard an **ejaculation** or **cry**, and was struck **cold** to see her husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning to her from a second-floor window. The window was open, and she distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being **terribly** agitated. He waved his hands frantically to her, and then **vanished** from the window so **suddenly** that it seemed to her that he had been plucked back by some irresistible **force** from behind. One singular point which struck her quick feminine eye was that although he wore some **dark** coat, such as he had **started** to town in, he had on neither collar nor necktie.

"**Convinced** that something was amiss with him, she rushed down the steps—for the house was none other than the **opium** den in which you **found** me to-night—and running through the front room she **attempted** to ascend the stairs which **led** to the first floor. At the foot of the stairs, however, she met this Lascar **scoundrel** of whom I have spoken, who thrust her back and, **aided** by a Dane, who acts as assistant there, pushed her out into the street. **Filled** with the most **maddening doubts** and **fears**, she rushed down the lane and, by rare good-fortune, met in Fresno Street a number of **constables** with an **inspector**, all on their way to their beat. The **inspector** and two men accompanied her back, and in **spite** of the continued **resistance** of the proprietor, they made their way to the room in which Mr. St. Clair had last been seen. There was no sign of him there. In **fact**, in the whole of that floor there was no one to be **found** save a **crippled wretch** of **hideous** aspect, who, it seems, made his home there. Both he and the Lascar stoutly swore that no one else had been in the front room during the afternoon. So determined was their **denial** that the **inspector** was **staggered**, and had almost come to believe that Mrs. St. Clair had been deluded when, with a **cry**, she sprang at a **small deal** box

which lay upon the table and tore the lid from it. Out there fell a cascade of children's bricks. It was the toy which he had promised to bring home.

"This discovery, and the evident confusion which the cripple showed, made the inspector realise that the matter was serious. The rooms were carefully examined, and results all pointed to an abominable crime. The front room was plainly furnished as a sitting-room and led into a small bedroom, which looked out upon the back of one of the wharves. Between the wharf and the bedroom window is a narrow strip, which is dry at low tide but is covered at high tide with at least four and a half feet of water. The bedroom window was a broad one and opened from below. On examination traces of blood were to be seen upon the windowsill, and several scattered drops were visible upon the wooden floor of the bedroom. Thrust away behind a curtain in the front room were all the clothes of Mr. Neville St. Clair, with the exception of his coat. His boots, his socks, his hat, and his watch—all were there. There were no signs of violence upon any of these garments, and there were no other traces of Mr. Neville St. Clair. Out of the window he must apparently have gone for no other exit could be discovered, and the ominous bloodstains upon the sill gave little promise that he could save himself by swimming, for the tide was at its very highest at the moment of the tragedy.

"And now as to the villains who seemed to be immediately implicated in the matter. The Lascar was known to be a man of the vilest antecedents, but as, by Mrs. St. Clair's story, he was known to have been at the foot of the stair within a very few seconds of her husband's appearance at the window, he could hardly have been more than an accessory to the crime. His defence was one of absolute ignorance, and he protested that he had no knowledge as to the doings of Hugh Boone, his lodger, and that he could not account in any way for the presence of the missing gentleman's clothes.

"So much for the Lascar manager. Now for the sinister cripple who lives upon the second floor of the opium den, and who was certainly the last human being whose eyes rested upon Neville St. Clair. His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. He is a professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas. Some little distance down Threadneedle Street, upon the left-hand side, there is, as you may have remarked, a small angle in the wall. Here it is that this creature takes his daily seat, cross-legged with his tiny stock of matches on his lap, and as he is a piteous spectacle a small rain of charity descends into the

greasy leather cap which lies upon the pavement beside him. I have watched the fellow more than once before ever I thought of making his professional acquaintance, and I have been surprised at the harvest which he has reaped in a short time. His appearance, you see, is so remarkable that no one can pass him without observing him. A shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar, which, by its contraction, has turned up the outer edge of his upper lip, a bulldog chin, and a pair of very penetrating dark eyes, which present a singular contrast to the colour of his hair, all mark him out from amid the common crowd of mendicants and so, too, does his wit, for he is ever ready with a reply to any piece of chaff which may be thrown at him by the passers-by. This is the man whom we now learn to have been the lodger at the opium den, and to have been the last man to see the gentleman of whom we are in quest."

"But a cripple!" said I. "What could he have done single-handed against a man in the prime of life?"

"He is a cripple in the sense that he walks with a limp; but in other respects he appears to be a powerful and well-nurtured man. Surely your medical experience would tell you, Watson, that weakness in one limb is often compensated for by exceptional strength in the others."

"Pray continue your narrative."

"Mrs. St. Clair had fainted at the sight of the blood upon the window, and she was escorted home in a cab by the police, as her presence could be of no help to them in their investigations. Inspector Barton, who had charge of the case, made a very careful examination of the premises, but without finding anything which threw any light upon the matter. One mistake had been made in not arresting Boone instantly, as he was allowed some few minutes during which he might have communicated with his friend the Lascar, but this fault was soon remedied, and he was seized and searched, without anything being found which could incriminate him. There were, it is true, some blood-stains upon his right shirt-sleeve, but he pointed to his ring-finger, which had been cut near the nail, and explained that the bleeding came from there, adding that he had been to the window not long before, and that the stains which had been observed there came doubtless from the same source. He denied strenuously having ever seen Mr. Neville St. Clair and swore that the presence of the clothes in his room was as much a mystery to him as to the police. As to Mrs. St. Clair's assertion that she had actually seen her husband at the window, he declared that she must have been either mad or dreaming. He was removed, loudly protesting, to the police-station, while the inspector remained upon the premises in the hope that the ebbing tide might afford some fresh clue.

"And it did, though they hardly **found** upon the mud-bank what they had **feared** to find. It was Neville St. Clair's coat, and not Neville St. Clair, which lay uncovered as the tide receded. And what do you think they **found** in the pockets?"

"I cannot imagine."

"No, I don't think you would **guess**. Every pocket stuffed with pennies and half-pennies—421 pennies and 270 half-pennies. It was no wonder that it had not been swept away by the tide. But a human body is a different matter. There is a **fierce** eddy between the wharf and the house. It seemed likely enough that the **weighted** coat had remained when the **stripped** body had been **sucked** away into the river."

"But I understand that all the other clothes were **found** in the room. Would the body be dressed in a coat alone?"

"No, **sir**, but the **facts** might be met speciously enough. Suppose that this man Boone had thrust Neville St. Clair through the window, there is no human eye which could have seen the **deed**. What would he do then? It would of course instantly **strike** him that he must get rid of the tell-tale garments. He would **seize** the coat, then, and be in the act of throwing it out, when it would occur to him that it would **swim** and not sink. He has little **time**, for he has heard the scuffle downstairs when the wife tried to **force** her way up, and perhaps he has already heard from his Lascar **confederate** that the **police** are **hurrying** up the street. There is not an instant to be **lost**. He rushes to some **secret** hoard, where he has accumulated the fruits of his beggary, and he stuffs all the coins upon which he can lay his hands into the pockets to make sure of the coat's sinking. He throws it out, and would have done the same with the other garments had not he heard the rush of steps below, and only just had **time** to close the window when the **police** appeared."

"It certainly sounds feasible."

"Well, we will take it as a working **hypothesis** for want of a better. Boone, as I have told you, was **arrested** and taken to the station, but it could not be **shown** that there had ever before been anything against him. He had for years been known as a **professional beggar**, but his life appeared to have been a very **quiet** and **innocent** one. There the matter stands at **present**, and the **questions** which have to be solved—what Neville St. Clair was doing in the **opium** den, what **happened** to him when there, where is he now, and what Hugh Boone had to do with his disappearance—are all as far from a **solution** as ever. I **confess** that I cannot recall any **case** within my experience which looked at the first glance so simple and yet which **presented** such **difficulties**." While Sherlock Holmes had been detailing this singular **series** of events, we had been whirling through the outskirts of the great

town until the last straggling houses had been left behind, and we rattled along with a country hedge upon either side of us. Just as he finished, however, we drove through two scattered villages, where a few lights still glimmered in the windows.

"We are on the outskirts of Lee," said my companion. "We have touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent. See that light among the trees? That is The Cedars, and beside that lamp sits a woman whose anxious ears have already, I have little doubt, caught the clink of our horse's feet."

"But why are you not conducting the case from Baker Street?" I asked.

"Because there are many inquiries which must be made out here. Mrs. St. Clair has most kindly put two rooms at my disposal, and you may rest assured that she will have nothing but a welcome for my friend and colleague. I hate to meet her, Watson, when I have no news of her husband. Here we are. Whoa, there, whoa!"

We had pulled up in front of a large villa which stood within its own grounds. A stable-boy had run out to the horse's head, and springing down, I followed Holmes up the small, winding gravel-drive which led to the house. As we approached, the door flew open, and a little blonde woman stood in the opening, clad in some sort of light mousseline de soie, with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists. She stood with her figure outlined against the flood of light, one hand upon the door, one half-raised in her eagerness, her body slightly bent, her head and face protruded, with eager eyes and parted lips, a standing question.

"Well?" she cried, "well?" And then, seeing that there were two of us, she gave a cry of hope which sank into a groan as she saw that my companion shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"No good news?"

"None."

"No bad?"

"No."

"Thank God for that. But come in. You must be weary, for you have had a long day."

"This is my friend, Dr. Watson. He has been of most vital use to me in several of my cases, and a lucky chance has made it possible for me to bring him out and associate him with this investigation."

"I am delighted to see you," said she, pressing my hand warmly.

"You will, I am sure, forgive anything that may be wanting in our arrangements, when you consider the blow which has come so suddenly upon us."

"My dear madam," said I, "I am an old campaigner, and if I were

not I can very well see that no apology is needed. If I can be of any assistance, either to you or to my friend here, I shall be indeed happy."

"Now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said the lady as we entered a well-lit dining-room, upon the table of which a cold supper had been laid out, "I should very much like to ask you one or two plain questions, to which I beg that you will give a plain answer."

"Certainly, madam."

"Do not trouble about my feelings. I am not hysterical, nor given to fainting. I simply wish to hear your real, real opinion."

"Upon what point?"

"In your heart of hearts, do you think that Neville is alive?"

Sherlock Holmes seemed to be embarrassed by the question.

"Frankly, now!" she repeated, standing upon the rug and looking keenly down at him as he leaned back in a basket-chair.

"Frankly, then, madam, I do not."

"You think that he is dead?"

"I do."

"Murdered?"

"I don't say that. Perhaps."

"And on what day did he meet his death?"

"On Monday."

"Then perhaps, Mr. Holmes, you will be good enough to explain how it is that I have received a letter from him to-day."

Sherlock Holmes sprang out of his chair as if he had been galvanised.

"What!" he roared.

"Yes, to-day." She stood smiling, holding up a little slip of paper in the air.

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."

He snatched it from her in his eagerness, and smoothing it out upon the table he drew over the lamp and examined it intently. I had left my chair and was gazing at it over his shoulder. The envelope was a very coarse one and was stamped with the Gravesend postmark and with the date of that very day, or rather of the day before, for it was considerably after midnight.

"Coarse writing," murmured Holmes. "Surely this is not your husband's writing, madam."

"No, but the enclosure is."

"I perceive also that whoever addressed the envelope had to go and inquire as to the address."

"How can you tell that?"

"The name, you see, is in perfectly black ink, which has dried itself. The rest is of the greyish colour, which shows that

blotting-paper has been used. If it had been written straight off, and then **blotted**, none would be of a deep **black** shade. This man has written the name, and there has then been a pause before he wrote the address, which can only mean that he was not **familiar** with it. It is, of course, a **trifle**, but there is nothing so **important** as **trifles**. Let us now see the **letter**. Ha! there has been an enclosure here!"

"Yes, there was a ring. His signet-ring."

"And you are sure that this is your husband's hand?"

"One of his hands."

"One?"

"His hand when he wrote hurriedly. It is very unlike his **usual** writing, and yet I know it well."

"Dearest do not be **frightened**. All will come well. There is a huge **error** which it may take some little **time** to **rectify**.

Wait in patience.—NEVILLE.' Written in pencil upon the fly-leaf of a book, octavo size, no water-mark. Hum! Posted to-day in Gravesend by a man with a **dirty** thumb. Ha! And the **flap** has been gummed, if I am not very much in **error**, by a person who had been chewing **tobacco**. And you have no **doubt** that it is your husband's hand, madam?"

"None. Neville wrote those **words**."

"And they were posted to-day at Gravesend. Well, Mrs. St. Clair, the clouds lighten, though I should not venture to say that the **danger** is over."

"But he must be **alive**, Mr. Holmes."

"Unless this is a **clever forgery** to put us on the **wrong** scent.

The ring, after all, proves nothing. It may have been taken from him."

"No, no; it is, it is his very own writing!"

"Very well. It may, however, have been written on Monday and only posted to-day."

"That is possible."

"If so, much may have **happened** between."

"Oh, you must not **discourage** me, Mr. Holmes. I know that all is well with him. There is so keen a **sympathy** between us that I should know if **evil** came upon him. On the very day that I saw him last he cut himself in the bedroom, and yet I in the dining-room rushed upstairs instantly with the utmost **certainty** that something had **happened**. Do you think that I would respond to such a **trifle** and yet be **ignorant** of his **death**?"

"I have seen too much not to know that the **impression** of a woman may be more **valuable** than the conclusion of an analytical reasoner. And in this **letter** you certainly have a very strong piece of evidence to **corroborate** your view. But if your husband is **alive** and able to write **letters**, why should he remain away

from you?"

"I cannot imagine. It is **unthinkable**."

"And on Monday he made no remarks before **leaving** you?"

"No."

"And you were **surprised** to see him in Swandam Lane?"

"Very much so."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes."

"Then he might have called to you?"

"He might."

"He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate **cry**?"

"Yes."

"A call for help, you **thought**?"

"Yes. He waved his hands."

"But it might have been a **cry** of **surprise**. **Astonishment** at the **unexpected** sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?"

"It is possible."

"And you **thought** he was **pulled** back?"

"He **disappeared** so **suddenly**."

"He might have leaped back. You did not see anyone else in the room?"

"No, but this **horrible** man **confessed** to having been there, and the Lascar was at the foot of the stairs."

"Quite so. Your husband, as far as you could see, had his ordinary clothes on?"

"But without his collar or tie. I distinctly saw his bare throat."

"Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?"

"Never."

"Had he ever **showed** any signs of having taken **opium**?"

"Never."

"Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. Those are the **principal** points about which I wished to be absolutely clear. We shall now have a little supper and then retire, for we may have a very busy day **to-morrow**."

A large and comfortable double-bedded room had been placed at our **disposal**, and I was quickly between the sheets, for I was **weary** after my night of **adventure**. Sherlock Holmes was a man, however, who, when he had an unsolved **problem** upon his mind, would go for days, and even for a week, without **rest**, turning it over, rearranging his **facts**, looking at it from every point of view until he had either fathomed it or **convinced** himself that his data were **insufficient**. It was soon **evident** to me that he was now **preparing** for an all-night sitting. He took off his coat and waistcoat, put on a large **blue** dressing-gown, and then wandered about the room collecting **pillows** from his bed and **cushions** from

the sofa and armchairs. With these he constructed a sort of Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged, with an ounce of shag tobacco and a box of matches laid out in front of him. In the dim light of the lamp I saw him sitting there, an old briar pipe between his lips, his eyes fixed vacantly upon the corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling up from him, silent, motionless, with the light shining upon his strong-set aquiline features. So he sat as I dropped off to sleep, and so he sat when a sudden ejaculation caused me to wake up, and I found the summer sun shining into the apartment. The pipe was still between his lips, the smoke still curled upward, and the room was full of a dense tobacco haze, but nothing remained of the heap of shag which I had seen upon the previous night.

"Awake, Watson?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Game for a morning drive?"

"Certainly."

"Then dress. No one is stirring yet, but I know where the stable-boy sleeps, and we shall soon have the trap out." He chuckled to himself as he spoke, his eyes twinkled, and he seemed a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous night. As I dressed I glanced at my watch. It was no wonder that no one was stirring. It was twenty-five minutes past four. I had hardly finished when Holmes returned with the news that the boy was putting in the horse.

"I want to test a little theory of mine," said he, pulling on his boots. "I think, Watson, that you are now standing in the presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. I deserve to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. But I think I have the key of the affair now."

"And where is it?" I asked, smiling.

"In the bathroom," he answered. "Oh, yes, I am not joking," he continued, seeing my look of incredulity. "I have just been there, and I have taken it out, and I have got it in this Gladstone bag. Come on, my boy, and we shall see whether it will not fit the lock."

We made our way downstairs as quietly as possible, and out into the bright morning sunshine. In the road stood our horse and trap, with the half-clad stable-boy waiting at the head. We both sprang in, and away we dashed down the London Road. A few country carts were stirring, bearing in vegetables to the metropolis, but the lines of villas on either side were as silent and lifeless as some city in a dream.

"It has been in some points a singular case," said Holmes, flicking the horse on into a gallop. "I confess that I have been as blind as a mole, but it is better to learn wisdom late than

never to learn it at all."

In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey side. Passing down the Waterloo Bridge Road we crossed over the river, and dashing up Wellington Street wheeled sharply to the right and found ourselves in Bow Street. Sherlock Holmes was well known to the force, and the two constables at the door saluted him. One of them held the horse's head while the other led us in. "Who is on duty?" asked Holmes.

"Inspector Bradstreet, sir."

"Ah, Bradstreet, how are you?" A tall, stout official had come down the stone-flagged passage, in a peaked cap and frogged jacket. "I wish to have a quiet word with you, Bradstreet." "Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Step into my room here." It was a small, office-like room, with a huge ledger upon the table, and a telephone projecting from the wall. The inspector sat down at his desk.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Holmes?"

"I called about that beggarman, Boone—the one who was charged with being concerned in the disappearance of Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee."

"Yes. He was brought up and remanded for further inquiries."

"So I heard. You have him here?"

"In the cells."

"Is he quiet?"

"Oh, he gives no trouble. But he is a dirty scoundrel."

"Dirty?"

"Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his face is as black as a tinker's. Well, when once his case has been settled, he will have a regular prison bath; and I think, if you saw him, you would agree with me that he needed it."

"I should like to see him very much."

"Would you? That is easily done. Come this way. You can leave your bag."

"No, I think that I'll take it."

"Very good. Come this way, if you please." He led us down a passage, opened a barred door, passed down a winding stair, and brought us to a whitewashed corridor with a line of doors on each side.

"The third on the right is his," said the inspector. "Here it is!" He quietly shot back a panel in the upper part of the door and glanced through.

"He is asleep," said he. "You can see him very well."

We both put our eyes to the grating. The prisoner lay with his face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and heavily. He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his

calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. He was, as the **inspector** had said, extremely **dirty**, but the **grime** which **covered** his face could not **conceal** its repulsive **ugliness**. A broad wheal from an old **scar** ran right across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were **exposed** in a perpetual **snarl**. A **shock** of very bright red hair **grew** low over his eyes and forehead.

"He's a **beauty**, isn't he?" said the **inspector**.

"He certainly needs a wash," remarked Holmes. "I had an idea that he might, and I took the **liberty** of bringing the tools with me." He opened the Gladstone bag as he **spoke**, and took out, to my **astonishment**, a very large bath-sponge.

"He! he! You are a funny one," **chuckled** the **inspector**.

"Now, if you will have the great **goodness** to open that door very quietly, we will soon make him cut a much more **respectable** figure."

"Well, I don't know why not," said the **inspector**. "He doesn't look a **credit** to the Bow Street cells, does he?" He **slipped** his key into the lock, and we all very quietly entered the cell. The sleeper half turned, and then settled down once more into a deep slumber. Holmes stooped to the water-jug, moistened his **sponge**, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the **prisoner's** face.

"Let me introduce you," he **shouted**, "to Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee, in the **county** of Kent."

Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off under the **sponge** like the **bark** from a **tree**. Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the **horrid scar** which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive **sneer** to the face! A **twitch** brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and **staring** about him with sleepy **bewilderment**. Then **suddenly** realising the exposure, he **broke** into a **scream** and threw himself down with his face to the **pillow**.

"Great heavens!" **cried** the **inspector**, "it is, indeed, the missing man. I know him from the photograph."

The **prisoner** turned with the **reckless** air of a man who **abandons** himself to his destiny. "Be it so," said he. "And **pray** what am I charged with?"

"With making away with Mr. Neville St.— Oh, come, you can't be charged with that unless they make a **case** of **attempted suicide** of it," said the **inspector** with a **grin**. "Well, I have been twenty-seven years in the **force**, but this really takes the cake."

"If I am Mr. Neville St. Clair, then it is **obvious** that no **crime**

has been committed, and that, therefore, I am illegally detained."

"No crime, but a very great error has been committed," said Holmes. "You would have done better to have trusted your wife."

"It was not the wife; it was the children," groaned the prisoner.

"God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. My God! What an exposure! What can I do?"

Sherlock Holmes sat down beside him on the couch and patted him kindly on the shoulder.

"If you leave it to a court of law to clear the matter up," said he, "of course you can hardly avoid publicity. On the other hand, if you convince the police authorities that there is no possible case against you, I do not know that there is any reason that the details should find their way into the papers. Inspector Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which you might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. The case would then never go into court at all."

"God bless you!" cried the prisoner passionately. "I would have endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left my miserable secret as a family blot to my children."

"You are the first who have ever heard my story. My father was a schoolmaster in Chesterfield, where I received an excellent education. I travelled in my youth, took to the stage, and finally became a reporter on an evening paper in London. One day my editor wished to have a series of articles upon begging in the metropolis, and I volunteered to supply them. There was the point from which all my adventures started. It was only by trying begging as an amateur that I could get the facts upon which to base my articles. When an actor I had, of course, learned all the secrets of making up, and had been famous in the green-room for my skill. I took advantage now of my attainments. I painted my face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a small slip of flesh-coloured plaster. Then with a red head of hair, and an appropriate dress, I took my station in the business part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a beggar. For seven hours I plied my trade, and when I returned home in the evening I found to my surprise that I had received no less than 26s. 4d."

"I wrote my articles and thought little more of the matter until, some time later, I backed a bill for a friend and had a writ served upon me for 25 pounds. I was at my wit's end where to get the money, but a sudden idea came to me. I begged a fortnight's grace from the creditor, asked for a holiday from my employers, and spent the time in begging in the City under my disguise. In ten days I had the money and had paid the debt."

"Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to **arduous** work at 2 **pounds** a week when I knew that I could **earn** as much in a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my **cap** on the **ground**, and sitting still. It was a **long fight** between my **pride** and the **money**, but the dollars won at last, and I threw up reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first **chosen**, **inspiring pity** by my **ghastly** face and **filling** my pockets with coppers. Only one man knew my **secret**. He was the keeper of a low den in which I used to lodge in Swandam Lane, where I could every morning emerge as a squalid **beggar** and in the evenings transform myself into a well-dressed man about town. This **fellow**, a Lascar, was well paid by me for his rooms, so that I knew that my **secret** was **safe** in his **possession**.

"Well, very soon I **found** that I was **saving considerable** sums of **money**. I do not mean that any **beggar** in the streets of London could **earn** 700 **pounds** a year—which is less than my average takings—but I had exceptional **advantages** in my power of making up, and also in a facility of repartee, which **improved** by **practice** and made me quite a recognised character in the City. All day a stream of pennies, varied by silver, poured in upon me, and it was a very **bad** day in which I failed to take 2 **pounds**.

"As I **grew** richer I **grew** more ambitious, took a house in the country, and eventually married, without anyone having a **suspicion** as to my **real occupation**. My **dear** wife knew that I had business in the City. She little knew what.

"Last Monday I had finished for the day and was dressing in my room above the **opium** den when I looked out of my window and saw, to my **horror** and **astonishment**, that my wife was standing in the street, with her eyes fixed **full** upon me. I gave a **cry** of **surprise**, threw up my arms to **cover** my face, and, rushing to my confidant, the Lascar, entreated him to **prevent** anyone from coming up to me. I heard her voice downstairs, but I knew that she could not ascend. Swiftly I threw off my clothes, **pulled** on those of a **beggar**, and put on my pigments and wig. Even a wife's eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise. But then it occurred to me that there might be a search in the room, and that the clothes might **betray** me. I threw open the window, reopening by my **violence** a **small** cut which I had **inflicted** upon myself in the bedroom that morning. Then I **seized** my coat, which was **weighted** by the coppers which I had just transferred to it from the leather bag in which I carried my takings. I hurled it out of the window, and it **disappeared** into the Thames. The other clothes would have followed, but at that moment there was a rush of **constables** up the stair, and a few minutes after I **found**, rather, I **confess**, to my **relief**, that instead of being identified as Mr. Neville St. Clair, I was **arrested** as his **murderer**.

"I do not know that there is anything else for me to explain. I was determined to preserve my disguise as long as possible, and hence my preference for a dirty face. Knowing that my wife would be terribly anxious, I slipped off my ring and confided it to the Lascar at a moment when no constable was watching me, together with a hurried scrawl, telling her that she had no cause to fear."

"That note only reached her yesterday," said Holmes.

"Good God! What a week she must have spent!"

"The police have watched this Lascar," said Inspector Bradstreet, "and I can quite understand that he might find it difficult to post a letter unobserved. Probably he handed it to some sailor customer of his, who forgot all about it for some days."

"That was it," said Holmes, nodding approvingly; "I have no doubt of it. But have you never been prosecuted for begging?"

"Many times; but what was a fine to me?"

"It must stop here, however," said Bradstreet. "If the police are to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone."

"I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take."

"In that case I think that it is probable that no further steps may be taken. But if you are found again, then all must come out. I am sure, Mr. Holmes, that we are very much indebted to you for having cleared the matter up. I wish I knew how you reach your results."

"I reached this one," said my friend, "by sitting upon five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag. I think, Watson, that if we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast."

VII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE

I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach upon the right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable hard-felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several places. A lens and a forceps lying upon the seat of the chair suggested that the hat had been suspended in this manner for the purpose of examination.

"You are engaged," said I; "perhaps I interrupt you."

"Not at all. I am glad to have a friend with whom I can discuss my results. The matter is a perfectly trivial one"—he jerked his thumb in the direction of the old hat—"but there are points in connection with it which are not entirely devoid of interest and even of instruction."

I seated myself in his armchair and warmed my hands before his

crackling **fire**, for a sharp frost had set in, and the windows were thick with the ice **crystals**. "I suppose," I remarked, "that, homely as it looks, this thing has some **deadly** story linked on to it—that it is the **clue** which will **guide** you in the **solution** of some **mystery** and the **punishment** of some **crime**."

"No, no. No **crime**," said Sherlock Holmes, **laughing**. "Only one of those **whimsical** little **incidents** which will **happen** when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles. Amid the **action** and reaction of so dense a **swarm** of **humanity**, every possible combination of events may be **expected** to take place, and many a little **problem** will be **presented** which may be **striking** and **bizarre** without being **criminal**. We have already had experience of such."

"So much so," I remarked, "that of the last six **cases** which I have added to my notes, three have been entirely free of any **legal crime**."

"Precisely. You allude to my **attempt** to recover the Irene Adler papers, to the singular **case** of Miss Mary Sutherland, and to the **adventure** of the man with the twisted lip. Well, I have no **doubt** that this **small** matter will **fall** into the same **innocent** category. You know Peterson, the commissioner?"

"Yes."

"It is to him that this **trophy** belongs."

"It is his hat."

"No, no, he **found** it. Its owner is **unknown**. I **beg** that you will look upon it not as a **battered** billycock but as an **intellectual problem**. And, first, as to how it came here. It **arrived** upon Christmas morning, in company with a **good fat** goose, which is, I have no **doubt**, roasting at this moment in front of Peterson's **fire**. The **facts** are these: about four o'clock on Christmas morning, Peterson, who, as you know, is a very **honest fellow**, was returning from some **small** jollification and was making his way homeward down Tottenham **Court** Road. In front of him he saw, in the gaslight, a tallish man, walking with a slight **stagger**, and carrying a **white** goose slung over his **shoulder**. As he reached the corner of Goodge Street, a **row** **broke** out between this **stranger** and a little knot of roughs. One of the latter knocked off the man's hat, on which he raised his stick to **defend** himself and, swinging it over his head, **smashed** the shop window behind him. Peterson had rushed **forward** to **protect** the **stranger** from his **assailants**; but the man, **shocked** at having **broken** the window, and seeing an official-looking person in uniform rushing towards him, dropped his goose, took to his **heels**, and **vanished** amid the **labyrinth** of **small** streets which **lie** at the back of Tottenham **Court** Road. The roughs had also **fled** at the appearance of Peterson, so that he was left in **possession** of the field of

battle, and also of the spoils of victory in the shape of this battered hat and a most unimpeachable Christmas goose."

"Which surely he restored to their owner?"

"My dear fellow, there lies the problem. It is true that 'For Mrs. Henry Baker' was printed upon a small card which was tied to the bird's left leg, and it is also true that the initials 'H. B.' are legible upon the lining of this hat, but as there are some thousands of Bakers, and some hundreds of Henry Bakers in this city of ours, it is not easy to restore lost property to any one of them."

"What, then, did Peterson do?"

"He brought round both hat and goose to me on Christmas morning, knowing that even the smallest problems are of interest to me.

The goose we retained until this morning, when there were signs that, in spite of the slight frost, it would be well that it should be eaten without unnecessary delay. Its finder has carried it off, therefore, to fulfil the ultimate destiny of a goose, while I continue to retain the hat of the unknown gentleman who lost his Christmas dinner."

"Did he not advertise?"

"No."

"Then, what clue could you have as to his identity?"

"Only as much as we can deduce."

"From his hat?"

"Precisely."

"But you are joking. What can you gather from this old battered felt?"

"Here is my lens. You know my methods. What can you gather yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this article?"

I took the tattered object in my hands and turned it over rather ruefully. It was a very ordinary black hat of the usual round shape, hard and much the worse for wear. The lining had been of red silk, but was a good deal discoloured. There was no maker's name; but, as Holmes had remarked, the initials "H. B." were scrawled upon one side. It was pierced in the brim for a hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. For the rest, it was cracked, exceedingly dusty, and spotted in several places, although there seemed to have been some attempt to hide the discoloured patches by smearing them with ink.

"I can see nothing," said I, handing it back to my friend.

"On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences."

"Then, pray tell me what it is that you can infer from this hat?"

He picked it up and gazed at it in the peculiar introspective

fashion which was characteristic of him. "It is perhaps less suggestive than it might have been," he remarked, "and yet there are a few inferences which are very distinct, and a few others which represent at least a strong balance of probability. That the man was highly intellectual is of course obvious upon the face of it, and also that he was fairly well-to-do within the last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He had foresight, but has less now than formerly, pointing to a moral retrogression, which, when taken with the decline of his fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink, at work upon him. This may account also for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him."

"My dear Holmes!"

"He has, however, retained some degree of self-respect," he continued, disregarding my remonstrance. "He is a man who leads a sedentary life, goes out little, is out of training entirely, is middle-aged, has grizzled hair which he has had cut within the last few days, and which he anoints with lime-cream. These are the more patent facts which are to be deduced from his hat. Also, by the way, that it is extremely improbable that he has gas laid on in his house."

"You are certainly joking, Holmes."

"Not in the least. Is it possible that even now, when I give you these results, you are unable to see how they are attained?"

"I have no doubt that I am very stupid, but I must confess that I am unable to follow you. For example, how did you deduce that this man was intellectual?"

For answer Holmes clapped the hat upon his head. It came right over the forehead and settled upon the bridge of his nose. "It is a question of cubic capacity," said he; "a man with so large a brain must have something in it."

"The decline of his fortunes, then?"

"This hat is three years old. These flat brims curled at the edge came in then. It is a hat of the very best quality. Look at the band of ribbed silk and the excellent lining. If this man could afford to buy so expensive a hat three years ago, and has had no hat since, then he has assuredly gone down in the world."

"Well, that is clear enough, certainly. But how about the foresight and the moral retrogression?"

Sherlock Holmes laughed. "Here is the foresight," said he putting his finger upon the little disc and loop of the hat-securer.

"They are never sold upon hats. If this man ordered one, it is a sign of a certain amount of foresight, since he went out of his way to take this precaution against the wind. But since we see that he has broken the elastic and has not troubled to replace it, it is obvious that he has less foresight now than formerly,

which is a distinct **proof** of a weakening nature. On the other hand, he has endeavoured to **conceal** some of these **stains** upon the felt by daubing them with ink, which is a sign that he has not entirely **lost** his self-respect."

"Your **reasoning** is certainly plausible."

"The further points, that he is middle-aged, that his hair is grizzled, that it has been recently cut, and that he uses lime-cream, are all to be gathered from a close **examination** of the lower part of the lining. The lens discloses a large number of hair-ends, **clean** cut by the scissors of the barber. They all appear to be adhesive, and there is a distinct odour of lime-cream. This **dust**, you will observe, is not the gritty, grey **dust** of the street but the fluffy brown **dust** of the house, **showing** that it has been hung up indoors most of the **time**, while the marks of moisture upon the inside are **proof** positive that the wearer perspired very **freely**, and could therefore, hardly be in the best of training."

"But his wife—you said that she had ceased to **love** him."

"This hat has not been brushed for weeks. When I see you, my **dear** Watson, with a week's accumulation of **dust** upon your hat, and when your wife allows you to go out in such a state, I shall **fear** that you also have been **unfortunate** enough to **lose** your wife's **affection**."

"But he might be a bachelor."

"**Nay**, he was bringing home the goose as a peace-offering to his wife. Remember the card upon the bird's leg."

"You have an answer to everything. But how on earth do you deduce that the gas is not laid on in his house?"

"One tallow **stain**, or even two, might come by **chance**; but when I see no less than five, I think that there can be little **doubt** that the individual must be brought into frequent **contact** with burning tallow—walks upstairs at night probably with his hat in one hand and a **guttering** candle in the other. Anyhow, he never got tallow-stains from a gas-jet. Are you **satisfied**?"

"Well, it is very **ingenious**," said I, **laughing**; "but since, as you said just now, there has been no **crime** committed, and no **harm** done **save** the **loss** of a goose, all this seems to be rather a **waste** of energy."

Sherlock Holmes had opened his **mouth** to reply, when the door flew open, and Peterson, the commissionaire, rushed into the apartment with **flushed** cheeks and the face of a man who is dazed with **astonishment**.

"The goose, Mr. Holmes! The goose, **sir**!" he gasped.

"Eh? What of it, then? Has it returned to life and **flapped** off through the kitchen window?" Holmes twisted himself round upon the sofa to get a fairer view of the man's **excited** face.

"See here, **sir**! See what my wife **found** in its crop!" He held out his hand and displayed upon the centre of the palm a brilliantly scintillating **blue stone**, rather **smaller** than a bean in size, but of such **purity** and **radiance** that it **twinkled** like an **electric** point in the **dark hollow** of his hand.

Sherlock Holmes sat up with a whistle. "By Jove, Peterson!" said he, "this is **treasure** trove indeed. I suppose you know what you have got?"

"A **diamond**, **sir**? A **precious stone**. It cuts into glass as though it were putty."

"It's more than a **precious stone**. It is the **precious stone**."

"Not the **Countess** of Morcar's **blue** carbuncle!" I ejaculated.

"Precisely so. I ought to know its size and **shape**, seeing that I have read the advertisement about it in The **Times** every day lately. It is absolutely **unique**, and its value can only be **conjectured**, but the **reward offered** of 1000 **pounds** is certainly not within a twentieth part of the market price."

"A thousand **pounds**! Great **Lord** of **mercy**!" The commissioner plumped down into a chair and **stared** from one to the other of us.

"That is the **reward**, and I have **reason** to know that there are **sentimental** considerations in the background which would induce the **Countess** to part with half her **fortune** if she could but recover the **gem**."

"It was **lost**, if I remember aright, at the Hotel **Cosmopolitan**," I remarked.

"Precisely so, on December 22nd, just five days ago. **John** Horner, a plumber, was accused of having abstracted it from the lady's jewel-case. The evidence against him was so strong that the **case** has been referred to the Assizes. I have some **account** of the matter here, I believe." He rummaged amid his newspapers, glancing over the dates, until at last he smoothed one out, doubled it over, and read the following paragraph:

"Hotel **Cosmopolitan** Jewel **Robbery**. **John** Horner, 26, plumber, was brought up upon the charge of having upon the 22nd inst., abstracted from the jewel-case of the **Countess** of Morcar the **valuable gem** known as the **blue** carbuncle. James Ryder, upper-attendant at the hotel, gave his evidence to the effect that he had **shown** Horner up to the dressing-room of the **Countess** of Morcar upon the day of the **robbery** in order that he might solder the second bar of the **grate**, which was loose. He had remained with Horner some little **time**, but had **finally** been called away. On returning, he **found** that Horner had **disappeared**, that the bureau had been **forced** open, and that the **small morocco casket** in which, as it afterwards transpired, the **Countess** was accustomed to keep her jewel, was **lying** empty upon the dressing-table. Ryder instantly gave the **alarm**, and Horner was

arrested the same evening; but the stone could not be found either upon his person or in his rooms. Catherine Cusack, maid to the Countess, deposed to having heard Ryder's cry of dismay on discovering the robbery, and to having rushed into the room, where she found matters as described by the last witness.

Inspector Bradstreet, B division, gave evidence as to the arrest of Horner, who struggled frantically, and protested his innocence in the strongest terms. Evidence of a previous conviction for robbery having been given against the prisoner, the magistrate refused to deal summarily with the offence, but referred it to the Assizes. Horner, who had shown signs of intense emotion during the proceedings, fainted away at the conclusion and was carried out of court."

"Hum! So much for the police-court," said Holmes thoughtfully, tossing aside the paper. "The question for us now to solve is the sequence of events leading from a rifled jewel-case at one end to the crop of a goose in Tottenham Court Road at the other. You see, Watson, our little deductions have suddenly assumed a much more important and less innocent aspect. Here is the stone; the stone came from the goose, and the goose came from Mr. Henry Baker, the gentleman with the bad hat and all the other characteristics with which I have bored you. So now we must set ourselves very seriously to finding this gentleman and ascertaining what part he has played in this little mystery. To do this, we must try the simplest means first, and these lie undoubtedly in an advertisement in all the evening papers. If this fail, I shall have recourse to other methods."

"What will you say?"

"Give me a pencil and that slip of paper. Now, then: 'Found at the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and a black felt hat. Mr. Henry Baker can have the same by applying at 6:30 this evening at 221B, Baker Street.' That is clear and concise."

"Very. But will he see it?"

"Well, he is sure to keep an eye on the papers, since, to a poor man, the loss was a heavy one. He was clearly so scared by his mischance in breaking the window and by the approach of Peterson that he thought of nothing but flight, but since then he must have bitterly regretted the impulse which caused him to drop his bird. Then, again, the introduction of his name will cause him to see it, for everyone who knows him will direct his attention to it. Here you are, Peterson, run down to the advertising agency and have this put in the evening papers."

"In which, sir?"

"Oh, in the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James's, Evening News, Standard, Echo, and any others that occur to you."

"Very well, sir. And this stone?"

"Ah, yes, I shall keep the **stone**. Thank you. And, I say, Peterson, just buy a goose on your way back and **leave** it here with me, for we must have one to give to this **gentleman** in place of the one which your family is now **devouring**."

When the commissioner had gone, Holmes took up the **stone** and held it against the light. "It's a bonny thing," said he. "Just see how it glints and **sparkles**. Of course it is a nucleus and **focus** of **crime**. Every **good stone** is. They are the **devil's pet baits**. In the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a **bloody deed**. This **stone** is not yet twenty years old. It was **found** in the **banks** of the Amoy River in southern China and is **remarkable** in having every characteristic of the carbuncle, **save** that it is **blue** in shade instead of ruby red. In **spite** of its **youth**, it has already a **sinister** history. There have been two **murders**, a vitriol-throwing, a **suicide**, and several **robberies** brought about for the sake of this forty-grain **weight** of crystallised charcoal. Who would think that so **pretty** a toy would be a purveyor to the **gallows** and the **prison**? I'll lock it up in my strong box now and drop a line to the **Countess** to say that we have it."

"Do you think that this man Horner is **innocent**?"

"I cannot tell."

"Well, then, do you imagine that this other one, Henry Baker, had anything to do with the matter?"

"It is, I think, much more likely that Henry Baker is an absolutely **innocent** man, who had no idea that the bird which he was carrying was of considerably more value than if it were made of **solid gold**. That, however, I shall determine by a very simple test if we have an answer to our advertisement."

"And you can do nothing until then?"

"Nothing."

"In that **case** I shall **continue** my **professional** round. But I shall come back in the evening at the hour you have mentioned, for I should like to see the **solution** of so tangled a business."

"Very **glad** to see you. I dine at seven. There is a woodcock, I believe. By the way, in view of recent occurrences, perhaps I ought to ask Mrs. Hudson to examine its crop."

I had been **delayed** at a **case**, and it was a little after half-past six when I **found** myself in Baker Street once more. As I approached the house I saw a tall man in a **Scotch** bonnet with a coat which was buttoned up to his chin **waiting** outside in the bright semicircle which was thrown from the fanlight. Just as I **arrived** the door was opened, and we were **shown** up together to Holmes' room.

"Mr. Henry Baker, I believe," said he, rising from his armchair and greeting his **visitor** with the easy air of geniality which he could so **readily** assume. "**Pray** take this chair by the **fire**, Mr.

Baker. It is a **cold** night, and I observe that your circulation is more **adapted** for summer than for winter. Ah, Watson, you have just come at the right **time**. Is that your hat, Mr. Baker?"

"Yes, **sir**, that is undoubtedly my hat."

He was a large man with rounded **shoulders**, a massive head, and a broad, **intelligent** face, **sloping** down to a pointed beard of grizzled brown. A touch of red in **nose** and cheeks, with a slight **tremor** of his **extended** hand, recalled Holmes' **surmise** as to his habits. His **rusty black** frock-coat was buttoned right up in front, with the collar turned up, and his lank wrists protruded from his sleeves without a sign of cuff or shirt. He **spoke** in a slow **staccato** fashion, choosing his **words** with care, and gave the **impression** generally of a man of **learning** and **letters** who had had ill-usage at the hands of **fortune**.

"We have **retained** these things for some days," said Holmes,

"because we **expected** to see an advertisement from you giving your address. I am at a **loss** to know now why you did not advertise."

Our **visitor** gave a rather shamefaced **laugh**. "Shillings have not been so **plentiful** with me as they once were," he remarked. "I had no **doubt** that the **gang** of roughs who **assaulted** me had carried off both my hat and the bird. I did not care to spend more **money** in a **hopeless attempt** at recovering them."

"Very naturally. By the way, about the bird, we were compelled to **eat** it."

"To **eat** it!" Our **visitor** half rose from his chair in his **excitement**.

"Yes, it would have been of no use to anyone had we not done so. But I presume that this other goose upon the sideboard, which is about the same **weight** and perfectly fresh, will answer your purpose **equally** well?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," answered Mr. Baker with a sigh of **relief**.

"Of course, we still have the feathers, legs, crop, and so on of your own bird, so if you wish—"

The man burst into a hearty **laugh**. "They might be useful to me as relics of my **adventure**," said he, "but beyond that I can hardly see what use the disjecta membra of my **late** acquaintance are going to be to me. No, **sir**, I think that, with your **permission**, I will **confine** my **attentions** to the **excellent** bird which I **perceive** upon the sideboard."

Sherlock Holmes glanced sharply across at me with a slight shrug of his **shoulders**.

"There is your hat, then, and there your bird," said he. "By the way, would it **bore** you to tell me where you got the other one from? I am somewhat of a fowl fancier, and I have seldom seen a better grown goose."

"Certainly, **sir**," said Baker, who had risen and tucked his newly **gained** property under his arm. "There are a few of us who frequent the Alpha Inn, near the Museum—we are to be **found** in the Museum itself during the day, you understand. This year our **good** host, Windigate by name, **instituted** a goose club, by which, on consideration of some few pence every week, we were each to receive a bird at Christmas. My pence were duly paid, and the **rest** is **familiar** to you. I am much indebted to you, **sir**, for a **Scotch** bonnet is fitted neither to my years nor my gravity." With a comical pomposity of manner he bowed solemnly to both of us and strode off upon his way.

"So much for Mr. Henry Baker," said Holmes when he had closed the door behind him. "It is quite certain that he knows nothing whatever about the matter. Are you **hungry**, Watson?"

"Not particularly."

"Then I **suggest** that we turn our **dinner** into a supper and follow up this **clue** while it is still **hot**."

"By all means."

It was a bitter night, so we drew on our ulsters and wrapped cravats about our throats. Outside, the **stars** were shining **coldly** in a cloudless **sky**, and the breath of the passers-by blew out into smoke like so many **pistol shots**. Our footfalls rang out crisply and loudly as we swung through the **doctors'** quarter, Wimpole Street, Harley Street, and so through Wigmore Street into Oxford Street. In a quarter of an hour we were in Bloomsbury at the Alpha Inn, which is a **small** public-house at the corner of one of the streets which runs down into Holborn. Holmes pushed open the door of the private bar and ordered two glasses of **beer** from the ruddy-faced, white-aproned landlord.

"Your **beer** should be **excellent** if it is as **good** as your geese," said he.

"My geese!" The man seemed **surprised**.

"Yes. I was speaking only half an hour ago to Mr. Henry Baker, who was a member of your goose club."

"Ah! yes, I see. But you see, **sir**, them's not our geese."

"Indeed! Whose, then?"

"Well, I got the two dozen from a salesman in Covent **Garden**."

"Indeed? I know some of them. Which was it?"

"Breckinridge is his name."

"Ah! I don't know him. Well, here's your **good** health landlord, and **prosperity** to your house. Good-night."

"Now for Mr. Breckinridge," he continued, buttoning up his coat as we came out into the frosty air. "Remember, Watson that though we have so homely a thing as a goose at one end of this chain, we have at the other a man who will certainly get seven years' **penal servitude** unless we can **establish** his **innocence**. It is possible

that our **inquiry** may but confirm his **guilt**; but, in any **case**, we have a line of **investigation** which has been missed by the **police**, and which a singular **chance** has placed in our hands. Let us follow it out to the bitter end. Faces to the south, then, and quick **march!**"

We passed across Holborn, down Endell Street, and so through a zigzag of **slums** to Covent **Garden** Market. One of the largest **stalls bore** the name of Breckinridge upon it, and the proprietor a horsey-looking man, with a sharp face and trim side-whiskers was helping a **boy** to put up the shutters.

"Good-evening. It's a **cold** night," said Holmes.

The salesman nodded and **shot** a **questioning** glance at my **companion**.

"Sold out of geese, I see," continued Holmes, pointing at the bare slabs of marble.

"Let you have five hundred **to-morrow** morning."

"That's no **good**."

"Well, there are some on the **stall** with the gas-flare."

"Ah, but I was **recommended** to you."

"Who by?"

"The landlord of the Alpha."

"Oh, yes; I sent him a couple of dozen."

"Fine birds they were, too. Now where did you get them from?"

To my **surprise** the **question** provoked a burst of **anger** from the salesman.

"Now, then, mister," said he, with his head cocked and his arms akimbo, "what are you driving at? Let's have it straight, now."

"It is straight enough. I should like to know who sold you the geese which you **supplied** to the Alpha."

"Well then, I shan't tell you. So now!"

"Oh, it is a matter of no **importance**; but I don't know why you should be so warm over such a **trifle**."

"Warm! You'd be as warm, maybe, if you were as pestered as I am. When I **pay good money** for a **good** article there should be an end of the business; but it's 'Where are the geese?' and 'Who did you sell the geese to?' and 'What will you take for the geese?' One would think they were the only geese in the world, to hear the **fuss** that is made over them."

"Well, I have no connection with any other people who have been making **inquiries**," said Holmes carelessly. "If you **won't** tell us the bet is off, that is all. But I'm always **ready** to back my opinion on a matter of fowls, and I have a fiver on it that the bird I ate is country bred."

"Well, then, you've **lost** your fiver, for it's town bred," snapped the salesman.

"It's nothing of the **kind**."

"I say it is."

"I don't believe it."

"D'you think you know more about fowls than I, who have handled them ever since I was a nipper? I tell you, all those birds that went to the Alpha were town bred."

"You'll never persuade me to believe that."

"Will you bet, then?"

"It's merely taking your money, for I know that I am right. But I'll have a sovereign on with you, just to teach you not to be obstinate."

The salesman chuckled grimly. "Bring me the books, Bill," said he.

The small boy brought round a small thin volume and a great greasy-backed one, laying them out together beneath the hanging lamp.

"Now then, Mr. Cocksure," said the salesman, "I thought that I was out of geese, but before I finish you'll find that there is still one left in my shop. You see this little book?"

"Well?"

"That's the list of the folk from whom I buy. D'you see? Well, then, here on this page are the country folk, and the numbers after their names are where their accounts are in the big ledger. Now, then! You see this other page in red ink? Well, that is a list of my town suppliers. Now, look at that third name. Just read it out to me."

"Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road-249," read Holmes.

"Quite so. Now turn that up in the ledger."

Holmes turned to the page indicated. "Here you are, 'Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier.'"

"Now, then, what's the last entry?"

"December 22nd. Twenty-four geese at 7s. 6d."

"Quite so. There you are. And underneath?"

"Sold to Mr. Windigate of the Alpha, at 12s."

"What have you to say now?"

Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. He drew a sovereign from his pocket and threw it down upon the slab, turning away with the air of a man whose disgust is too deep for words. A few yards off he stopped under a lamp-post and laughed in the hearty, noiseless fashion which was peculiar to him.

"When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the 'Pink 'un' protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet," said he. "I daresay that if I had put 100 pounds down in front of him, that man would not have given me such complete information as was drawn from him by the idea that he was doing me on a wager. Well, Watson, we are, I fancy, nearing the end of our quest, and the only point which remains to be determined is

whether we should go on to this Mrs. Oakshott to-night, or whether we should **reserve** it for **to-morrow**. It is clear from what that **surly fellow** said that there are others besides ourselves who are **anxious** about the matter, and I should—”

His remarks were **suddenly** cut short by a loud hubbub which **broke** out from the **stall** which we had just left. Turning round we saw a little rat-faced **fellow** standing in the centre of the circle of yellow light which was thrown by the swinging lamp, while Breckinridge, the salesman, framed in the door of his **stall**, was shaking his fists fiercely at the **cringing** figure.

”I’ve had enough of you and your geese,” he **shouted**. ”I wish you were all at the **devil** together. If you come pestering me any more with your **silly talk** I’ll set the dog at you. You bring Mrs. Oakshott here and I’ll answer her, but what have you to do with it? Did I buy the geese off you?”

”No; but one of them was mine all the same,” **whined** the little man.

”Well, then, ask Mrs. Oakshott for it.”

”She told me to ask you.”

”Well, you can ask the **King** of Proosia, for all I care. I’ve had enough of it. Get out of this!” He rushed fiercely **forward**, and the **inquirer** flitted away into the **darkness**.

”Ha! this may **save** us a **visit** to Brixton Road,” whispered Holmes.

”Come with me, and we will see what is to be made of this **fellow**.” Striding through the scattered knots of people who **lounged** round the flaring **stalls**, my **companion** speedily overtook the little man and touched him upon the **shoulder**. He sprang round, and I could see in the gas-light that every vestige of colour had been driven from his face.

”Who are you, then? What do you want?” he asked in a quavering voice.

”You will **excuse** me,” said Holmes blandly, ”but I could not help overhearing the **questions** which you put to the salesman just now. I think that I could be of **assistance** to you.”

”You? Who are you? How could you know anything of the matter?”

”My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don’t know.”

”But you can know nothing of this?”

”**Excuse** me, I know everything of it. You are endeavouring to trace some geese which were sold by Mrs. Oakshott, of Brixton Road, to a salesman named Breckinridge, by him in turn to Mr. Windigate, of the Alpha, and by him to his club, of which Mr. Henry Baker is a member.”

”Oh, **sir**, you are the very man whom I have **longed** to meet,” **cried** the little **fellow** with outstretched hands and **quivering** fingers.

”I can hardly **explain** to you how **interested** I am in this matter.”

Sherlock Holmes **hailed** a four-wheeler which was passing. "In that **case** we had better discuss it in a **cosy** room rather than in this wind-swept market-place," said he. "But **pray** tell me, before we go farther, who it is that I have the pleasure of **assisting**." The man hesitated for an instant. "My name is **John** Robinson," he answered with a sidelong glance.

"No, no; the **real** name," said Holmes sweetly. "It is always awkward doing business with an alias."

A **flush** sprang to the **white** cheeks of the **stranger**. "Well then," said he, "my **real** name is James Ryder."

"Precisely so. Head **attendant** at the Hotel **Cosmopolitan**. **Pray** step into the **cab**, and I shall soon be able to tell you everything which you would wish to know."

The little man stood glancing from one to the other of us with half-frightened, half-hopeful eyes, as one who is not sure whether he is on the **verge** of a **windfall** or of a **catastrophe**. Then he stepped into the **cab**, and in half an hour we were back in the sitting-room at Baker Street. Nothing had been said during our drive, but the high, thin breathing of our new **companion**, and the claspings and unclaspings of his hands, **spoke** of the **nervous tension** within him.

"Here we are!" said Holmes cheerily as we filed into the room.

"The **fire** looks very seasonable in this weather. You look **cold**, Mr. Ryder. **Pray** take the basket-chair. I will just put on my slippers before we settle this little matter of yours. Now, then! You want to know what became of those geese?"

"Yes, **sir**."

"Or rather, I **fancy**, of that goose. It was one bird, I imagine in which you were interested—white, with a **black** bar across the tail."

Ryder **quivered** with emotion. "Oh, **sir**," he **cried**, "can you tell me where it went to?"

"It came here."

"Here?"

"Yes, and a most **remarkable** bird it **proved**. I don't wonder that you should take an **interest** in it. It laid an egg after it was dead—the bonniest, brightest little **blue** egg that ever was seen. I have it here in my museum."

Our **visitor** **staggered** to his feet and clutched the mantelpiece with his right hand. Holmes unlocked his strong-box and held up the **blue** carbuncle, which shone out like a **star**, with a **cold**, **brilliant**, many-pointed **radiance**. Ryder stood **glaring** with a drawn face, **uncertain** whether to claim or to disown it.

"The game's up, Ryder," said Holmes quietly. "Hold up, man, or you'll be into the **fire**! Give him an arm back into his chair, Watson. He's not got blood enough to go in for **felony** with

impunity. Give him a dash of **brandy**. So! Now he looks a little more human. What a shrimp it is, to be sure!" For a moment he had **staggered** and nearly **fallen**, but the **brandy** brought a tinge of colour into his cheeks, and he sat **staring** with **frightened** eyes at his **accuser**.

"I have almost every link in my hands, and all the **proofs** which I could possibly need, so there is little which you need tell me. Still, that little may as well be cleared up to make the **case** complete. You had heard, Ryder, of this **blue stone** of the **Countess** of Morcar's?"

"It was Catherine Cusack who told me of it," said he in a crackling voice.

"I see—her ladyship's waiting-maid. Well, the **temptation** of **sudden wealth** so easily **acquired** was too much for you, as it has been for better men before you; but you were not very scrupulous in the means you used. It seems to me, Ryder, that there is the making of a very **pretty villain** in you. You knew that this man Horner, the plumber, had been **concerned** in some such matter before, and that **suspicion** would **rest** the more **readily** upon him. What did you do, then? You made some **small job** in my lady's room—you and your **confederate** Cusack—and you **managed** that he should be the man sent for. Then, when he had left, you **rifled** the jewel-case, raised the **alarm**, and had this **unfortunate** man **arrested**. You then—"

Ryder threw himself down **suddenly** upon the rug and clutched at my **companion's** knees. "For **God's** sake, have **mercy!**" he **shrieked**.

"Think of my **father!** Of my **mother!** It would **break** their hearts. I never went **wrong** before! I never will again. I **swear** it. **I'll swear** it on a Bible. Oh, don't bring it into **court!** For Christ's sake, don't!"

"Get back into your chair!" said Holmes sternly. "It is very well to **cringe** and **crawl** now, but you **thought** little enough of this poor Horner in the dock for a **crime** of which he knew nothing."

"I will fly, Mr. Holmes. I will **leave** the country, **sir**. Then the charge against him will **break** down."

"Hum! We will **talk** about that. And now let us hear a **true account** of the next act. How came the **stone** into the goose, and how came the goose into the open market? Tell us the **truth**, for there **lies** your only **hope** of safety."

Ryder passed his tongue over his parched lips. "I will tell you it just as it **happened, sir**," said he. "When Horner had been **arrested**, it seemed to me that it would be best for me to get away with the **stone** at once, for I did not know at what moment the **police** might not take it into their heads to search me and my room. There was no place about the hotel where it would be **safe**. I went out, as if on some **commission**, and I made for my sister's

house. She had married a man named Oakshott, and lived in Brixton Road, where she fattened fowls for the market. All the way there every man I met seemed to me to be a policeman or a detective; and, for all that it was a cold night, the sweat was pouring down my face before I came to the Brixton Road. My sister asked me what was the matter, and why I was so pale; but I told her that I had been upset by the jewel robbery at the hotel. Then I went into the back yard and smoked a pipe and wondered what it would be best to do.

"I had a friend once called Maudsley, who went to the bad, and has just been serving his time in Pentonville. One day he had met me, and fell into talk about the ways of thieves, and how they could get rid of what they stole. I knew that he would be true to me, for I knew one or two things about him; so I made up my mind to go right on to Kilburn, where he lived, and take him into my confidence. He would show me how to turn the stone into money. But how to get to him in safety? I thought of the agonies I had gone through in coming from the hotel. I might at any moment be seized and searched, and there would be the stone in my waistcoat pocket. I was leaning against the wall at the time and looking at the geese which were waddling about round my feet, and suddenly an idea came into my head which showed me how I could beat the best detective that ever lived.

"My sister had told me some weeks before that I might have the pick of her geese for a Christmas present, and I knew that she was always as good as her word. I would take my goose now, and in it I would carry my stone to Kilburn. There was a little shed in the yard, and behind this I drove one of the birds—a fine big one, white, with a barred tail. I caught it, and prying its bill open, I thrust the stone down its throat as far as my finger could reach. The bird gave a gulp, and I felt the stone pass along its gullet and down into its crop. But the creature flapped and struggled, and out came my sister to know what was the matter. As I turned to speak to her the brute broke loose and fluttered off among the others.

"'Whatever were you doing with that bird, Jem?' says she.

"'Well,' said I, 'you said you'd give me one for Christmas, and I was feeling which was the fattest.'

"'Oh,' says she, 'we've set yours aside for you—Jem's bird, we call it. It's the big white one over yonder. There's twenty-six of them, which makes one for you, and one for us, and two dozen for the market.'

"'Thank you, Maggie,' says I; 'but if it is all the same to you, I'd rather have that one I was handling just now.'

"'The other is a good three pound heavier,' said she, 'and we fattened it expressly for you.'

"Never mind. I'll have the other, and I'll take it now," said I.

"Oh, just as you like," said she, a little huffed. "Which is it you want, then?"

"That white one with the barred tail, right in the middle of the flock."

"Oh, very well. Kill it and take it with you."

"Well, I did what she said, Mr. Holmes, and I carried the bird all the way to Kilburn. I told my pal what I had done, for he was a man that it was easy to tell a thing like that to. He laughed until he choked, and we got a knife and opened the goose. My heart turned to water, for there was no sign of the stone, and I knew that some terrible mistake had occurred. I left the bird, rushed back to my sister's, and hurried into the back yard. There was not a bird to be seen there.

"Where are they all, Maggie?" I cried.

"Gone to the dealer's, Jem."

"Which dealer's?"

"Breckinridge, of Covent Garden."

"But was there another with a barred tail?" I asked, "the same as the one I chose?"

"Yes, Jem; there were two barred-tailed ones, and I could never tell them apart."

"Well, then, of course I saw it all, and I ran off as hard as my feet would carry me to this man Breckinridge; but he had sold the lot at once, and not one word would he tell me as to where they had gone. You heard him yourselves to-night. Well, he has always answered me like that. My sister thinks that I am going mad. Sometimes I think that I am myself. And now—and now I am myself a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth for which I sold my character. God help me! God help me!" He burst into convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands.

There was a long silence, broken only by his heavy breathing and by the measured tapping of Sherlock Holmes' finger-tips upon the edge of the table. Then my friend rose and threw open the door.

"Get out!" said he.

"What, sir! Oh, Heaven bless you!"

"No more words. Get out!"

And no more words were needed. There was a rush, a clatter upon the stairs, the bang of a door, and the crisp rattle of running footfalls from the street.

"After all, Watson," said Holmes, reaching up his hand for his clay pipe, "I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. If Horner were in danger it would be another thing; but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must collapse. I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong

again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to gaol now, and you make him a gaol-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of forgiveness. Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward. If you will have the goodness to touch the bell, Doctor, we will begin another investigation, in which, also a bird will be the chief feature."

VIII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser, as a rule, and as the clock on the mantelpiece showed me that it was only a quarter-past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you."

"What is it, then—a fire?"

"No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should

call you and give you the chance.”

”My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything.”

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

”Good-morning, madam,” said Holmes cheerily. ”My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering.”

”It is not cold which makes me shiver,” said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

”What, then?”

”It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror.” She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

”You must not fear,” said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. ”We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see.”

”You know me, then?”

”No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station.”

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

”There is no mystery, my dear madam,” said he, smiling. ”The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver.”

”Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct,” said she. ”I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues.

I have no one to turn to—none, **save** only one, who cares for me, and he, poor **fellow**, can be of little **aid**. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her **sore** need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, **sir**, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense **darkness** which **surrounds** me? At **present** it is out of my power to **reward** you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own **income**, and then at least you shall not find me **ungrateful**.”

Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a **small** case-book, which he **consulted**.

”Farintosh,” said he. ”Ah yes, I recall the **case**; it was **concerned** with an opal tiara. I think it was before your **time**, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be **happy** to devote the same care to your **case** as I did to that of your **friend**. As to **reward**, my **profession** is its own **reward**; but you are at **liberty** to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the **time** which suits you best. And now I **beg** that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter.”

”Alas!” replied our **visitor**, ”the very **horror** of my situation **lies** in the **fact** that my **fears** are so **vague**, and my **suspensions** **depend** so entirely upon **small** points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and **advice** looks upon all that I tell him about it as the **fancies** of a **nervous** woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his **soothing** answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold **wickedness** of the human heart. You may **advise** me how to walk amid the **dangers** which encompass me.”

”I am all **attention**, madam.”

”My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Royslotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey.”

Holmes nodded his head. ”The name is **familiar** to me,” said he.

”The family was at one **time** among the richest in England, and the estates **extended** over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and **wasteful** disposition, and the family **ruin** was eventually completed by a **gambler** in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left **save** a few acres of **ground**, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy **mortgage**. The last squire dragged out his **existence** there, living the **horrible** life of an **aristocratic pauper**; but

his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must **adapt** himself to the new conditions, obtained an **advance** from a **relative**, which **enabled** him to take a **medical degree** and went out to Calcutta, where, by his **professional skill** and his **force** of character, he **established** a large **practice**. In a fit of **anger**, however, caused by some **robberies** which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native **butler** to **death** and narrowly **escaped** a capital **sentence**. As it was, he **suffered** a **long** term of **imprisonment** and afterwards returned to England a morose and **disappointed** man. "When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my **mother**, Mrs. Stoner, the **young widow** of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal **Artillery**. My sister Julia and I were **twins**, and we were only two years old at the **time** of my **mother's** re-marriage. She had a **considerable** sum of money—not less than 1000 **pounds** a year—and this she bequeathed to Dr. Roylott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our **marriage**. **Shortly** after our return to England my **mother** died—she was **killed** eight years ago in a railway **accident** near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then **abandoned** his **attempts** to **establish** himself in **practice** in London and took us to live with him in the old **ancestral** house at Stoke Moran. The **money** which my **mother** had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no **obstacle** to our **happiness**. "But a **terrible change** came over our stepfather about this **time**. Instead of making **friends** and **exchanging visits** with our neighbours, who had at first been **overjoyed** to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out **save** to indulge in **ferocious quarrels** with whoever might **cross** his path. **Violence** of temper approaching to **mania** has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's **case** it had, I believe, been intensified by his **long** residence in the tropics. A **series** of **disgraceful brawls** took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the **terror** of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of **immense strength**, and absolutely **uncontrollable** in his **anger**. "Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by **paying** over all the **money** which I could gather together that I was able to avert another **public** exposure. He had no **friends** at all **save** the wandering gipsies, and he would give these vagabonds **leave** to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered **land** which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the **hospitality** of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a **passion** also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a **baboon**,

which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

"You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has."

"Your sister is dead, then?"

"She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother's maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady's house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion."

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

"Pray be precise as to details," said he.

"It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms the first is Dr. Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly so."

"The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o'clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

"Tell me, Helen," said she, 'have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?'

"Never," said I.

"I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?"

”Certainly not. But why?”

”Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I **thought** that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.”

”No, I have not. It must be those **wretched** gipsies in the plantation.”

”Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.”

”Ah, but I sleep more **heavily** than you.”

”Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.” She **smiled** back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock.”

”Indeed,” said Holmes. ”Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?”

”Always.”

”And why?”

”I think that I mentioned to you that the **doctor** kept a cheetah and a **baboon**. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked.”

”Quite so. **Pray** proceed with your **statement**.”

”I could not sleep that night. A **vague** feeling of impending **misfortune** impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were **twins**, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely **allied**. It was a **wild** night. The wind was **howling** outside, and the rain was **beating** and **splashing** against the windows. **Suddenly**, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the **wild scream** of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister’s voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had **fallen**. As I ran down the passage, my sister’s door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I **stared** at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with **terror**, her hands **groping** for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she **fell** to the **ground**. She writhed as one who is in **terrible pain**, and her limbs were **dreadfully** convulsed. At first I **thought** that she had not recognised me, but as I bent over her she **suddenly shrieked** out in a voice which I shall never **forget**, ’Oh, my **God**! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!’ There was something else which she

would **fain** have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the **doctor's** room, but a fresh convulsion **seized** her and choked her **words**. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was **unconscious**, and though he poured **brandy** down her throat and sent for **medical aid** from the village, all **efforts** were in vain, for she slowly sank and **died** without having recovered her **consciousness**. Such was the **dreadful** end of my beloved sister."

"One moment," said Holmes, "are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you **swear** to it?"

"That was what the **county coroner** asked me at the **inquiry**. It is my strong **impression** that I heard it, and yet, among the **crash** of the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been **deceived**."

"Was your sister dressed?"

"No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was **found** the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box."

"**Showing** that she had struck a light and looked about her when the **alarm** took place. That is **important**. And what conclusions did the **coroner** come to?"

"He **investigated** the **case** with great care, for Dr. Roylott's conduct had **long** been notorious in the **county**, but he was **unable** to find any satisfactory cause of **death**. My evidence **showed** that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad **iron** bars, which were secured every night. The walls were **carefully** sounded, and were **shown** to be quite **solid** all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same **result**. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any **violence** upon her."

"How about **poison**?"

"The **doctors** examined her for it, but without **success**."

"What do you think that this **unfortunate** lady **died** of, then?"

"It is my belief that she **died** of pure **fear** and **nervous shock**, though what it was that **frightened** her I cannot imagine."

"Were there gipsies in the plantation at the **time**?"

"Yes, there are nearly always some there."

"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band—a speckled band?"

"Sometimes I have **thought** that it was merely the **wild talk** of **delirium**, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gipsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them **wear** over their heads might have **suggested** the strange adjective which

she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being **satisfied**.

"These are very deep waters," said he; "**pray** go on with your narrative."

"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a **dear friend**, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in **marriage**. His name is Armitage—Percy Armitage—the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near **Reading**. My stepfather has **offered** no **opposition** to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were **started** in the west wing of the **building**, and my bedroom wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister **died**, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my **thrill** of **terror** when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her **terrible fate**, I **suddenly** heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which had been the herald of her own **death**. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I **slipped** down, got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn, which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your **advice**."

"You have done wisely," said my **friend**. "But have you told me all?"

"Yes, all."

"Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your stepfather."

"Why, what do you mean?"

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of **black lace** which fringed the hand that lay upon our **visitor's** knee. Five little **livid** spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the **white** wrist.

"You have been **cruelly** used," said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply and **covered** over her **injured** wrist. "He is a hard man," she said, "and perhaps he hardly knows his own **strength**."

There was a **long** silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and **stared** into the crackling **fire**.

"This is a very deep business," he said at last. "There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide upon our course of **action**. Yet we have not a moment to **lose**. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for us to see over these rooms without the **knowledge** of your stepfather?"

"As it happens, he **spoke** of coming into town to-day upon some

most **important** business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and **foolish**, and I could easily get her out of the way."

"**Excellent**. You are not **averse** to this **trip**, Watson?"

"By no means."

"Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train, so as to be there in **time** for your coming."

"And you may **expect** us early in the afternoon. I have myself some **small** business matters to attend to. Will you not **wait** and **breakfast**?"

"No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have **confided** my trouble to you. I shall look **forward** to seeing you again this afternoon." She dropped her thick **black** veil over her face and **glided** from the room.

"And what do you think of it all, Watson?" asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

"It seems to me to be a most **dark** and **sinister** business."

"**Dark** enough and **sinister** enough."

"Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are **impassable**, then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her **mysterious** end."

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar **words** of the **dying** woman?"

"I cannot think."

"When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the **presence** of a band of gipsies who are on **intimate** terms with this old **doctor**, the **fact** that we have every **reason** to believe that the **doctor** has an **interest** in **preventing** his stepdaughter's **marriage**, the **dying** allusion to a band, and, **finally**, the **fact** that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars that secured the shutters **falling** back into its place, I think that there is **good ground** to think that the **mystery** may be cleared along those lines."

"But what, then, did the gipsies do?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I see many **objections** to any such **theory**."

"And so do I. It is precisely for that **reason** that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the **objections** are **fatal**, or if they may be **explained** away. But what in the name of the **devil**!"

The **ejaculation** had been drawn from my **companion** by the **fact** that our door had been **suddenly** dashed open, and that a huge man had

framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

"Which of you is Holmes?" asked this apparition.

"My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me," said my companion quietly.

"I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran."

"Indeed, Doctor," said Holmes blandly. "Pray take a seat."

"I will do nothing of the kind. My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my companion imperturbably.

"Ha! You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler."

My friend smiled.

"Holmes, the busybody!"

His smile broadened.

"Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!"

Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught."

"I will go when I have said my say. Don't you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here." He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

"See that you keep yourself out of my grip," he snarled, and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace he strode out of the room.

"He seems a very amiable person," said Holmes, laughing. "I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own." As he spoke he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort, straightened it out again.

"Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk down to Doctors' Commons, where I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter."

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

"I have seen the will of the deceased wife," said he. "To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of 1100 pounds, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than 750 pounds. Each daughter can claim an income of 250 pounds, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a very serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need."

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in the front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

"Look there!" said he.

A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a

very old mansion.

"Stoke Moran?" said he.

"Yes, **sir**, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott," remarked the driver.

"There is some **building** going on there," said Holmes; "that is where we are going."

"There's the village," said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; "but if you want to get to the house, you'll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking."

"And the lady, I **fancy**, is Miss Stoner," observed Holmes, shading his eyes. "Yes, I think we had better do as you **suggest**."

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

"I **thought** it as well," said Holmes as we climbed the stile,

"that this **fellow** should think we had come here as architects, or on some definite business. It may stop his **gossip**.

Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as **good** as our **word**."

Our client of the morning had **hurried forward** to meet us with a face which **spoke** her **joy**. "I have been **waiting** so eagerly for you," she **cried**, shaking hands with us warmly. "All has turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening."

"We have had the pleasure of making the **doctor's** acquaintance," said Holmes, and in a few **words** he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned **white** to the lips as she listened.

"**Good** heavens!" she **cried**, "he has followed me, then."

"So it appears."

"He is so **cunning** that I never know when I am **safe** from him. What will he say when he returns?"

"He must **guard** himself, for he may find that there is someone more **cunning** than himself upon his **track**. You must lock yourself up from him to-night. If he is **violent**, we shall take you away to your **aunt's** at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our **time**, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine."

The **building** was of grey, lichen-blotched **stone**, with a high central portion and two curving wings, like the **claws** of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were **broken** and blocked with wooden **boards**, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of **ruin**. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the **blinds** in the windows, with the **blue** smoke **curling** up from the chimneys, **showed** that this was where the family resided.

Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main building to Dr. Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."

"Pending the alterations, as I understand. By the way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through."

"As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters?"

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, "my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter."

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discoloured that it may have dated from the original building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat

silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

"Where does that bell **communicate** with?" he asked at last pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually **lying** upon the **pillow**.

"It goes to the housekeeper's room."

"It looks newer than the other things?"

"Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago."

"Your sister asked for it, I suppose?"

"No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves."

"Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there.

You will **excuse** me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor." He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand and **crawled** swiftly **backward** and **forward**, examining minutely the **cracks** between the **boards**. Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. **Finally** he walked over to the bed and **spent** some **time** in **staring** at it and in running his eye up and down the wall. **Finally** he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

"Why, it's a **dummy**," said he.

"**Won't** it ring?"

"No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very **interesting**.

You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is."

"How very **absurd**! I never noticed that before."

"Very strange!" **muttered** Holmes, **pulling** at the rope. "There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a **fool** a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have **communicated** with the outside air!"

"That is also quite modern," said the lady.

"Done about the same **time** as the bell-rope?" remarked Holmes.

"Yes, there were several little **changes** carried out about that **time**."

"They seem to have been of a most **interesting** character—dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your **permission**, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment."

Dr. Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a **small** wooden shelf **full** of books, mostly of a technical character, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large **iron safe** were the **principal** things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest **interest**.

"What's in here?" he asked, tapping the **safe**.

"My stepfather's business papers."

"Oh! you have seen inside, then?"

"Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was **full** of papers."

"There isn't a cat in it, for example?"

"No. What a strange idea!"

"Well, look at this!" He took up a **small** saucer of milk which stood on the **top** of it.

"No; we don't keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a **baboon**."

"Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I daresay. There is one point which I should wish to determine." He squatted down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat of it with the greatest **attention**.

"Thank you. That is quite settled," said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. "Hullo! Here is something **interesting**!"

The object which had caught his eye was a **small** dog **lash** hung on one corner of the bed. The **lash**, however, was **curled** upon itself and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

"What do you make of that, Watson?"

"It's a common enough **lash**. But I don't know why it should be tied."

"That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it's a **wicked** world, and when a **clever** man turns his brains to **crime** it is the **worst** of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your **permission** we shall walk out upon the lawn."

I had never seen my **friend's** face so **grim** or his brow so **dark** as it was when we turned from the scene of this **investigation**. We had walked several **times** up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to **break** in upon his **thoughts** before he roused himself from his **reverie**.

"It is very **essential**, Miss Stoner," said he, "that you should absolutely follow my **advice** in every **respect**."

"I shall most certainly do so."

"The matter is too serious for any **hesitation**. Your life may **depend** upon your **compliance**."

"I **assure** you that I am in your hands."

"In the first place, both my **friend** and I must spend the night in your room."

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in **astonishment**.

"Yes, it must be so. Let me **explain**. I believe that that is the village inn over there?"

"Yes, that is the Crown."

"Very **good**. Your windows would be visible from there?"

"Certainly."

"You must **confine** yourself to your room, on pretence of a **headache**, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, **undo** the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then **withdraw** quietly with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to **occupy**. I have no **doubt** that, in **spite** of the repairs, you could **manage** there for one night."

"Oh, yes, easily."

"The **rest** you will **leave** in our hands."

"But what will you do?"

"We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall **investigate** the cause of this **noise** which has **disturbed** you."

"I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind," said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my **companion's** sleeve.

"Perhaps I have."

"Then, for **pity's** sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister's **death**."

"I should **prefer** to have clearer **proofs** before I speak."

"You can at least tell me whether my own **thought** is correct, and if she **died** from some **sudden fright**."

"No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must **leave** you for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us our **journey** would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may **rest assured** that we shall soon drive away the **dangers** that **threaten** you."

Sherlock Holmes and I had no **difficulty** in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue **gate**, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form **looming** up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The **boy** had some slight **difficulty** in **undoing** the heavy **iron gates**, and we heard the **hoarse** roar of the **doctor's** voice and saw the **fury** with which he shook his clinched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a **sudden** light spring up among the **trees** as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes as we sat together in the gathering **darkness**, "I have really some scruples as to taking you to-night. There is a distinct element of **danger**."

"Can I be of **assistance**?"

"Your **presence** might be invaluable."

"Then I shall certainly come."

"It is very **kind** of you."

"You speak of **danger**. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me."

"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did."

"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."

"You saw the ventilator, too?"

"Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through."

"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Oh, yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. Now, of course that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."

"But what harm can there be in that?"

"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"

"I cannot as yet see any connection."

"Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?"

"No."

"It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope—or so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull."

"Holmes," I cried, "I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime."

"Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over; for goodness' sake let us have a quiet pipe and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful."

About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it comes from the middle window."

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord, explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand. There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

"My God!" I whispered; "did you see it?"

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh and put his lips to my ear.

"It is a nice household," he murmured. "That is the baboon."

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes' example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

I nodded to show that I had heard.

"We must sit without light. He would see it through the ventilator."

I nodded again.

"Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair."

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table. Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness.

From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn catlike whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

"You see it, Watson?" he yelled. "You see it?"

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale and filled with horror and loathing. He had ceased to strike and was gazing up at the ventilator when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

"What can it mean?" I gasped.

"It means that it is all over," Holmes answered. "And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and we will enter Dr. Roylott's room."

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark-lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott clad in a long grey dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding

beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the **long lash** which we had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a **dreadful, rigid** stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be **bound** tightly round his head. As we entered he made neither sound nor **motion**.

"The band! the speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step **forward**. In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there **reared** itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a **loathsome serpent**.

"It is a **swamp adder**!" cried Holmes; "the deadliest **snake** in India. He has **died** within ten seconds of being bitten. **Violence** does, in **truth**, recoil upon the **violent**, and the schemer **falls** into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this **creature** back into its den, and we can then **remove** Miss Stoner to some place of **shelter** and let the **county police** know what has **happened**."

As he **spoke** he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man's lap, and throwing the **noose** round the reptile's neck he drew it from its **horrid** perch and, carrying it at arm's length, threw it into the **iron safe**, which he closed upon it.

Such are the **true facts** of the **death** of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should **prolong** a narrative which has already run to too great a length by telling how we **broke** the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her **good aunt** at Harrow, of how the slow process of **official inquiry** came to the conclusion that the **doctor** met his **fate** while indiscreetly playing with a **dangerous pet**. The little which I had yet to **learn** of the **case** was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely **erroneous** conclusion which **shows**, my **dear** Watson, how **dangerous** it always is to **reason** from **insufficient** data. The **presence** of the gipsies, and the use of the **word** 'band,' which was used by the poor girl, no **doubt**, to **explain** the appearance which she had caught a **hurried** glimpse of by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely **wrong** scent. I can only claim the **merit** that I instantly reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever **danger threatened** an **occupant** of the room could not come either from the window or the door. My **attention** was speedily drawn, as I have already remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The **discovery** that this was a **dummy**, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, instantly gave rise to the **suspicion** that the rope was

there as a bridge for something passing through the hole and coming to the bed. The idea of a **snake** instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my **knowledge** that the **doctor** was furnished with a **supply** of **creatures** from India, I felt that I was probably on the right **track**. The idea of using a form of **poison** which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a **clever** and **ruthless** man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a **poison** would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an **advantage**. It would be a sharp-eyed **coroner**, indeed, who could distinguish the two little **dark** punctures which would **show** where the **poison fangs** had done their work. Then I **thought** of the whistle. Of course he must recall the **snake** before the morning light revealed it to the **victim**. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he **thought** best, with the **certainty** that it would **crawl** down the rope and **land** on the bed. It might or might not **bite** the **occupant**, perhaps she might **escape** every night for a week, but sooner or later she must **fall** a **victim**.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair **showed** me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the **safe**, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to **finally dispel** any **doubts** which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather hastily closing the door of his **safe** upon its **terrible occupant**. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the **proof**. I heard the **creature hiss** as I have no **doubt** that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and **attacked** it."

"With the **result** of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also with the **result** of causing it to turn upon its **master** at the other side. Some of the blows of my **cane** came home and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no **doubt** indirectly **responsible** for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's **death**, and I cannot say that it is likely to **weigh** very **heavily** upon my **conscience**."

IX. THE **ADVENTURE** OF THE ENGINEER'S THUMB

Of all the **problems** which have been **submitted** to my **friend**, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, for **solution** during the years of our intimacy, there were only two which I was the means of introducing to his notice—that of Mr. Hatherley's thumb, and that of **Colonel Warburton's madness**. Of these the latter may have **afforded** a finer field for an acute and original observer, but the other was

so strange in its inception and so dramatic in its details that it may be the more **worthy** of being placed upon record, even if it gave my **friend** fewer openings for those deductive methods of **reasoning** by which he **achieved** such **remarkable results**. The story has, I believe, been told more than once in the newspapers, but, like all such narratives, its effect is much less **striking** when set forth en bloc in a single half-column of print than when the **facts** slowly evolve before your own eyes, and the **mystery** clears gradually away as each new **discovery** furnishes a step which **leads** on to the complete **truth**. At the **time** the circumstances made a deep **impression** upon me, and the **lapse** of two years has hardly **served** to weaken the effect.

It was in the summer of '89, not **long** after my **marriage**, that the events occurred which I am now about to summarise. I had returned to **civil practice** and had **finally abandoned** Holmes in his Baker Street rooms, although I continually **visited** him and occasionally even **persuaded** him to forgo his Bohemian habits so far as to come and **visit** us. My **practice** had steadily **increased**, and as I **happened** to live at no very great distance from Paddington Station, I got a few **patients** from among the **officials**. One of these, whom I had cured of a **painful** and **lingering disease**, was never **weary** of advertising my **virtues** and of endeavouring to send me on every **sufferer** over whom he might have any **influence**. One morning, at a little before seven o'clock, I was awakened by the maid tapping at the door to announce that two men had come from Paddington and were **waiting** in the consulting-room. I dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway **cases** were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. As I descended, my old **ally**, the **guard**, came out of the room and closed the door tightly behind him.

"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his **shoulder**; "he's all right."

"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner **suggested** that it was some strange **creature** which he had **caged** up in my room.

"It's a new **patient**," he whispered. "I **thought** I'd bring him round myself; then he couldn't **slip** away. There he is, all **safe** and sound. I must go now, **Doctor**; I have my dooties, just the same as you." And off he went, this **trusty** tout, without even giving me **time** to thank him.

I entered my consulting-room and **found** a **gentleman** seated by the table. He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed with a soft cloth **cap** which he had laid down upon my books. Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was **young**, not more than five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong, **masculine** face; but he was exceedingly pale and gave me the **impression** of a man who

was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control.

"I am sorry to knock you up so early, Doctor," said he, "but I have had a very serious accident during the night. I came in by train this morning, and on inquiring at Paddington as to where I might find a doctor, a worthy fellow very kindly escorted me here. I gave the maid a card, but I see that she has left it upon the side-table."

I took it up and glanced at it. "Mr. Victor Hatherley, hydraulic engineer, 16A, Victoria Street (3rd floor)." That was the name, style, and abode of my morning visitor. "I regret that I have kept you waiting," said I, sitting down in my library-chair. "You are fresh from a night journey, I understand, which is in itself a monotonous occupation."

"Oh, my night could not be called monotonous," said he, and laughed. He laughed very heartily, with a high, ringing note, leaning back in his chair and shaking his sides. All my medical instincts rose up against that laugh.

"Stop it!" I cried; "pull yourself together!" and I poured out some water from a caraffe.

It was useless, however. He was off in one of those hysterical outbursts which come upon a strong nature when some great crisis is over and gone. Presently he came to himself once more, very weary and pale-looking.

"I have been making a fool of myself," he gasped.

"Not at all. Drink this." I dashed some brandy into the water, and the colour began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

"That's better!" said he. "And now, Doctor, perhaps you would kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb used to be."

He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. It gave even my hardened nerves a shudder to look at it. There were four protruding fingers and a horrid red, spongy surface where the thumb should have been. It had been hacked or torn right out from the roots.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "this is a terrible injury. It must have bled considerably."

"Yes, it did. I fainted when it was done, and I think that I must have been senseless for a long time. When I came to I found that it was still bleeding, so I tied one end of my handkerchief very tightly round the wrist and braced it up with a twig."

"Excellent! You should have been a surgeon."

"It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own province."

"This has been done," said I, examining the wound, "by a very heavy and sharp instrument."

"A thing like a cleaver," said he.

"An **accident**, I presume?"

"By no means."

"What! a **murderous attack**?"

"Very **murderous** indeed."

"You horrify me."

I **sponged** the **wound**, **cleaned** it, dressed it, and **finally covered** it over with cotton wadding and carbolised bandages. He lay back without **wincing**, though he bit his lip from **time to time**.

"How is that?" I asked when I had finished.

"Capital! Between your **brandy** and your bandage, I feel a new man.

I was very weak, but I have had a **good deal** to go through."

"Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. It is evidently trying to your **nerves**."

"Oh, no, not now. I shall have to tell my **tale** to the **police**;

but, between ourselves, if it were not for the **convincing** evidence of this **wound** of mine, I should be **surprised** if they believed my **statement**, for it is a very **extraordinary** one, and I have not much in the way of **proof** with which to back it up; and, even if they believe me, the **clues** which I can give them are so **vague** that it is a **question** whether **justice** will be done."

"Ha!" **cried** I, "if it is anything in the nature of a **problem** which you desire to see solved, I should **strongly recommend** you to come to my **friend**, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, before you go to the **official police**."

"Oh, I have heard of that **fellow**," answered my **visitor**, "and I should be very **glad** if he would take the matter up, though of course I must use the **official police** as well. Would you give me an introduction to him?"

"I'll do better. I'll take you round to him myself."

"I should be immensely **obliged** to you."

"We'll call a **cab** and go together. We shall just be in **time** to have a little **breakfast** with him. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Yes; I shall not feel easy until I have told my story."

"Then my **servant** will call a **cab**, and I shall be with you in an instant." I rushed upstairs, **explained** the matter **shortly** to my wife, and in five minutes was inside a hansom, driving with my new acquaintance to Baker Street.

Sherlock Holmes was, as I **expected**, **lounging** about his sitting-room in his dressing-gown, **reading** the **agony** column of The **Times** and smoking his before-breakfast pipe, which was composed of all the plugs and dottles left from his smokes of the day before, all **carefully** dried and collected on the corner of the mantelpiece. He received us in his quietly **genial** fashion, ordered fresh rashers and eggs, and **joined** us in a hearty meal. When it was concluded he settled our new acquaintance upon the

sofa, placed a **pillow** beneath his head, and laid a glass of **brandy** and water within his reach.

"It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one, Mr. Hatherley," said he. "**Pray, lie** down there and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired and keep up your **strength** with a little stimulant."

"Thank you," said my **patient**, "but I have felt another man since the **doctor** bandaged me, and I think that your **breakfast** has completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your **valuable time** as possible, so I shall **start** at once upon my peculiar experiences."

Holmes sat in his big armchair with the **weary**, heavy-lidded expression which veiled his keen and **eager** nature, while I sat opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story which our **visitor** detailed to us.

"You must know," said he, "that I am an **orphan** and a bachelor, residing alone in **lodgings** in London. By **profession** I am a hydraulic engineer, and I have had **considerable** experience of my work during the seven years that I was **apprenticed** to Venner Matheson, the well-known firm, of Greenwich. Two years ago, having **served** my **time**, and having also come into a **fair** sum of **money** through my poor **father's death**, I determined to **start** in business for myself and took **professional** chambers in Victoria Street.

"I suppose that everyone finds his first independent **start** in business a **dreary** experience. To me it has been exceptionally so. During two years I have had three consultations and one **small job**, and that is absolutely all that my **profession** has brought me. My **gross** takings amount to 27 **pounds** 10s. Every day, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, I **waited** in my little den, until at last my heart began to sink, and I came to believe that I should never have any **practice** at all.

"Yesterday, however, just as I was thinking of **leaving** the office, my clerk entered to say there was a **gentleman waiting** who wished to see me upon business. He brought up a card, too, with the name of '**Colonel** Lysander **Stark**' engraved upon it. Close at his **heels** came the **colonel** himself, a man rather over the middle size, but of an **exceeding** thinness. I do not think that I have ever seen so thin a man. His whole face **sharpened** away into **nose** and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over his **outstanding** bones. Yet this emaciation seemed to be his natural habit, and due to no **disease**, for his eye was bright, his step brisk, and his bearing **assured**. He was plainly but **neatly** dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than thirty.

"'Mr. Hatherley?' said he, with something of a German accent.

'You have been recommended to me, Mr. Hatherley, as being a man who is not only proficient in his profession but is also discreet and capable of preserving a secret.'

"I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an address. 'May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?'

"Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just at this moment. I have it from the same source that you are both an orphan and a bachelor and are residing alone in London.'

"That is quite correct,' I answered; 'but you will excuse me if I say that I cannot see how all this bears upon my professional qualifications. I understand that it was on a professional matter that you wished to speak to me?'

"Undoubtedly so. But you will find that all I say is really to the point. I have a professional commission for you, but absolute secrecy is quite essential—absolute secrecy, you understand, and of course we may expect that more from a man who is alone than from one who lives in the bosom of his family.'

"If I promise to keep a secret,' said I, 'you may absolutely depend upon my doing so.'

"He looked very hard at me as I spoke, and it seemed to me that I had never seen so suspicious and questioning an eye.

"Do you promise, then?" said he at last.

"Yes, I promise.'

"Absolute and complete silence before, during, and after? No reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?'

"I have already given you my word.'

"Very good.' He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning across the room he flung open the door. The passage outside was empty.

"That's all right,' said he, coming back. 'I know that clerks are sometimes curious as to their master's affairs. Now we can talk in safety.' He drew up his chair very close to mine and began to stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

"A feeling of repulsion, and of something akin to fear had begun to rise within me at the strange antics of this fleshless man. Even my dread of losing a client could not restrain me from showing my impatience.

"I beg that you will state your business, sir,' said I; 'my time is of value.' Heaven forgive me for that last sentence, but the words came to my lips.

"How would fifty guineas for a night's work suit you?" he asked.

"Most admirably.'

"I say a night's work, but an hour's would be nearer the mark. I simply want your opinion about a hydraulic stamping machine which has got out of gear. If you show us what is wrong we shall soon set it right ourselves. What do you think of such a commission as

that?’

”The work appears to be light and the pay munificent.’

”Precisely so. We shall want you to come to-night by the last train.’

”Where to?’

”To Eyford, in Berkshire. It is a little place near the borders of Oxfordshire, and within seven miles of Reading. There is a train from Paddington which would bring you there at about 11:15.’

”Very good.’

”I shall come down in a carriage to meet you.’

”There is a drive, then?’

”Yes, our little place is quite out in the country. It is a good seven miles from Eyford Station.’

”Then we can hardly get there before midnight. I suppose there would be no chance of a train back. I should be compelled to stop the night.’

”Yes, we could easily give you a shake-down.’

”That is very awkward. Could I not come at some more convenient hour?’

”We have judged it best that you should come late. It is to recompense you for any inconvenience that we are paying to you, a young and unknown man, a fee which would buy an opinion from the very heads of your profession. Still, of course, if you would like to draw out of the business, there is plenty of time to do so.’

”I thought of the fifty guineas, and of how very useful they would be to me. ’Not at all,’ said I, ’I shall be very happy to accommodate myself to your wishes. I should like, however, to understand a little more clearly what it is that you wish me to do.’

”Quite so. It is very natural that the pledge of secrecy which we have exacted from you should have aroused your curiosity. I have no wish to commit you to anything without your having it all laid before you. I suppose that we are absolutely safe from eavesdroppers?’

”Entirely.’

”Then the matter stands thus. You are probably aware that fuller’s-earth is a valuable product, and that it is only found in one or two places in England?’

”I have heard so.’

”Some little time ago I bought a small place—a very small place—within ten miles of Reading. I was fortunate enough to discover that there was a deposit of fuller’s-earth in one of my fields. On examining it, however, I found that this deposit was a comparatively small one, and that it formed a link between two

very much larger ones upon the right and left—both of them, however, in the **grounds** of my neighbours. These **good** people were absolutely **ignorant** that their **land** contained that which was quite as **valuable** as a gold-mine. Naturally, it was to my **interest** to buy their **land** before they discovered its **true** value, but unfortunately I had no capital by which I could do this. I took a few of my **friends** into the **secret**, however, and they **suggested** that we should quietly and secretly work our own little deposit and that in this way we should **earn** the **money** which would **enable** us to buy the neighbouring fields. This we have now been doing for some **time**, and in order to help us in our **operations** we erected a hydraulic press. This press, as I have already **explained**, has got out of order, and we wish your **advice** upon the **subject**. We **guard** our **secret** very jealously, however, and if it once became known that we had hydraulic engineers coming to our little house, it would soon rouse **inquiry**, and then, if the **facts** came out, it would be good-bye to any **chance** of getting these fields and carrying out our **plans**. That is why I have made you **promise** me that you will not tell a human being that you are going to Eyford to-night. I **hope** that I make it all plain?"

"I quite follow you," said I. "The only point which I could not quite understand was what use you could make of a hydraulic press in excavating fuller's-earth, which, as I understand, is dug out like gravel from a pit."

"Ah!" said he carelessly, "we have our own process. We **compress** the earth into bricks, so as to **remove** them without revealing what they are. But that is a mere detail. I have taken you **fully** into my **confidence** now, Mr. Hatherley, and I have **shown** you how I **trust** you." He rose as he **spoke**. "I shall **expect** you, then, at Eyford at 11:15."

"I shall certainly be there."

"And not a **word** to a soul." He looked at me with a last **long**, **questioning** gaze, and then, pressing my hand in a **cold**, **dank** grasp, he **hurried** from the room.

"Well, when I came to think it all over in **cool** blood I was very much astonished, as you may both think, at this **sudden commission** which had been intrusted to me. On the one hand, of course, I was **glad**, for the **fee** was at least tenfold what I should have asked had I set a price upon my own services, and it was possible that this order might **lead** to other ones. On the other hand, the face and manner of my **patron** had made an **unpleasant impression** upon me, and I could not think that his explanation of the fuller's-earth was sufficient to **explain** the **necessity** for my coming at midnight, and his extreme **anxiety** lest I should tell anyone of my **errand**. However, I threw all **fears** to the winds, ate a hearty supper, drove to Paddington, and **started** off, having

obeyed to the letter the injunction as to holding my tongue.
 "At Reading I had to change not only my carriage but my station.
 However, I was in time for the last train to Eyford, and I
 reached the little dim-lit station after eleven o'clock. I was the
 only passenger who got out there, and there was no one upon the
 platform save a single sleepy porter with a lantern. As I passed
 out through the wicket gate, however, I found my acquaintance of
 the morning waiting in the shadow upon the other side. Without a
 word he grasped my arm and hurried me into a carriage, the door
 of which was standing open. He drew up the windows on either
 side, tapped on the wood-work, and away we went as fast as the
 horse could go."
 "One horse?" interjected Holmes.
 "Yes, only one."
 "Did you observe the colour?"
 "Yes, I saw it by the side-lights when I was stepping into the
 carriage. It was a chestnut."
 "Tired-looking or fresh?"
 "Oh, fresh and glossy."
 "Thank you. I am sorry to have interrupted you. Pray continue
 your most interesting statement."
 "Away we went then, and we drove for at least an hour. Colonel
 Lysander Stark had said that it was only seven miles, but I
 should think, from the rate that we seemed to go, and from the
 time that we took, that it must have been nearer twelve. He sat
 at my side in silence all the time, and I was aware, more than
 once when I glanced in his direction, that he was looking at me
 with great intensity. The country roads seem to be not very good
 in that part of the world, for we lurched and jolted terribly. I
 tried to look out of the windows to see something of where we
 were, but they were made of frosted glass, and I could make out
 nothing save the occasional bright blur of a passing light. Now
 and then I hazarded some remark to break the monotony of the
 journey, but the colonel answered only in monosyllables, and the
 conversation soon flagged. At last, however, the bumping of the
 road was exchanged for the crisp smoothness of a gravel-drive,
 and the carriage came to a stand. Colonel Lysander Stark sprang
 out, and, as I followed after him, pulled me swiftly into a porch
 which gaped in front of us. We stepped, as it were, right out of
 the carriage and into the hall, so that I failed to catch the
 most fleeting glance of the front of the house. The instant that
 I had crossed the threshold the door slammed heavily behind us,
 and I heard faintly the rattle of the wheels as the carriage
 drove away.
 "It was pitch dark inside the house, and the colonel fumbled
 about looking for matches and muttering under his breath.

Suddenly a door opened at the other end of the passage, and a long, golden bar of light shot out in our direction. It grew broader, and a woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, which she held above her head, pushing her face forward and peering at us. I could see that she was pretty, and from the gloss with which the light shone upon her dark dress I knew that it was a rich material. She spoke a few words in a foreign tongue in a tone as though asking a question, and when my companion answered in a gruff monosyllable she gave such a start that the lamp nearly fell from her hand. Colonel Stark went up to her, whispered something in her ear, and then, pushing her back into the room from whence she had come, he walked towards me again with the lamp in his hand.

"Perhaps you will have the kindness to wait in this room for a few minutes," said he, throwing open another door. It was a quiet, little, plainly furnished room, with a round table in the centre, on which several German books were scattered. Colonel Stark laid down the lamp on the top of a harmonium beside the door. 'I shall not keep you waiting an instant,' said he, and vanished into the darkness.

"I glanced at the books upon the table, and in spite of my ignorance of German I could see that two of them were treatises on science, the others being volumes of poetry. Then I walked across to the window, hoping that I might catch some glimpse of the country-side, but an oak shutter, heavily barred, was folded across it. It was a wonderfully silent house. There was an old clock ticking loudly somewhere in the passage, but otherwise everything was deadly still. A vague feeling of uneasiness began to steal over me. Who were these German people, and what were they doing living in this strange, out-of-the-way place? And where was the place? I was ten miles or so from Eyford, that was all I knew, but whether north, south, east, or west I had no idea. For that matter, Reading, and possibly other large towns, were within that radius, so the place might not be so secluded, after all. Yet it was quite certain, from the absolute stillness, that we were in the country. I paced up and down the room, humming a tune under my breath to keep up my spirits and feeling that I was thoroughly earning my fifty-guinea fee.

"Suddenly, without any preliminary sound in the midst of the utter stillness, the door of my room swung slowly open. The woman was standing in the aperture, the darkness of the hall behind her, the yellow light from my lamp beating upon her eager and beautiful face. I could see at a glance that she was sick with fear, and the sight sent a chill to my own heart. She held up one shaking finger to warn me to be silent, and she shot a few whispered words of broken English at me, her eyes glancing back,

like those of a frightened horse, into the gloom behind her.

"'I would go,' said she, trying hard, as it seemed to me, to speak calmly; 'I would go. I should not stay here. There is no good for you to do.'

"'But, madam,' said I, 'I have not yet done what I came for. I cannot possibly leave until I have seen the machine.'

"'It is not worth your while to wait,' she went on. 'You can pass through the door; no one hinders.' And then, seeing that I smiled and shook my head, she suddenly threw aside her constraint and made a step forward, with her hands wrung together. 'For the love of Heaven!' she whispered, 'get away from here before it is too late!'

"But I am somewhat headstrong by nature, and the more ready to engage in an affair when there is some obstacle in the way. I thought of my fifty-guinea fee, of my wearisome journey, and of the unpleasant night which seemed to be before me. Was it all to go for nothing? Why should I slink away without having carried out my commission, and without the payment which was my due? This woman might, for all I knew, be a monomaniac. With a stout bearing, therefore, though her manner had shaken me more than I cared to confess, I still shook my head and declared my intention of remaining where I was. She was about to renew her entreaties when a door slammed overhead, and the sound of several footsteps was heard upon the stairs. She listened for an instant, threw up her hands with a despairing gesture, and vanished as suddenly and as noiselessly as she had come.

"The newcomers were Colonel Lysander Stark and a short thick man with a chinchilla beard growing out of the creases of his double chin, who was introduced to me as Mr. Ferguson.

"'This is my secretary and manager,' said the colonel. 'By the way, I was under the impression that I left this door shut just now. I fear that you have felt the draught.'

"'On the contrary,' said I, 'I opened the door myself because I felt the room to be a little close.'

"He shot one of his suspicious looks at me. 'Perhaps we had better proceed to business, then,' said he. 'Mr. Ferguson and I will take you up to see the machine.'

"'I had better put my hat on, I suppose.'

"'Oh, no, it is in the house.'

"'What, you dig fuller's-earth in the house?'

"'No, no. This is only where we compress it. But never mind that. All we wish you to do is to examine the machine and to let us know what is wrong with it.'

"We went upstairs together, the colonel first with the lamp, the fat manager and I behind him. It was a labyrinth of an old house, with corridors, passages, narrow winding staircases, and little

low doors, the thresholds of which were hollowed out by the generations who had crossed them. There were no carpets and no signs of any furniture above the ground floor, while the plaster was peeling off the walls, and the damp was breaking through in green, unhealthy blotches. I tried to put on as unconcerned an air as possible, but I had not forgotten the warnings of the lady, even though I disregarded them, and I kept a keen eye upon my two companions. Ferguson appeared to be a morose and silent man, but I could see from the little that he said that he was at least a fellow-countryman.

"Colonel Lysander Stark stopped at last before a low door, which he unlocked. Within was a small, square room, in which the three of us could hardly get at one time. Ferguson remained outside, and the colonel ushered me in.

"We are now," said he, "actually within the hydraulic press, and it would be a particularly unpleasant thing for us if anyone were to turn it on. The ceiling of this small chamber is really the end of the descending piston, and it comes down with the force of many tons upon this metal floor. There are small lateral columns of water outside which receive the force, and which transmit and multiply it in the manner which is familiar to you. The machine goes readily enough, but there is some stiffness in the working of it, and it has lost a little of its force. Perhaps you will have the goodness to look it over and to show us how we can set it right."

"I took the lamp from him, and I examined the machine very thoroughly. It was indeed a gigantic one, and capable of exercising enormous pressure. When I passed outside, however, and pressed down the levers which controlled it, I knew at once by the whishing sound that there was a slight leakage, which allowed a regurgitation of water through one of the side cylinders. An examination showed that one of the india-rubber bands which was round the head of a driving-rod had shrunk so as not quite to fill the socket along which it worked. This was clearly the cause of the loss of power, and I pointed it out to my companions, who followed my remarks very carefully and asked several practical questions as to how they should proceed to set it right. When I had made it clear to them, I returned to the main chamber of the machine and took a good look at it to satisfy my own curiosity. It was obvious at a glance that the story of the fuller's-earth was the merest fabrication, for it would be absurd to suppose that so powerful an engine could be designed for so inadequate a purpose. The walls were of wood, but the floor consisted of a large iron trough, and when I came to examine it I could see a crust of metallic deposit all over it. I had stooped and was scraping at this to see exactly what it was when I heard a

muttered exclamation in German and saw the cadaverous face of the colonel looking down at me.

"What are you doing there?" he asked.

"I felt angry at having been tricked by so elaborate a story as that which he had told me. 'I was admiring your fuller's-earth,' said I; 'I think that I should be better able to advise you as to your machine if I knew what the exact purpose was for which it was used.'

"The instant that I uttered the words I regretted the rashness of my speech. His face set hard, and a baleful light sprang up in his grey eyes.

"Very well," said he, 'you shall know all about the machine.' He took a step backward, slammed the little door, and turned the key in the lock. I rushed towards it and pulled at the handle, but it was quite secure, and did not give in the least to my kicks and shoves. 'Hullo!' I yelled. 'Hullo! Colonel! Let me out!'

"And then suddenly in the silence I heard a sound which sent my heart into my mouth. It was the clank of the levers and the swish of the leaking cylinder. He had set the engine at work. The lamp still stood upon the floor where I had placed it when examining the trough. By its light I saw that the black ceiling was coming down upon me, slowly, jerkily, but, as none knew better than myself, with a force which must within a minute grind me to a shapeless pulp. I threw myself, screaming, against the door, and dragged with my nails at the lock. I implored the colonel to let me out, but the remorseless clanking of the levers drowned my cries. The ceiling was only a foot or two above my head, and with my hand upraised I could feel its hard, rough surface. Then it flashed through my mind that the pain of my death would depend very much upon the position in which I met it. If I lay on my face the weight would come upon my spine, and I shuddered to think of that dreadful snap. Easier the other way, perhaps; and yet, had I the nerve to lie and look up at that deadly black shadow wavering down upon me? Already I was unable to stand erect, when my eye caught something which brought a gush of hope back to my heart.

"I have said that though the floor and ceiling were of iron, the walls were of wood. As I gave a last hurried glance around, I saw a thin line of yellow light between two of the boards, which broadened and broadened as a small panel was pushed backward. For an instant I could hardly believe that here was indeed a door which led away from death. The next instant I threw myself through, and lay half-fainting upon the other side. The panel had closed again behind me, but the crash of the lamp, and a few moments afterwards the clang of the two slabs of metal, told me how narrow had been my escape.

"I was recalled to myself by a frantic plucking at my wrist, and I found myself lying upon the stone floor of a narrow corridor, while a woman bent over me and tugged at me with her left hand, while she held a candle in her right. It was the same good friend whose warning I had so foolishly rejected.

"'Come! come!' she cried breathlessly. 'They will be here in a moment. They will see that you are not there. Oh, do not waste the so-precious time, but come!'

"This time, at least, I did not scorn her advice. I staggered to my feet and ran with her along the corridor and down a winding stair. The latter led to another broad passage, and just as we reached it we heard the sound of running feet and the shouting of two voices, one answering the other from the floor on which we were and from the one beneath. My guide stopped and looked about her like one who is at her wit's end. Then she threw open a door which led into a bedroom, through the window of which the moon was shining brightly.

"'It is your only chance,' said she. 'It is high, but it may be that you can jump it.'

"As she spoke a light sprang into view at the further end of the passage, and I saw the lean figure of Colonel Lysander Stark rushing forward with a lantern in one hand and a weapon like a butcher's cleaver in the other. I rushed across the bedroom, flung open the window, and looked out. How quiet and sweet and wholesome the garden looked in the moonlight, and it could not be more than thirty feet down. I clambered out upon the sill, but I hesitated to jump until I should have heard what passed between my saviour and the ruffian who pursued me. If she were ill-used, then at any risks I was determined to go back to her assistance. The thought had hardly flashed through my mind before he was at the door, pushing his way past her; but she threw her arms round him and tried to hold him back.

"'Fritz! Fritz!' she cried in English, 'remember your promise after the last time. You said it should not be again. He will be silent! Oh, he will be silent!'

"'You are mad, Elise!' he shouted, struggling to break away from her. 'You will be the ruin of us. He has seen too much. Let me pass, I say!' He dashed her to one side, and, rushing to the window, cut at me with his heavy weapon. I had let myself go, and was hanging by the hands to the sill, when his blow fell. I was conscious of a dull pain, my grip loosened, and I fell into the garden below.

"I was shaken but not hurt by the fall; so I picked myself up and rushed off among the bushes as hard as I could run, for I understood that I was far from being out of danger yet. Suddenly, however, as I ran, a deadly dizziness and sickness came over me.

I glanced down at my hand, which was **throbbing painfully**, and then, for the first **time**, saw that my thumb had been cut off and that the blood was pouring from my **wound**. I endeavoured to tie my handkerchief round it, but there came a **sudden** buzzing in my ears, and next moment I **fell** in a dead faint among the rose-bushes.

"How **long** I remained **unconscious** I cannot tell. It must have been a very **long time**, for the moon had **sunk**, and a bright morning was **breaking** when I came to myself. My clothes were all sodden with dew, and my coat-sleeve was drenched with blood from my **wounded** thumb. The smarting of it recalled in an instant all the particulars of my night's **adventure**, and I sprang to my feet with the feeling that I might hardly yet be **safe** from my pursuers. But to my **astonishment**, when I came to look round me, neither house nor **garden** were to be seen. I had been **lying** in an angle of the hedge close by the highroad, and just a little lower down was a **long building**, which **proved**, upon my approaching it, to be the very station at which I had **arrived** upon the previous night. Were it not for the **ugly wound** upon my hand, all that had passed during those **dreadful** hours might have been an **evil** dream.

"Half dazed, I went into the station and asked about the morning train. There would be one to **Reading** in less than an hour. The same porter was on duty, I **found**, as had been there when I **arrived**. I inquired of him whether he had ever heard of **Colonel** Lysander **Stark**. The name was strange to him. Had he observed a carriage the night before **waiting** for me? No, he had not. Was there a police-station anywhere near? There was one about three miles off.

"It was too far for me to go, weak and **ill** as I was. I determined to **wait** until I got back to town before telling my story to the **police**. It was a little past six when I **arrived**, so I went first to have my **wound** dressed, and then the **doctor** was **kind** enough to bring me along here. I put the **case** into your hands and shall do exactly what you **advise**."

We both sat in silence for some little **time** after listening to this **extraordinary** narrative. Then Sherlock Holmes **pulled** down from the shelf one of the **ponderous commonplace** books in which he placed his **cuttings**.

"Here is an advertisement which will **interest** you," said he. "It appeared in all the papers about a year ago. Listen to this:

'**Lost**, on the 9th inst., Mr. Jeremiah Hayling, aged twenty-six, a hydraulic engineer. Left his **lodgings** at ten o'clock at night, and has not been heard of since. Was dressed in,' etc., etc. Ha! That represents the last **time** that the **colonel** needed to have his **machine** overhauled, I **fancy**."

"**Good heavens!**" **cried** my **patient**. "Then that explains what the

girl said."

"Undoubtedly. It is quite clear that the colonel was a cool and desperate man, who was absolutely determined that nothing should stand in the way of his little game, like those out-and-out pirates who will leave no survivor from a captured ship. Well, every moment now is precious, so if you feel equal to it we shall go down to Scotland Yard at once as a preliminary to starting for Eyford."

Some three hours or so afterwards we were all in the train together, bound from Reading to the little Berkshire village. There were Sherlock Holmes, the hydraulic engineer, Inspector Bradstreet, of Scotland Yard, a plain-clothes man, and myself. Bradstreet had spread an ordnance map of the county out upon the seat and was busy with his compasses drawing a circle with Eyford for its centre.

"There you are," said he. "That circle is drawn at a radius of ten miles from the village. The place we want must be somewhere near that line. You said ten miles, I think, sir."

"It was an hour's good drive."

"And you think that they brought you back all that way when you were unconscious?"

"They must have done so. I have a confused memory, too, of having been lifted and conveyed somewhere."

"What I cannot understand," said I, "is why they should have spared you when they found you lying fainting in the garden. Perhaps the villain was softened by the woman's entreaties."

"I hardly think that likely. I never saw a more inexorable face in my life."

"Oh, we shall soon clear up all that," said Bradstreet. "Well, I have drawn my circle, and I only wish I knew at what point upon it the folk that we are in search of are to be found."

"I think I could lay my finger on it," said Holmes quietly.

"Really, now!" cried the inspector, "you have formed your opinion! Come, now, we shall see who agrees with you. I say it is south, for the country is more deserted there."

"And I say east," said my patient.

"I am for west," remarked the plain-clothes man. "There are several quiet little villages up there."

"And I am for north," said I, "because there are no hills there, and our friend says that he did not notice the carriage go up any."

"Come," cried the inspector, laughing; "it's a very pretty diversity of opinion. We have boxed the compass among us. Who do you give your casting vote to?"

"You are all wrong."

"But we can't all be."

"Oh, yes, you can. This is my point." He placed his finger in the centre of the circle. "This is where we shall find them."

"But the twelve-mile drive?" gasped Hatherley.

"Six out and six back. Nothing simpler. You say yourself that the horse was fresh and glossy when you got in. How could it be that if it had gone twelve miles over heavy roads?"

"Indeed, it is a likely ruse enough," observed Bradstreet thoughtfully. "Of course there can be no doubt as to the nature of this gang."

"None at all," said Holmes. "They are coiners on a large scale, and have used the machine to form the amalgam which has taken the place of silver."

"We have known for some time that a clever gang was at work," said the inspector. "They have been turning out half-crowns by the thousand. We even traced them as far as Reading, but could get no farther, for they had covered their traces in a way that showed that they were very old hands. But now, thanks to this lucky chance, I think that we have got them right enough."

But the inspector was mistaken, for those criminals were not destined to fall into the hands of justice. As we rolled into Eyford Station we saw a gigantic column of smoke which streamed up from behind a small clump of trees in the neighbourhood and hung like an immense ostrich feather over the landscape.

"A house on fire?" asked Bradstreet as the train steamed off again on its way.

"Yes, sir!" said the station-master.

"When did it break out?"

"I hear that it was during the night, sir, but it has got worse, and the whole place is in a blaze."

"Whose house is it?"

"Dr. Becher's."

"Tell me," broke in the engineer, "is Dr. Becher a German, very thin, with a long, sharp nose?"

The station-master laughed heartily. "No, sir, Dr. Becher is an Englishman, and there isn't a man in the parish who has a better-lined waistcoat. But he has a gentleman staying with him, a patient, as I understand, who is a foreigner, and he looks as if a little good Berkshire beef would do him no harm."

The station-master had not finished his speech before we were all hastening in the direction of the fire. The road topped a low hill, and there was a great widespread whitewashed building in front of us, spouting fire at every chink and window, while in the garden in front three fire-engines were vainly striving to keep the flames under.

"That's it!" cried Hatherley, in intense excitement. "There is the gravel-drive, and there are the rose-bushes where I lay. That

second window is the one that I jumped from.”

”Well, at least,” said Holmes, ”you have had your **revenge** upon them. There can be no **question** that it was your oil-lamp which, when it was crushed in the press, set **fire** to the wooden walls, though no **doubt** they were too **excited** in the **chase** after you to observe it at the **time**. Now keep your eyes open in this crowd for your **friends** of last night, though I very much **fear** that they are a **good** hundred miles off by now.”

And Holmes’ **fears** came to be realised, for from that day to this no **word** has ever been heard either of the **beautiful** woman, the **sinister** German, or the morose Englishman. Early that morning a peasant had met a cart containing several people and some very bulky boxes driving rapidly in the direction of **Reading**, but there all traces of the **fugitives** **disappeared**, and even Holmes’ ingenuity failed ever to discover the least **clue** as to their whereabouts.

The **firemen** had been much perturbed at the strange arrangements which they had **found** within, and still more so by discovering a newly **severed** human thumb upon a window-sill of the second floor. About **sunset**, however, their **efforts** were at last **successful**, and they **subdued** the flames, but not before the roof had **fallen** in, and the whole place been reduced to such **absolute ruin** that, **save** some twisted cylinders and **iron** piping, not a trace remained of the machinery which had cost our **unfortunate** acquaintance so dearly. Large masses of nickel and of tin were discovered **stored** in an **out-house**, but no coins were to be **found**, which may have **explained** the **presence** of those bulky boxes which have been already referred to.

How our hydraulic engineer had been conveyed from the **garden** to the spot where he recovered his senses might have remained forever a **mystery** were it not for the soft mould, which told us a very plain **tale**. He had evidently been carried down by two persons, one of whom had **remarkably small** feet and the other unusually large ones. On the whole, it was most probable that the silent Englishman, being less **bold** or less **murderous** than his **companion**, had **assisted** the woman to **bear** the **unconscious** man out of the way of **danger**.

”Well,” said our engineer ruefully as we took our seats to return once more to London, ”it has been a **pretty** business for me! I have **lost** my thumb and I have **lost** a fifty-guinea **fee**, and what have I **gained**?”

”Experience,” said Holmes, **laughing**. ”Indirectly it may be of value, you know; you have only to put it into **words** to **gain** the reputation of being **excellent** company for the remainder of your **existence**.”

X. THE **ADVENTURE** OF THE **NOBLE** BACHELOR

The Lord St. Simon marriage, and its curious termination, have long ceased to be a subject of interest in those exalted circles in which the unfortunate bridegroom moves. Fresh scandals have eclipsed it, and their more piquant details have drawn the gossips away from this four-year-old drama. As I have reason to believe, however, that the full facts have never been revealed to the general public, and as my friend Sherlock Holmes had a considerable share in clearing the matter up, I feel that no memoir of him would be complete without some little sketch of this remarkable episode.

It was a few weeks before my own marriage, during the days when I was still sharing rooms with Holmes in Baker Street, that he came home from an afternoon stroll to find a letter on the table waiting for him. I had remained indoors all day, for the weather had taken a sudden turn to rain, with high autumnal winds, and the Jezail bullet which I had brought back in one of my limbs as a relic of my Afghan campaign throbbed with dull persistence. With my body in one easy-chair and my legs upon another, I had surrounded myself with a cloud of newspapers until at last, saturated with the news of the day, I tossed them all aside and lay listless, watching the huge crest and monogram upon the envelope upon the table and wondering lazily who my friend's noble correspondent could be.

"Here is a very fashionable epistle," I remarked as he entered.

"Your morning letters, if I remember right, were from a fish-monger and a tide-waiter."

"Yes, my correspondence has certainly the charm of variety," he answered, smiling, "and the humbler are usually the more interesting. This looks like one of those unwelcome social summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie." He broke the seal and glanced over the contents.

"Oh, come, it may prove to be something of interest, after all."

"Not social, then?"

"No, distinctly professional."

"And from a noble client?"

"One of the highest in England."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you."

"I assure you, Watson, without affectation, that the status of my client is a matter of less moment to me than the interest of his case. It is just possible, however, that that also may not be wanting in this new investigation. You have been reading the papers diligently of late, have you not?"

"It looks like it," said I ruefully, pointing to a huge bundle in the corner. "I have had nothing else to do."

"It is fortunate, for you will perhaps be able to post me up. I read nothing except the criminal news and the agony column. The

latter is always instructive. But if you have followed recent events so closely you must have read about Lord St. Simon and his wedding?"

"Oh, yes, with the deepest interest."

"That is well. The letter which I hold in my hand is from Lord St. Simon. I will read it to you, and in return you must turn over these papers and let me have whatever bears upon the matter.

This is what he says:

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES:—Lord Backwater tells me that I may place implicit reliance upon your judgment and discretion. I have determined, therefore, to call upon you and to consult you in reference to the very painful event which has occurred in connection with my wedding. Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, is acting already in the matter, but he assures me that he sees no objection to your co-operation, and that he even thinks that it might be of some assistance. I will call at four o'clock in the afternoon, and, should you have any other engagement at that time, I hope that you will postpone it, as this matter is of paramount importance. Yours faithfully, ST. SIMON.'

"It is dated from Grosvenor Mansions, written with a quill pen, and the noble lord has had the misfortune to get a smear of ink upon the outer side of his right little finger," remarked Holmes as he folded up the epistle.

"He says four o'clock. It is three now. He will be here in an hour."

"Then I have just time, with your assistance, to get clear upon the subject. Turn over those papers and arrange the extracts in their order of time, while I take a glance as to who our client is." He picked a red-covered volume from a line of books of reference beside the mantelpiece. "Here he is," said he, sitting down and flattening it out upon his knee. "'Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral.' Hum! 'Arms: Azure, three caltrops in chief over a fess sable. Born in 1846.' He's forty-one years of age, which is mature for marriage. Was Under-Secretary for the colonies in a late administration. The Duke, his father, was at one time Secretary for Foreign Affairs. They inherit Plantagenet blood by direct descent, and Tudor on the distaff side. Ha! Well, there is nothing very instructive in all this. I think that I must turn to you Watson, for something more solid."

"I have very little difficulty in finding what I want," said I, "for the facts are quite recent, and the matter struck me as remarkable. I feared to refer them to you, however, as I knew that you had an inquiry on hand and that you disliked the intrusion of other matters."

"Oh, you mean the little problem of the Grosvenor Square

furniture van. That is quite cleared up now—though, indeed, it was obvious from the first. Pray give me the results of your newspaper selections.”

”Here is the first notice which I can find. It is in the personal column of the Morning Post, and dates, as you see, some weeks back: ‘A marriage has been arranged,’ it says, ‘and will, if rumour is correct, very shortly take place, between Lord Robert St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral, and Miss Hatty Doran, the only daughter of Aloysius Doran. Esq., of San Francisco, Cal., U.S.A.’ That is all.”

”Terse and to the point,” remarked Holmes, stretching his long, thin legs towards the fire.

”There was a paragraph amplifying this in one of the society papers of the same week. Ah, here it is: ‘There will soon be a call for protection in the marriage market, for the present free-trade principle appears to tell heavily against our home product. One by one the management of the noble houses of Great Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from across the Atlantic. An important addition has been made during the last week to the list of the prizes which have been borne away by these charming invaders. Lord St. Simon, who has shown himself for over twenty years proof against the little god’s arrows, has now definitely announced his approaching marriage with Miss Hatty Doran, the fascinating daughter of a California millionaire. Miss Doran, whose graceful figure and striking face attracted much attention at the Westbury House festivities, is an only child, and it is currently reported that her dowry will run to considerably over the six figures, with expectancies for the future. As it is an open secret that the Duke of Balmoral has been compelled to sell his pictures within the last few years, and as Lord St. Simon has no property of his own save the small estate of Birchmoor, it is obvious that the Californian heiress is not the only gainer by an alliance which will enable her to make the easy and common transition from a Republican lady to a British peeress.’”

”Anything else?” asked Holmes, yawning.

”Oh, yes; plenty. Then there is another note in the Morning Post to say that the marriage would be an absolutely quiet one, that it would be at St. George’s, Hanover Square, that only half a dozen intimate friends would be invited, and that the party would return to the furnished house at Lancaster Gate which has been taken by Mr. Aloysius Doran. Two days later—that is, on Wednesday last—there is a curt announcement that the wedding had taken place, and that the honeymoon would be passed at Lord Backwater’s place, near Petersfield. Those are all the notices which appeared before the disappearance of the bride.”

"Before the what?" asked Holmes with a **start**.

"The **vanishing** of the lady."

"When did she **vanish**, then?"

"At the wedding **breakfast**."

"Indeed. This is more **interesting** than it **promised** to be; quite dramatic, in **fact**."

"Yes; it struck me as being a little out of the common."

"They often **vanish** before the **ceremony**, and occasionally during the **honeymoon**; but I cannot call to mind anything quite so prompt as this. **Pray** let me have the details."

"I **warn** you that they are very incomplete."

"Perhaps we may make them less so."

"Such as they are, they are set forth in a single article of a morning paper of yesterday, which I will read to you. It is headed, 'Singular Occurrence at a **Fashionable** Wedding':

"The family of **Lord** Robert St. Simon has been thrown into the greatest **consternation** by the strange and **painful** episodes which have taken place in connection with his wedding. The **ceremony**, as **shortly** announced in the papers of yesterday, occurred on the previous morning; but it is only now that it has been possible to confirm the strange rumours which have been so persistently floating about. In **spite** of the **attempts** of the **friends** to **hush** the matter up, so much **public attention** has now been drawn to it that no **good** purpose can be **served** by affecting to **disregard** what is a common **subject** for conversation.

"The **ceremony**, which was performed at St. George's, Hanover Square, was a very **quiet** one, no one being **present save** the **father** of the **bride**, Mr. Aloysius Doran, the Duchess of Balmoral, **Lord Backwater**, **Lord** Eustace and Lady Clara St. Simon (the **younger brother** and sister of the **bridegroom**), and Lady Alicia Whittington. The whole party proceeded afterwards to the house of Mr. Aloysius Doran, at Lancaster **Gate**, where **breakfast** had been **prepared**. It appears that some little trouble was caused by a woman, whose name has not been ascertained, who endeavoured to **force** her way into the house after the **bridal** party, **alleging** that she had some claim upon **Lord** St. Simon. It was only after a **painful** and **prolonged** scene that she was **ejected** by the **butler** and the footman. The **bride**, who had fortunately entered the house before this **unpleasant** interruption, had sat down to **breakfast** with the **rest**, when she **complained** of a **sudden** indisposition and retired to her room. Her **prolonged absence** having caused some comment, her **father** followed her, but **learned** from her maid that she had only come up to her chamber for an instant, caught up an ulster and bonnet, and **hurried** down to the passage. One of the footmen declared that he had seen a lady **leave** the house thus apparelled, but had **refused** to **credit** that it was his **mistress**,

believing her to be with the company. On ascertaining that his daughter had disappeared, Mr. Aloysius Doran, in conjunction with the bridegroom, instantly put themselves in communication with the police, and very energetic inquiries are being made, which will probably result in a speedy clearing up of this very singular business. Up to a late hour last night, however, nothing had transpired as to the whereabouts of the missing lady. There are rumours of foul play in the matter, and it is said that the police have caused the arrest of the woman who had caused the original disturbance, in the belief that, from jealousy or some other motive, she may have been concerned in the strange disappearance of the bride.”

”And is that all?”

”Only one little item in another of the morning papers, but it is a suggestive one.”

”And it is—”

”That Miss Flora Millar, the lady who had caused the disturbance, has actually been arrested. It appears that she was formerly a danseuse at the Allegro, and that she has known the bridegroom for some years. There are no further particulars, and the whole case is in your hands now—so far as it has been set forth in the public press.”

”And an exceedingly interesting case it appears to be. I would not have missed it for worlds. But there is a ring at the bell, Watson, and as the clock makes it a few minutes after four, I have no doubt that this will prove to be our noble client. Do not dream of going, Watson, for I very much prefer having a witness, if only as a check to my own memory.”

”Lord Robert St. Simon,” announced our page-boy, throwing open the door. A gentleman entered, with a pleasant, cultured face, high-nosed and pale, with something perhaps of petulance about the mouth, and with the steady, well-opened eye of a man whose pleasant lot it had ever been to command and to be obeyed. His manner was brisk, and yet his general appearance gave an undue impression of age, for he had a slight forward stoop and a little bend of the knees as he walked. His hair, too, as he swept off his very curly-brimmed hat, was grizzled round the edges and thin upon the top. As to his dress, it was careful to the verge of foppishness, with high collar, black frock-coat, white waistcoat, yellow gloves, patent-leather shoes, and light-coloured gaiters. He advanced slowly into the room, turning his head from left to right, and swinging in his right hand the cord which held his golden eyeglasses.

”Good-day, Lord St. Simon,” said Holmes, rising and bowing. ”Pray take the basket-chair. This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson. Draw up a little to the fire, and we will talk this

matter over.”

”A most **painful** matter to me, as you can most **readily** imagine, Mr. Holmes. I have been cut to the quick. I understand that you have already **managed** several delicate **cases** of this sort, **sir**, though I presume that they were hardly from the same class of society.”

”No, I am descending.”

”I **beg pardon**.”

”My last client of the sort was a **king**.”

”Oh, really! I had no idea. And which **king**?”

”The **King** of Scandinavia.”

”What! Had he **lost** his wife?”

”You can understand,” said Holmes suavely, ”that I **extend** to the affairs of my other clients the same **secrecy** which I **promise** to you in yours.”

”Of course! Very right! very right! I’m sure I **beg pardon**. As to my own **case**, I am **ready** to give you any **information** which may **assist** you in forming an opinion.”

”Thank you. I have already **learned** all that is in the **public** prints, nothing more. I presume that I may take it as correct—this article, for example, as to the disappearance of the **bride**.”

Lord St. Simon glanced over it. ”Yes, it is correct, as far as it goes.”

”But it needs a great **deal** of supplementing before anyone could **offer** an opinion. I think that I may **arrive** at my **facts** most directly by **questioning** you.”

”**Pray** do so.”

”When did you first meet Miss Hatty Doran?”

”In San Francisco, a year ago.”

”You were travelling in the States?”

”Yes.”

”Did you become engaged then?”

”No.”

”But you were on a **friendly footing**?”

”I was **amused** by her society, and she could see that I was **amused**.”

”Her **father** is very rich?”

”He is said to be the richest man on the **Pacific** slope.”

”And how did he make his **money**?”

”In mining. He had nothing a few years ago. Then he struck **gold**, invested it, and came up by leaps and **bounds**.”

”Now, what is your own **impression** as to the **young** lady’s—your wife’s character?”

The **nobleman** swung his glasses a little faster and **stared** down into the **fire**. ”You see, Mr. Holmes,” said he, ”my wife was twenty before her **father** became a rich man. During that **time** she

ran free in a mining camp and wandered through woods or **mountains**, so that her education has come from Nature rather than from the schoolmaster. She is what we call in England a tomboy, with a strong nature, **wild** and free, unfettered by any sort of traditions. She is impetuous—volcanic, I was about to say. She is **swift** in making up her mind and **fearless** in carrying out her resolutions. On the other hand, I would not have given her the name which I have the honour to bear—he gave a little **stately** cough—had not I **thought** her to be at **bottom** a **noble** woman. I believe that she is capable of **heroic** self-sacrifice and that anything dishonourable would be repugnant to her.”

”Have you her photograph?”

”I brought this with me.” He opened a locket and **showed** us the **full** face of a very **lovely** woman. It was not a photograph but an ivory miniature, and the artist had brought out the **full** effect of the **lustrous black** hair, the large **dark** eyes, and the **exquisite mouth**. Holmes gazed **long** and **earnestly** at it. Then he closed the locket and handed it back to **Lord St. Simon**.

”The **young** lady came to London, then, and you renewed your acquaintance?”

”Yes, her **father** brought her over for this last London season. I met her several **times**, became engaged to her, and have now married her.”

”She brought, I understand, a **considerable** dowry?”

”A **fair** dowry. Not more than is **usual** in my family.”

”And this, of course, **remains** to you, since the **marriage** is a fait accompli?”

”I really have made no **inquiries** on the **subject**.”

”Very naturally not. Did you see Miss Doran on the day before the wedding?”

”Yes.”

”Was she in **good spirits**?”

”Never better. She kept **talking** of what we should do in our future lives.”

”Indeed! That is very **interesting**. And on the morning of the wedding?”

”She was as bright as possible—at least until after the **ceremony**.”

”And did you observe any **change** in her then?”

”Well, to tell the **truth**, I saw then the first signs that I had ever seen that her temper was just a little sharp. The **incident** however, was too trivial to relate and can have no possible bearing upon the **case**.”

”**Pray** let us have it, for all that.”

”Oh, it is **childish**. She dropped her **bouquet** as we went towards the vestry. She was passing the front pew at the **time**, and it

fell over into the pew. There was a moment's delay, but the gentleman in the pew handed it up to her again, and it did not appear to be the worse for the fall. Yet when I spoke to her of the matter, she answered me abruptly; and in the carriage, on our way home, she seemed absurdly agitated over this trifling cause."

"Indeed! You say that there was a gentleman in the pew. Some of the general public were present, then?"

"Oh, yes. It is impossible to exclude them when the church is open."

"This gentleman was not one of your wife's friends?"

"No, no; I call him a gentleman by courtesy, but he was quite a common-looking person. I hardly noticed his appearance. But really I think that we are wandering rather far from the point."

"Lady St. Simon, then, returned from the wedding in a less cheerful frame of mind than she had gone to it. What did she do on re-entering her father's house?"

"I saw her in conversation with her maid."

"And who is her maid?"

"Alice is her name. She is an American and came from California with her."

"A confidential servant?"

"A little too much so. It seemed to me that her mistress allowed her to take great liberties. Still, of course, in America they look upon these things in a different way."

"How long did she speak to this Alice?"

"Oh, a few minutes. I had something else to think of."

"You did not overhear what they said?"

"Lady St. Simon said something about 'jumping a claim.' She was accustomed to use slang of the kind. I have no idea what she meant."

"American slang is very expressive sometimes. And what did your wife do when she finished speaking to her maid?"

"She walked into the breakfast-room."

"On your arm?"

"No, alone. She was very independent in little matters like that. Then, after we had sat down for ten minutes or so, she rose hurriedly, muttered some words of apology, and left the room. She never came back."

"But this maid, Alice, as I understand, deposes that she went to her room, covered her bride's dress with a long ulster, put on a bonnet, and went out."

"Quite so. And she was afterwards seen walking into Hyde Park in company with Flora Millar, a woman who is now in custody, and who had already made a disturbance at Mr. Doran's house that morning."

"Ah, yes. I should like a few particulars as to this young lady,

and your relations to her.”

Lord St. Simon shrugged his **shoulders** and raised his eyebrows.

”We have been on a **friendly footing** for some years—I may say on a very **friendly footing**. She used to be at the **Allegro**. I have not **treated** her ungenerously, and she had no just cause of **complaint** against me, but you know what women are, Mr. Holmes. Flora was a **dear** little thing, but exceedingly hot-headed and devotedly attached to me. She wrote me **dreadful letters** when she heard that I was about to be married, and, to tell the **truth**, the **reason** why I had the **marriage** celebrated so quietly was that I **feared** lest there might be a **scandal** in the **church**. She came to Mr. Doran’s door just after we returned, and she endeavoured to push her way in, uttering very abusive expressions towards my wife, and even **threatening** her, but I had **foreseen** the **possibility** of something of the sort, and I had two **police fellows** there in private clothes, who soon pushed her out again. She was **quiet** when she saw that there was no **good** in making a **row**.”

”Did your wife hear all this?”

”No, thank **goodness**, she did not.”

”And she was seen walking with this very woman afterwards?”

”Yes. That is what Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, looks upon as so serious. It is **thought** that Flora decoyed my wife out and laid some **terrible** trap for her.”

”Well, it is a possible supposition.”

”You think so, too?”

”I did not say a probable one. But you do not yourself look upon this as likely?”

”I do not think Flora would **hurt** a fly.”

”Still, **jealousy** is a strange transformer of characters. **Pray** what is your own **theory** as to what took place?”

”Well, really, I came to **seek** a **theory**, not to propound one. I have given you all the **facts**. Since you ask me, however, I may say that it has occurred to me as possible that the **excitement** of this affair, the **consciousness** that she had made so **immense** a social stride, had the effect of causing some little **nervous disturbance** in my wife.”

”In short, that she had become **suddenly** deranged?”

”Well, really, when I consider that she has turned her back—I will not say upon me, but upon so much that many have **aspired** to without success—I can hardly **explain** it in any other fashion.”

”Well, certainly that is also a conceivable **hypothesis**,” said Holmes, **smiling**. ”And now, Lord St. Simon, I think that I have nearly all my data. May I ask whether you were seated at the breakfast-table so that you could see out of the window?”

”We could see the other side of the road and the Park.”

"Quite so. Then I do not think that I need to **detain** you longer. I shall **communicate** with you."

"Should you be **fortunate** enough to solve this **problem**," said our client, rising.

"I have solved it."

"Eh? What was that?"

"I say that I have solved it."

"Where, then, is my wife?"

"That is a detail which I shall speedily **supply**."

Lord St. Simon shook his head. "I am **afraid** that it will take wiser heads than yours or mine," he remarked, and bowing in a **stately**, old-fashioned manner he **departed**.

"It is very **good** of Lord St. Simon to honour my head by putting it on a **level** with his own," said Sherlock Holmes, **laughing**. "I think that I shall have a **whisky** and soda and a cigar after all this cross-questioning. I had formed my conclusions as to the **case** before our client came into the room."

"My **dear** Holmes!"

"I have notes of several similar **cases**, though none, as I remarked before, which were quite as prompt. My whole **examination served** to turn my **conjecture** into a **certainty**. Circumstantial evidence is occasionally very **convincing**, as when you find a trout in the milk, to **quote** Thoreau's example."

"But I have heard all that you have heard."

"Without, however, the **knowledge** of pre-existing **cases** which serves me so well. There was a parallel instance in Aberdeen some years back, and something on very much the same lines at Munich the year after the Franco-Prussian **War**. It is one of these cases—but, hullo, here is Lestrade! Good-afternoon, Lestrade! You will find an **extra** tumbler upon the sideboard, and there are cigars in the box."

The **official** detective was attired in a pea-jacket and cravat, which gave him a decidedly nautical appearance, and he carried a **black** canvas bag in his hand. With a short greeting he seated himself and lit the cigar which had been **offered** to him.

"What's up, then?" asked Holmes with a **twinkle** in his eye. "You look dissatisfied."

"And I feel dissatisfied. It is this infernal St. Simon **marriage case**. I can make neither head nor tail of the business."

"Really! You **surprise** me."

"Who ever heard of such a mixed affair? Every **clue** seems to **slip** through my fingers. I have been at work upon it all day."

"And very wet it seems to have made you," said Holmes laying his hand upon the arm of the pea-jacket.

"Yes, I have been dragging the Serpentine."

"In heaven's name, what for?"

"In search of the body of Lady St. Simon."

Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair and **laughed heartily**.

"Have you dragged the basin of Trafalgar Square fountain?" he asked.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Because you have just as **good** a **chance** of finding this lady in the one as in the other."

Lestrade **shot** an **angry** glance at my **companion**. "I suppose you know all about it," he **sarled**.

"Well, I have only just heard the **facts**, but my mind is made up."

"Oh, indeed! Then you think that the Serpentine plays no part in the matter?"

"I think it very unlikely."

"Then perhaps you will kindly **explain** how it is that we **found** this in it?" He opened his bag as he **spoke**, and **tumbled** onto the floor a wedding-dress of watered **silk**, a pair of **white satin** shoes and a **bride's** wreath and veil, all discoloured and **soaked** in water. "There," said he, putting a new wedding-ring upon the **top** of the pile. "There is a little nut for you to **crack**, **Master Holmes**."

"Oh, indeed!" said my **friend**, blowing **blue** rings into the air.

"You dragged them from the Serpentine?"

"No. They were **found** floating near the **margin** by a park-keeper. They have been identified as her clothes, and it seemed to me that if the clothes were there the body would not be far off."

"By the same **brilliant reasoning**, every man's body is to be **found** in the neighbourhood of his wardrobe. And **pray** what did you **hope** to **arrive** at through this?"

"At some evidence **implicating** Flora Millar in the disappearance."

"I am **afraid** that you will find it **difficult**."

"Are you, indeed, now?" **cried** Lestrade with some **bitterness**. "I am **afraid**, Holmes, that you are not very practical with your deductions and your inferences. You have made two **blunders** in as many minutes. This dress does **implicate** Miss Flora Millar."

"And how?"

"In the dress is a pocket. In the pocket is a card-case. In the card-case is a note. And here is the very note." He **slapped** it down upon the table in front of him. "Listen to this: 'You will see me when all is **ready**. Come at once. F.H.M.' Now my **theory** all along has been that Lady St. Simon was decoyed away by Flora Millar, and that she, with **confederates**, no **doubt**, was **responsible** for her disappearance. Here, signed with her initials, is the very note which was no **doubt** quietly **slipped** into her hand at the door and which **lured** her within their reach."

"Very **good**, Lestrade," said Holmes, **laughing**. "You really are

very fine indeed. Let me see it." He took up the paper in a listless way, but his attention instantly became riveted, and he gave a little cry of satisfaction. "This is indeed important," said he.

"Ha! you find it so?"

"Extremely so. I congratulate you warmly."

Lestrade rose in his triumph and bent his head to look. "Why," he shrieked, "you're looking at the wrong side!"

"On the contrary, this is the right side."

"The right side? You're mad! Here is the note written in pencil over here."

"And over here is what appears to be the fragment of a hotel bill, which interests me deeply."

"There's nothing in it. I looked at it before," said Lestrade.

"Oct. 4th, rooms 8s., breakfast 2s. 6d., cocktail 1s., lunch 2s. 6d., glass sherry, 8d.' I see nothing in that."

"Very likely not. It is most important, all the same. As to the note, it is important also, or at least the initials are, so I congratulate you again."

"I've wasted time enough," said Lestrade, rising. "I believe in hard work and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine theories. Good-day, Mr. Holmes, and we shall see which gets to the bottom of the matter first." He gathered up the garments, thrust them into the bag, and made for the door.

"Just one hint to you, Lestrade," drawled Holmes before his rival vanished; "I will tell you the true solution of the matter. Lady St. Simon is a myth. There is not, and there never has been, any such person."

Lestrade looked sadly at my companion. Then he turned to me, tapped his forehead three times, shook his head solemnly, and hurried away.

He had hardly shut the door behind him when Holmes rose to put on his overcoat. "There is something in what the fellow says about outdoor work," he remarked, "so I think, Watson, that I must leave you to your papers for a little."

It was after five o'clock when Sherlock Holmes left me, but I had no time to be lonely, for within an hour there arrived a confectioner's man with a very large flat box. This he unpacked with the help of a youth whom he had brought with him, and presently, to my very great astonishment, a quite epicurean little cold supper began to be laid out upon our humble lodging-house mahogany. There were a couple of brace of cold woodcock, a pheasant, a pâté de foie gras pie with a group of ancient and cobwebby bottles. Having laid out all these luxuries, my two visitors vanished away, like the genii of the Arabian Nights, with no explanation save that the things had been paid

for and were ordered to this address.

Just before nine o'clock Sherlock Holmes stepped briskly into the room. His **features** were gravely set, but there was a light in his eye which made me think that he had not been **disappointed** in his conclusions.

"They have laid the supper, then," he said, rubbing his hands.

"You seem to **expect** company. They have laid for five."

"Yes, I **fancy** we may have some company dropping in," said he. "I am **surprised** that Lord St. Simon has not already **arrived**. Ha! I **fancy** that I hear his step now upon the stairs."

It was indeed our **visitor** of the afternoon who came bustling in, dangling his glasses more vigorously than ever, and with a very perturbed expression upon his **aristocratic features**.

"My **messenger** reached you, then?" asked Holmes.

"Yes, and I **confess** that the **contents** **startled** me beyond **measure**.

Have you **good authority** for what you say?"

"The best possible."

Lord St. Simon sank into a chair and passed his hand over his forehead.

"What will the **Duke** say," he murmured, "when he hears that one of the family has been **subjected** to such **humiliation**?"

"It is the purest **accident**. I cannot allow that there is any **humiliation**."

"Ah, you look on these things from another standpoint."

"I fail to see that anyone is to **blame**. I can hardly see how the lady could have acted otherwise, though her **abrupt** method of doing it was undoubtedly to be **regretted**. Having no **mother**, she had no one to **advise** her at such a **crisis**."

"It was a slight, **sir**, a **public** slight," said Lord St. Simon, tapping his fingers upon the table.

"You must make allowance for this poor girl, placed in so **unprecedented** a position."

"I will make no allowance. I am very **angry** indeed, and I have been shamefully used."

"I think that I heard a ring," said Holmes. "Yes, there are steps on the **landing**. If I cannot **persuade** you to take a **lenient** view of the matter, Lord St. Simon, I have brought an **advocate** here who may be more **successful**." He opened the door and ushered in a lady and **gentleman**. "Lord St. Simon," said he "allow me to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hay Moulton. The lady, I think, you have already met."

At the sight of these **newcomers** our client had sprung from his seat and stood very erect, with his eyes cast down and his hand thrust into the breast of his frock-coat, a picture of **offended dignity**. The lady had taken a quick step **forward** and had held out her hand to him, but he still **refused** to raise his eyes. It was

as well for his resolution, perhaps, for her pleading face was one which it was hard to resist.

"You're angry, Robert," said she. "Well, I guess you have every cause to be."

"Pray make no apology to me," said Lord St. Simon bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I know that I have treated you real bad and that I should have spoken to you before I went; but I was kind of rattled, and from the time when I saw Frank here again I just didn't know what I was doing or saying. I only wonder I didn't fall down and do a faint right there before the altar."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Moulton, you would like my friend and me to leave the room while you explain this matter?"

"If I may give an opinion," remarked the strange gentleman,

"we've had just a little too much secrecy over this business already. For my part, I should like all Europe and America to hear the rights of it." He was a small, wiry, sunburnt man, clean-shaven, with a sharp face and alert manner.

"Then I'll tell our story right away," said the lady. "Frank here and I met in '84, in McQuire's camp, near the Rockies, where pa was working a claim. We were engaged to each other, Frank and I; but then one day father struck a rich pocket and made a pile, while poor Frank here had a claim that petered out and came to nothing. The richer pa grew the poorer was Frank; so at last pa wouldn't hear of our engagement lasting any longer, and he took me away to 'Frisco. Frank wouldn't throw up his hand, though; so he followed me there, and he saw me without pa knowing anything about it. It would only have made him mad to know, so we just fixed it all up for ourselves. Frank said that he would go and make his pile, too, and never come back to claim me until he had as much as pa. So then I promised to wait for him to the end of time and pledged myself not to marry anyone else while he lived. 'Why shouldn't we be married right away, then,' said he, 'and then I will feel sure of you; and I won't claim to be your husband until I come back?' Well, we talked it over, and he had fixed it all up so nicely, with a clergyman all ready in waiting, that we just did it right there; and then Frank went off to seek his fortune, and I went back to pa.

"The next I heard of Frank was that he was in Montana, and then he went prospecting in Arizona, and then I heard of him from New Mexico. After that came a long newspaper story about how a miners' camp had been attacked by Apache Indians, and there was my Frank's name among the killed. I fainted dead away, and I was very sick for months after. Pa thought I had a decline and took me to half the doctors in 'Frisco. Not a word of news came for a year and more, so that I never doubted that Frank was really dead. Then Lord St. Simon came to 'Frisco, and we came to London,

and a marriage was arranged, and pa was very pleased, but I felt all the time that no man on this earth would ever take the place in my heart that had been given to my poor Frank.

"Still, if I had married Lord St. Simon, of course I'd have done my duty by him. We can't command our love, but we can our actions. I went to the altar with him with the intention to make him just as good a wife as it was in me to be. But you may imagine what I felt when, just as I came to the altar rails, I glanced back and saw Frank standing and looking at me out of the first pew. I thought it was his ghost at first; but when I looked again there he was still, with a kind of question in his eyes, as if to ask me whether I were glad or sorry to see him. I wonder I didn't drop. I know that everything was turning round, and the words of the clergyman were just like the buzz of a bee in my ear. I didn't know what to do. Should I stop the service and make a scene in the church? I glanced at him again, and he seemed to know what I was thinking, for he raised his finger to his lips to tell me to be still. Then I saw him scribble on a piece of paper, and I knew that he was writing me a note. As I passed his pew on the way out I dropped my bouquet over to him, and he slipped the note into my hand when he returned me the flowers. It was only a line asking me to join him when he made the sign to me to do so. Of course I never doubted for a moment that my first duty was now to him, and I determined to do just whatever he might direct.

"When I got back I told my maid, who had known him in California, and had always been his friend. I ordered her to say nothing, but to get a few things packed and my ulster ready. I know I ought to have spoken to Lord St. Simon, but it was dreadful hard before his mother and all those great people. I just made up my mind to run away and explain afterwards. I hadn't been at the table ten minutes before I saw Frank out of the window at the other side of the road. He beckoned to me and then began walking into the Park. I slipped out, put on my things, and followed him. Some woman came talking something or other about Lord St. Simon to me—seemed to me from the little I heard as if he had a little secret of his own before marriage also—but I managed to get away from her and soon overtook Frank. We got into a cab together, and away we drove to some lodgings he had taken in Gordon Square, and that was my true wedding after all those years of waiting. Frank had been a prisoner among the Apaches, had escaped, came on to 'Frisco, found that I had given him up for dead and had gone to England, followed me there, and had come upon me at last on the very morning of my second wedding."

"I saw it in a paper," explained the American. "It gave the name and the church but not where the lady lived."

"Then we had a talk as to what we should do, and Frank was all

for openness, but I was so ashamed of it all that I felt as if I should like to vanish away and never see any of them again—just sending a line to pa, perhaps, to show him that I was alive. It was awful to me to think of all those lords and ladies sitting round that breakfast-table and waiting for me to come back. So Frank took my wedding-clothes and things and made a bundle of them, so that I should not be traced, and dropped them away somewhere where no one could find them. It is likely that we should have gone on to Paris to-morrow, only that this good gentleman, Mr. Holmes, came round to us this evening, though how he found us is more than I can think, and he showed us very clearly and kindly that I was wrong and that Frank was right, and that we should be putting ourselves in the wrong if we were so secret. Then he offered to give us a chance of talking to Lord St. Simon alone, and so we came right away round to his rooms at once. Now, Robert, you have heard it all, and I am very sorry if I have given you pain, and I hope that you do not think very meanly of me.”

Lord St. Simon had by no means relaxed his rigid attitude, but had listened with a frowning brow and a compressed lip to this long narrative.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but it is not my custom to discuss my most intimate personal affairs in this public manner.”

“Then you won’t forgive me? You won’t shake hands before I go?”

“Oh, certainly, if it would give you any pleasure.” He put out his hand and coldly grasped that which she extended to him.

“I had hoped,” suggested Holmes, “that you would have joined us in a friendly supper.”

“I think that there you ask a little too much,” responded his Lordship. “I may be forced to acquiesce in these recent developments, but I can hardly be expected to make merry over them. I think that with your permission I will now wish you all a very good-night.” He included us all in a sweeping bow and stalked out of the room.

“Then I trust that you at least will honour me with your company,” said Sherlock Holmes. “It is always a joy to meet an American, Mr. Moulton, for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes.”

“The case has been an interesting one,” remarked Holmes when our visitors had left us, “because it serves to show very clearly how simple the explanation may be of an affair which at first sight seems to be almost inexplicable. Nothing could be more natural than the sequence of events as narrated by this lady, and nothing

stranger than the result when viewed, for instance, by Mr. Lestrade of Scotland Yard."

"You were not yourself at fault at all, then?"

"From the first, two facts were very obvious to me, the one that the lady had been quite willing to undergo the wedding ceremony, the other that she had repented of it within a few minutes of returning home. Obviously something had occurred during the morning, then, to cause her to change her mind. What could that something be? She could not have spoken to anyone when she was out, for she had been in the company of the bridegroom. Had she seen someone, then? If she had, it must be someone from America because she had spent so short a time in this country that she could hardly have allowed anyone to acquire so deep an influence over her that the mere sight of him would induce her to change her plans so completely. You see we have already arrived, by a process of exclusion, at the idea that she might have seen an American. Then who could this American be, and why should he possess so much influence over her? It might be a lover; it might be a husband. Her young womanhood had, I knew, been spent in rough scenes and under strange conditions. So far I had got before I ever heard Lord St. Simon's narrative. When he told us of a man in a pew, of the change in the bride's manner, of so transparent a device for obtaining a note as the dropping of a bouquet, of her resort to her confidential maid, and of her very significant allusion to claim-jumping—which in miners' parlance means taking possession of that which another person has a prior claim to—the whole situation became absolutely clear. She had gone off with a man, and the man was either a lover or was a previous husband—the chances being in favour of the latter."

"And how in the world did you find them?"

"It might have been difficult, but friend Lestrade held information in his hands the value of which he did not himself know. The initials were, of course, of the highest importance, but more valuable still was it to know that within a week he had settled his bill at one of the most select London hotels."

"How did you deduce the select?"

"By the select prices. Eight shillings for a bed and eightpence for a glass of sherry pointed to one of the most expensive hotels. There are not many in London which charge at that rate. In the second one which I visited in Northumberland Avenue, I learned by an inspection of the book that Francis H. Moulton, an American gentleman, had left only the day before, and on looking over the entries against him, I came upon the very items which I had seen in the duplicate bill. His letters were to be forwarded to 226 Gordon Square; so thither I travelled, and being fortunate enough to find the loving couple at home, I ventured to give them

some paternal **advice** and to point out to them that it would be better in every way that they should make their position a little clearer both to the **general public** and to **Lord St. Simon** in particular. I **invited** them to meet him here, and, as you see, I made him keep the appointment."

"But with no very **good result**," I remarked. "His conduct was certainly not very **gracious**."

"Ah, Watson," said Holmes, **smiling**, "perhaps you would not be very **gracious** either, if, after all the trouble of wooing and wedding, you **found** yourself deprived in an instant of wife and of **fortune**. I think that we may judge **Lord St. Simon** very mercifully and thank our **stars** that we are never likely to find ourselves in the same position. Draw your chair up and hand me my violin, for the only **problem** we have still to solve is how to while away these **bleak** autumnal evenings."

XI. THE **ADVENTURE** OF THE BERYL CORONET

"Holmes," said I as I stood one morning in our bow-window looking down the street, "here is a **madman** coming along. It seems rather sad that his **relatives** should allow him to come out alone."

My **friend** rose lazily from his armchair and stood with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, looking over my **shoulder**. It was a bright, **crisp** February morning, and the snow of the day before still lay deep upon the **ground**, shimmering brightly in the wintry **sun**. Down the centre of Baker Street it had been ploughed into a brown crumbly band by the traffic, but at either side and on the heaped-up edges of the foot-paths it still lay as **white** as when it **fell**. The grey **pavement** had been **cleaned** and scraped, but was still dangerously slippery, so that there were fewer **passengers** than **usual**. Indeed, from the direction of the **Metropolitan** Station no one was coming **save** the single **gentleman** whose eccentric conduct had drawn my **attention**.

He was a man of about fifty, tall, portly, and imposing, with a massive, **strongly marked** face and a commanding figure. He was dressed in a sombre yet rich style, in **black** frock-coat, shining hat, neat brown gaiters, and well-cut pearl-grey trousers. Yet his **actions** were in **absurd** contrast to the **dignity** of his dress and **features**, for he was running hard, with **occasional** little springs, such as a **weary** man gives who is little accustomed to set any **tax** upon his legs. As he ran he jerked his hands up and down, wagged his head, and writhed his face into the most **extraordinary** contortions.

"What on earth can be the matter with him?" I asked. "He is looking up at the numbers of the houses."

"I believe that he is coming here," said Holmes, rubbing his hands.

"Here?"

"Yes; I rather think he is coming to **consult** me professionally. I think that I recognise the **symptoms**. Ha! did I not tell you?" As he **spoke**, the man, puffing and blowing, rushed at our door and **pulled** at our bell until the whole house resounded with the clanging.

A few moments later he was in our room, still puffing, still gesticulating, but with so fixed a look of **grief** and **despair** in his eyes that our **smiles** were turned in an instant to **horror** and **pity**. For a while he could not get his **words** out, but swayed his body and plucked at his hair like one who has been driven to the extreme limits of his **reason**. Then, **suddenly** springing to his feet, he beat his head against the wall with such **force** that we both rushed upon him and tore him away to the centre of the room. Sherlock Holmes pushed him down into the easy-chair and, sitting beside him, patted his hand and chatted with him in the easy, **soothing** tones which he knew so well how to **employ**.

"You have come to me to tell your story, have you not?" said he.

"You are **fatigued** with your **haste**. **Pray wait** until you have recovered yourself, and then I shall be most **happy** to look into any little **problem** which you may **submit** to me."

The man sat for a minute or more with a heaving chest, **fighting** against his emotion. Then he passed his handkerchief over his brow, set his lips tight, and turned his face towards us.

"No **doubt** you think me **mad**?" said he.

"I see that you have had some great trouble," responded Holmes.

"**God** knows I have!—a trouble which is enough to **unseat** my **reason**, so **sudden** and so **terrible** is it. **Public disgrace** I might have faced, although I am a man whose character has never yet borne a **stain**. Private **affliction** also is the lot of every man; but the two coming together, and in so **frightful** a form, have been enough to shake my very soul. Besides, it is not I alone. The very **noblest** in the **land** may **suffer** unless some way be **found** out of this **horrible** affair."

"**Pray** compose yourself, **sir**," said Holmes, "and let me have a clear **account** of who you are and what it is that has befallen you."

"My name," answered our **visitor**, "is probably **familiar** to your ears. I am Alexander Holder, of the banking firm of Holder Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street."

The name was indeed well known to us as belonging to the senior **partner** in the second largest private banking concern in the City of London. What could have **happened**, then, to bring one of the foremost **citizens** of London to this most pitiable pass? We **waited**, all **curiosity**, until with another **effort** he braced himself to tell his story.

"I feel that **time** is of value," said he; "that is why I hastened

here when the police inspector suggested that I should secure your co-operation. I came to Baker Street by the Underground and hurried from there on foot, for the cabs go slowly through this snow. That is why I was so out of breath, for I am a man who takes very little exercise. I feel better now, and I will put the facts before you as shortly and yet as clearly as I can.

"It is, of course, well known to you that in a successful banking business as much depends upon our being able to find remunerative investments for our funds as upon our increasing our connection and the number of our depositors. One of our most lucrative means of laying out money is in the shape of loans, where the security is unimpeachable. We have done a good deal in this direction during the last few years, and there are many noble families to whom we have advanced large sums upon the security of their pictures, libraries, or plate.

"Yesterday morning I was seated in my office at the bank when a card was brought in to me by one of the clerks. I started when I saw the name, for it was that of none other than—well, perhaps even to you I had better say no more than that it was a name which is a household word all over the earth—one of the highest, noblest, most exalted names in England. I was overwhelmed by the honour and attempted, when he entered, to say so, but he plunged at once into business with the air of a man who wishes to hurry quickly through a disagreeable task.

"'Mr. Holder,' said he, 'I have been informed that you are in the habit of advancing money.'

"'The firm does so when the security is good.' I answered.

"'It is absolutely essential to me,' said he, 'that I should have 50,000 pounds at once. I could, of course, borrow so trifling a sum ten times over from my friends, but I much prefer to make it a matter of business and to carry out that business myself. In my position you can readily understand that it is unwise to place one's self under obligations.'

"'For how long, may I ask, do you want this sum?' I asked.

"'Next Monday I have a large sum due to me, and I shall then most certainly repay what you advance, with whatever interest you think it right to charge. But it is very essential to me that the money should be paid at once.'

"'I should be happy to advance it without further parley from my own private purse,' said I, 'were it not that the strain would be rather more than it could bear. If, on the other hand, I am to do it in the name of the firm, then in justice to my partner I must insist that, even in your case, every businesslike precaution should be taken.'

"'I should much prefer to have it so,' said he, raising up a square, black morocco case which he had laid beside his chair.

'You have doubtless heard of the Beryl Coronet?'

"One of the most precious public possessions of the empire,' said I.

"Precisely.' He opened the case, and there, imbedded in soft, flesh-coloured velvet, lay the magnificent piece of jewellery which he had named. 'There are thirty-nine enormous beryls,' said he, 'and the price of the gold chasing is incalculable. The lowest estimate would put the worth of the coronet at double the sum which I have asked. I am prepared to leave it with you as my security.'

"I took the precious case into my hands and looked in some perplexity from it to my illustrious client.

"'You doubt its value?' he asked.

"'Not at all. I only doubt—'

"'The propriety of my leaving it. You may set your mind at rest about that. I should not dream of doing so were it not absolutely certain that I should be able in four days to reclaim it. It is a pure matter of form. Is the security sufficient?'

"'Ample.'

"You understand, Mr. Holder, that I am giving you a strong proof of the confidence which I have in you, founded upon all that I have heard of you. I rely upon you not only to be discreet and to refrain from all gossip upon the matter but, above all, to preserve this coronet with every possible precaution because I need not say that a great public scandal would be caused if any harm were to befall it. Any injury to it would be almost as serious as its complete loss, for there are no beryls in the world to match these, and it would be impossible to replace them. I leave it with you, however, with every confidence, and I shall call for it in person on Monday morning.'

"Seeing that my client was anxious to leave, I said no more but, calling for my cashier, I ordered him to pay over fifty 1000 pound notes. When I was alone once more, however, with the precious case lying upon the table in front of me, I could not but think with some misgivings of the immense responsibility which it entailed upon me. There could be no doubt that, as it was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any misfortune should occur to it. I already regretted having ever consented to take charge of it. However, it was too late to alter the matter now, so I locked it up in my private safe and turned once more to my work.

"When evening came I felt that it would be an imprudence to leave so precious a thing in the office behind me. Bankers' safes had been forced before now, and why should not mine be? If so, how terrible would be the position in which I should find myself! I determined, therefore, that for the next few days I would always

carry the **case backward** and **forward** with me, so that it might never be really out of my reach. With this intention, I called a **cab** and drove out to my house at Streatham, carrying the jewel with me. I did not breathe **freely** until I had taken it upstairs and locked it in the bureau of my dressing-room.

"And now a **word** as to my **household**, Mr. Holmes, for I wish you to thoroughly understand the situation. My groom and my page sleep out of the house, and may be set aside altogether. I have three maid-servants who have been with me a number of years and whose **absolute reliability** is quite above **suspicion**. Another, Lucy Parr, the second waiting-maid, has only been in my service a few months. She came with an **excellent** character, however, and has always given me satisfaction. She is a very **pretty** girl and has attracted **admirers** who have occasionally hung about the place. That is the only **drawback** which we have **found** to her, but we believe her to be a thoroughly **good** girl in every way.

"So much for the **servants**. My family itself is so **small** that it will not take me **long** to describe it. I am a **widower** and have an only son, Arthur. He has been a **disappointment** to me, Mr. Holmes—a **grievous disappointment**. I have no **doubt** that I am myself to **blame**. People tell me that I have **spoiled** him. Very likely I have. When my **dear** wife **died** I felt that he was all I had to **love**. I could not **bear** to see the **smile fade** even for a moment from his face. I have never **denied** him a wish. Perhaps it would have been better for both of us had I been sterner, but I meant it for the best.

"It was naturally my intention that he should **succeed** me in my business, but he was not of a business turn. He was **wild**, wayward, and, to speak the **truth**, I could not **trust** him in the handling of large sums of **money**. When he was **young** he became a member of an **aristocratic** club, and there, having **charming** manners, he was soon the **intimate** of a number of men with **long** purses and expensive habits. He **learned** to play **heavily** at cards and to squander **money** on the turf, until he had again and again to come to me and implore me to give him an **advance** upon his allowance, that he might settle his **debts** of honour. He tried more than once to **break** away from the **dangerous** company which he was keeping, but each **time** the **influence** of his **friend**, Sir George Burnwell, was enough to draw him back again.

"And, indeed, I could not wonder that such a man as Sir George Burnwell should **gain** an **influence** over him, for he has frequently brought him to my house, and I have **found** myself that I could hardly **resist** the **fascination** of his manner. He is older than Arthur, a man of the world to his finger-tips, one who had been everywhere, seen everything, a **brilliant** talker, and a man of great **personal beauty**. Yet when I think of him in **cold** blood, far

away from the glamour of his presence, I am convinced from his cynical speech and the look which I have caught in his eyes that he is one who should be deeply distrusted. So I think, and so, too, thinks my little Mary, who has a woman's quick insight into character.

"And now there is only she to be described. She is my niece; but when my brother died five years ago and left her alone in the world I adopted her, and have looked upon her ever since as my daughter. She is a sunbeam in my house—sweet, loving, beautiful, a wonderful manager and housekeeper, yet as tender and quiet and gentle as a woman could be. She is my right hand. I do not know what I could do without her. In only one matter has she ever gone against my wishes. Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, for he loves her devotedly, but each time she has refused him. I think that if anyone could have drawn him into the right path it would have been she, and that his marriage might have changed his whole life; but now, alas! it is too late—forever too late!"

"Now, Mr. Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof, and I shall continue with my miserable story.

"When we were taking coffee in the drawing-room that night after dinner, I told Arthur and Mary my experience, and of the precious treasure which we had under our roof, suppressing only the name of my client. Lucy Parr, who had brought in the coffee, had, I am sure, left the room; but I cannot swear that the door was closed. Mary and Arthur were much interested and wished to see the famous coronet, but I thought it better not to disturb it.

"Where have you put it?" asked Arthur.

"In my own bureau."

"Well, I hope to goodness the house won't be burgled during the night," said he.

"It is locked up," I answered.

"Oh, any old key will fit that bureau. When I was a youngster I have opened it myself with the key of the box-room cupboard."

"He often had a wild way of talking, so that I thought little of what he said. He followed me to my room, however, that night with a very grave face.

"Look here, dad," said he with his eyes cast down, "can you let me have 200 pounds?"

"No, I cannot!" I answered sharply. "I have been far too generous with you in money matters."

"You have been very kind," said he, "but I must have this money, or else I can never show my face inside the club again."

"And a very good thing, too!" I cried.

"Yes, but you would not have me leave it a dishonoured man," said he. "I could not bear the disgrace. I must raise the money in some way, and if you will not let me have it, then I must try

other means.'

"I was very **angry**, for this was the third **demand** during the month. 'You shall not have a farthing from me,' I **cried**, on which he bowed and left the room without another **word**.

"When he was gone I unlocked my bureau, made sure that my **treasure** was **safe**, and locked it again. Then I **started** to go round the house to see that all was secure—a duty which I usually **leave** to Mary but which I **thought** it well to perform myself that night. As I came down the stairs I saw Mary herself at the side window of the hall, which she closed and fastened as I approached.

"'Tell me, dad,' said she, looking, I **thought**, a little **disturbed**, 'did you give Lucy, the maid, **leave** to go out to-night?'

"'Certainly not.'

"'She came in just now by the back door. I have no **doubt** that she has only been to the side **gate** to see someone, but I think that it is hardly **safe** and should be stopped.'

"'You must speak to her in the morning, or I will if you **prefer** it. Are you sure that everything is fastened?'

"'Quite sure, dad.'

"'Then, good-night.' I **kissed** her and went up to my bedroom again, where I was soon asleep.

"I am endeavouring to tell you everything, Mr. Holmes, which may have any bearing upon the **case**, but I **beg** that you will **question** me upon any point which I do not make clear."

"On the **contrary**, your **statement** is **singularly** lucid."

"I come to a part of my story now in which I should wish to be particularly so. I am not a very heavy sleeper, and the **anxiety** in my mind tended, no **doubt**, to make me even less so than **usual**. About two in the morning, then, I was awakened by some sound in the house. It had ceased ere I was wide awake, but it had left an **impression** behind it as though a window had gently closed somewhere. I lay listening with all my ears. **Suddenly**, to my **horror**, there was a distinct sound of footsteps moving softly in the next room. I **slipped** out of bed, all palpitating with **fear**, and peeped round the corner of my dressing-room door.

"'Arthur!' I **screamed**, 'you **villain!** you **thief!** How **dare** you touch that coronet?'

"The gas was half up, as I had left it, and my **unhappy boy**, dressed only in his shirt and trousers, was standing beside the light, holding the coronet in his hands. He appeared to be **wrenching** at it, or bending it with all his **strength**. At my **cry** he dropped it from his grasp and turned as pale as **death**. I snatched it up and examined it. One of the **gold** corners, with three of the beryls in it, was missing.

""You blackguard!" I **shouted**, beside myself with **rage**. 'You have **destroyed** it! You have dishonoured me forever! Where are the jewels which you have **stolen**?'

""**'Stolen!'** he **cried**.

""Yes, **thief!**' I roared, shaking him by the **shoulder**.

""There are none missing. There cannot be any missing,' said he.

""There are three missing. And you know where they are. Must I call you a **liar** as well as a **thief**? Did I not see you trying to tear off another piece?"

""You have called me names enough,' said he, 'I will not stand it any longer. I shall not say another **word** about this business, since you have **chosen** to **insult** me. I will **leave** your house in the morning and make my own way in the world.'

""You shall **leave** it in the hands of the **police!**' I **cried** half-mad with **grief** and **rage**. 'I shall have this matter probed to the **bottom**.'

""You shall **learn** nothing from me,' said he with a **passion** such as I should not have **thought** was in his nature. 'If you choose to call the **police**, let the **police** find what they can.'

"By this **time** the whole house was astir, for I had raised my voice in my **anger**. Mary was the first to rush into my room, and, at the sight of the coronet and of Arthur's face, she read the whole story and, with a **scream**, **fell** down **senseless** on the **ground**. I sent the house-maid for the **police** and put the **investigation** into their hands at once. When the **inspector** and a **constable** entered the house, Arthur, who had stood sullenly with his arms folded, asked me whether it was my intention to charge him with **theft**. I answered that it had ceased to be a private matter, but had become a **public** one, since the **ruined** coronet was national property. I was determined that the **law** should have its way in everything.

""At least,' said he, 'you will not have me **arrested** at once. It would be to your **advantage** as well as mine if I might **leave** the house for five minutes.'

""That you may get away, or perhaps that you may **conceal** what you have **stolen**,' said I. And then, realising the **dreadful** position in which I was placed, I implored him to remember that not only my honour but that of one who was far greater than I was at stake; and that he **threatened** to raise a **scandal** which would convulse the **nation**. He might avert it all if he would but tell me what he had done with the three missing **stones**.

""You may as well face the matter,' said I; 'you have been caught in the act, and no **confession** could make your **guilt** more **heinous**. If you but make such **reparation** as is in your power, by telling us where the beryls are, all shall be **forgiven** and **forgotten**.'

""Keep your forgiveness for those who ask for it,' he answered,

turning away from me with a sneer. I saw that he was too hardened for any words of mine to influence him. There was but one way for it. I called in the inspector and gave him into custody. A search was made at once not only of his person but of his room and of every portion of the house where he could possibly have concealed the gems; but no trace of them could be found, nor would the wretched boy open his mouth for all our persuasions and our threats. This morning he was removed to a cell, and I, after going through all the police formalities, have hurried round to you to implore you to use your skill in unravelling the matter. The police have openly confessed that they can at present make nothing of it. You may go to any expense which you think necessary. I have already offered a reward of 1000 pounds. My God, what shall I do! I have lost my honour, my gems, and my son in one night. Oh, what shall I do!"

He put a hand on either side of his head and rocked himself to and fro, droning to himself like a child whose grief has got beyond words.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for some few minutes, with his brows knitted and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

"Do you receive much company?" he asked.

"None save my partner with his family and an occasional friend of Arthur's. Sir George Burnwell has been several times lately. No one else, I think."

"Do you go out much in society?"

"Arthur does. Mary and I stay at home. We neither of us care for it."

"That is unusual in a young girl."

"She is of a quiet nature. Besides, she is not so very young. She is four-and-twenty."

"This matter, from what you say, seems to have been a shock to her also."

"Terrible! She is even more affected than I."

"You have neither of you any doubt as to your son's guilt?"

"How can we have when I saw him with my own eyes with the coronet in his hands."

"I hardly consider that a conclusive proof. Was the remainder of the coronet at all injured?"

"Yes, it was twisted."

"Do you not think, then, that he might have been trying to straighten it?"

"God bless you! You are doing what you can for him and for me.

But it is too heavy a task. What was he doing there at all? If his purpose were innocent, why did he not say so?"

"Precisely. And if it were guilty, why did he not invent a lie?"

His silence appears to me to cut both ways. There are several

singular points about the **case**. What did the **police** think of the **noise** which awoke you from your sleep?"

"They considered that it might be caused by Arthur's closing his bedroom door."

"A likely story! As if a man bent on **felony** would **slam** his door so as to wake a **household**. What did they say, then, of the disappearance of these **gems**?"

"They are still sounding the planking and probing the furniture in the **hope** of finding them."

"Have they **thought** of looking outside the house?"

"Yes, they have **shown extraordinary** energy. The whole **garden** has already been minutely examined."

"Now, my **dear sir**," said Holmes, "is it not **obvious** to you now that this matter really **strikes** very much deeper than either you or the **police** were at first inclined to think? It appeared to you to be a simple **case**; to me it seems exceedingly complex. Consider what is involved by your **theory**. You suppose that your son came down from his bed, went, at great **risk**, to your dressing-room, opened your bureau, took out your coronet, **broke** off by **main force** a **small** portion of it, went off to some other place, **concealed** three **gems** out of the thirty-nine, with such skill that nobody can find them, and then returned with the other thirty-six into the room in which he **exposed** himself to the greatest **danger** of being discovered. I ask you now, is such a **theory tenable**?"

"But what other is there?" **cried** the **banker** with a gesture of **despair**. "If his motives were **innocent**, why does he not **explain** them?"

"It is our **task** to find that out," replied Holmes; "so now, if you please, Mr. Holder, we will set off for Streatham together, and devote an hour to glancing a little more closely into details."

My **friend** insisted upon my accompanying them in their **expedition**, which I was **eager** enough to do, for my **curiosity** and **sympathy** were deeply stirred by the story to which we had listened. I **confess** that the **guilt** of the **banker's** son appeared to me to be as **obvious** as it did to his **unhappy father**, but still I had such **faith** in Holmes' **judgment** that I felt that there must be some **grounds** for **hope** as **long** as he was dissatisfied with the accepted explanation. He hardly **spoke** a **word** the whole way out to the southern suburb, but sat with his chin upon his breast and his hat drawn over his eyes, **sunk** in the deepest **thought**. Our client appeared to have taken fresh heart at the little glimpse of **hope** which had been **presented** to him, and he even **broke** into a desultory chat with me over his business affairs. A short railway **journey** and a shorter walk brought us to Fairbank, the **modest** residence of the great financier.

Fairbank was a good-sized square house of white stone, standing back a little from the road. A double carriage-sweep, with a snow-clad lawn, stretched down in front to two large iron gates which closed the entrance. On the right side was a small wooden thicket, which led into a narrow path between two neat hedges stretching from the road to the kitchen door, and forming the tradesmen's entrance. On the left ran a lane which led to the stables, and was not itself within the grounds at all, being a public, though little used, thoroughfare. Holmes left us standing at the door and walked slowly all round the house, across the front, down the tradesmen's path, and so round by the garden behind into the stable lane. So long was he that Mr. Holder and I went into the dining-room and waited by the fire until he should return. We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and a young lady came in. She was rather above the middle height, slim, with dark hair and eyes, which seemed the darker against the absolute pallor of her skin. I do not think that I have ever seen such deadly paleness in a woman's face. Her lips, too, were bloodless, but her eyes were flushed with crying. As she swept silently into the room she impressed me with a greater sense of grief than the banker had done in the morning, and it was the more striking in her as she was evidently a woman of strong character, with immense capacity for self-restraint. Disregarding my presence, she went straight to her uncle and passed her hand over his head with a sweet womanly caress.

"You have given orders that Arthur should be liberated, have you not, dad?" she asked.

"No, no, my girl, the matter must be probed to the bottom."

"But I am so sure that he is innocent. You know what woman's instincts are. I know that he has done no harm and that you will be sorry for having acted so harshly."

"Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?"

"Who knows? Perhaps because he was so angry that you should suspect him."

"How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with the coronet in his hand?"

"Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh, do, do take my word for it that he is innocent. Let the matter drop and say no more. It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in prison!"

"I shall never let it drop until the gems are found—never, Mary! Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences to me. Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman down from London to inquire more deeply into it."

"This gentleman?" she asked, facing round to me.

"No, his friend. He wished us to leave him alone. He is round in

the stable lane now."

"The stable lane?" She raised her dark eyebrows. "What can he hope to find there? Ah! this, I suppose, is he. I trust, sir, that you will succeed in proving, what I feel sure is the truth, that my cousin Arthur is innocent of this crime."

"I fully share your opinion, and I trust, with you, that we may prove it," returned Holmes, going back to the mat to knock the snow from his shoes. "I believe I have the honour of addressing Miss Mary Holder. Might I ask you a question or two?"

"Pray do, sir, if it may help to clear this horrible affair up."

"You heard nothing yourself last night?"

"Nothing, until my uncle here began to speak loudly. I heard that, and I came down."

"You shut up the windows and doors the night before. Did you fasten all the windows?"

"Yes."

"Were they all fastened this morning?"

"Yes."

"You have a maid who has a sweetheart? I think that you remarked to your uncle last night that she had been out to see him?"

"Yes, and she was the girl who waited in the drawing-room, and who may have heard uncle's remarks about the coronet."

"I see. You infer that she may have gone out to tell her sweetheart, and that the two may have planned the robbery."

"But what is the good of all these vague theories," cried the banker impatiently, "when I have told you that I saw Arthur with the coronet in his hands?"

"Wait a little, Mr. Holder. We must come back to that. About this girl, Miss Holder. You saw her return by the kitchen door, I presume?"

"Yes; when I went to see if the door was fastened for the night I met her slipping in. I saw the man, too, in the gloom."

"Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes! he is the green-grocer who brings our vegetables round. His name is Francis Prosper."

"He stood," said Holmes, "to the left of the door—that is to say, farther up the path than is necessary to reach the door?"

"Yes, he did."

"And he is a man with a wooden leg?"

Something like fear sprang up in the young lady's expressive black eyes. "Why, you are like a magician," said she. "How do you know that?" She smiled, but there was no answering smile in Holmes' thin, eager face.

"I should be very glad now to go upstairs," said he. "I shall probably wish to go over the outside of the house again. Perhaps I had better take a look at the lower windows before I go up."

He walked swiftly round from one to the other, pausing only at the large one which looked from the hall onto the **stable** lane. This he opened and made a very **careful examination** of the sill with his **powerful** magnifying lens. "Now we shall go upstairs," said he at last.

The **banker's** dressing-room was a plainly furnished little chamber, with a grey carpet, a large bureau, and a **long** mirror. Holmes went to the bureau first and looked hard at the lock. "Which key was used to open it?" he asked.

"That which my son himself indicated—that of the cupboard of the lumber-room."

"Have you it here?"

"That is it on the dressing-table."

Sherlock Holmes took it up and opened the bureau.

"It is a noiseless lock," said he. "It is no wonder that it did not wake you. This **case**, I presume, contains the coronet. We must have a look at it." He opened the **case**, and taking out the diadem he laid it upon the table. It was a **magnificent** specimen of the jeweller's **art**, and the thirty-six **stones** were the finest that I have ever seen. At one side of the coronet was a **cracked** edge, where a corner holding three **gems** had been **torn** away.

"Now, Mr. Holder," said Holmes, "here is the corner which corresponds to that which has been so unfortunately **lost**. Might I **beg** that you will **break** it off."

The **banker** recoiled in **horror**. "I should not dream of trying," said he.

"Then I will." Holmes **suddenly** bent his **strength** upon it, but without **result**. "I feel it give a little," said he; "but, though I am exceptionally strong in the fingers, it would take me all my **time** to **break** it. An ordinary man could not do it. Now, what do you think would **happen** if I did **break** it, Mr. Holder? There would be a **noise** like a **pistol shot**. Do you tell me that all this **happened** within a few yards of your bed and that you heard nothing of it?"

"I do not know what to think. It is all **dark** to me."

"But perhaps it may **grow** lighter as we go. What do you think, Miss Holder?"

"I **confess** that I still **share** my uncle's **perplexity**."

"Your son had no shoes or slippers on when you saw him?"

"He had nothing on **save** only his trousers and shirt."

"Thank you. We have certainly been favoured with **extraordinary luck** during this **inquiry**, and it will be entirely our own **fault** if we do not **succeed** in clearing the matter up. With your **permission**, Mr. Holder, I shall now **continue** my **investigations** outside."

He went alone, at his own request, for he **explained** that any

unnecessary footmarks might make his task more difficult. For an hour or more he was at work, returning at last with his feet heavy with snow and his features as inscrutable as ever.

"I think that I have seen now all that there is to see, Mr. Holder," said he; "I can serve you best by returning to my rooms."

"But the gems, Mr. Holmes. Where are they?"

"I cannot tell."

The banker wrung his hands. "I shall never see them again!" he cried. "And my son? You give me hopes?"

"My opinion is in no way altered."

"Then, for God's sake, what was this dark business which was acted in my house last night?"

"If you can call upon me at my Baker Street rooms to-morrow morning between nine and ten I shall be happy to do what I can to make it clearer. I understand that you give me carte blanche to act for you, provided only that I get back the gems, and that you place no limit on the sum I may draw."

"I would give my fortune to have them back."

"Very good. I shall look into the matter between this and then. Good-bye; it is just possible that I may have to come over here again before evening."

It was obvious to me that my companion's mind was now made up about the case, although what his conclusions were was more than I could even dimly imagine. Several times during our homeward journey I endeavoured to sound him upon the point, but he always glided away to some other topic, until at last I gave it over in despair. It was not yet three when we found ourselves in our rooms once more. He hurried to his chamber and was down again in a few minutes dressed as a common loafer. With his collar turned up, his shiny, seedy coat, his red cravat, and his worn boots, he was a perfect sample of the class.

"I think that this should do," said he, glancing into the glass above the fireplace. "I only wish that you could come with me, Watson, but I fear that it won't do. I may be on the trail in this matter, or I may be following a will-o'-the-wisp, but I shall soon know which it is. I hope that I may be back in a few hours." He cut a slice of beef from the joint upon the sideboard, sandwiched it between two rounds of bread, and thrusting this rude meal into his pocket he started off upon his expedition. I had just finished my tea when he returned, evidently in excellent spirits, swinging an old elastic-sided boot in his hand. He chucked it down into a corner and helped himself to a cup of tea.

"I only looked in as I passed," said he. "I am going right on."

"Where to?"

"Oh, to the other side of the West End. It may be some time before I get back. Don't wait up for me in case I should be late."

"How are you getting on?"

"Oh, so so. Nothing to complain of. I have been out to Streatham since I saw you last, but I did not call at the house. It is a very sweet little problem, and I would not have missed it for a good deal. However, I must not sit gossiping here, but must get these disreputable clothes off and return to my highly respectable self."

I could see by his manner that he had stronger reasons for satisfaction than his words alone would imply. His eyes twinkled, and there was even a touch of colour upon his sallow cheeks. He hastened upstairs, and a few minutes later I heard the slam of the hall door, which told me that he was off once more upon his congenial hunt.

I waited until midnight, but there was no sign of his return, so I retired to my room. It was no uncommon thing for him to be away for days and nights on end when he was hot upon a scent, so that his lateness caused me no surprise. I do not know at what hour he came in, but when I came down to breakfast in the morning there he was with a cup of coffee in one hand and the paper in the other, as fresh and trim as possible.

"You will excuse my beginning without you, Watson," said he, "but you remember that our client has rather an early appointment this morning."

"Why, it is after nine now," I answered. "I should not be surprised if that were he. I thought I heard a ring."

It was, indeed, our friend the financier. I was shocked by the change which had come over him, for his face which was naturally of a broad and massive mould, was now pinched and fallen in, while his hair seemed to me at least a shade whiter. He entered with a weariness and lethargy which was even more painful than his violence of the morning before, and he dropped heavily into the armchair which I pushed forward for him.

"I do not know what I have done to be so severely tried," said he. "Only two days ago I was a happy and prosperous man, without a care in the world. Now I am left to a lonely and dishonoured age. One sorrow comes close upon the heels of another. My niece, Mary, has deserted me."

"Deserted you?"

"Yes. Her bed this morning had not been slept in, her room was empty, and a note for me lay upon the hall table. I had said to her last night, in sorrow and not in anger, that if she had married my boy all might have been well with him. Perhaps it was thoughtless of me to say so. It is to that remark that she refers

in this note:

"MY DEAREST UNCLE:—I feel that I have brought trouble upon you, and that if I had acted differently this terrible misfortune might never have occurred. I cannot, with this thought in my mind, ever again be happy under your roof, and I feel that I must leave you forever. Do not worry about my future, for that is provided for; and, above all, do not search for me, for it will be fruitless labour and an ill-service to me. In life or in death, I am ever your loving,—MARY.'

"What could she mean by that note, Mr. Holmes? Do you think it points to suicide?"

"No, no, nothing of the kind. It is perhaps the best possible solution. I trust, Mr. Holder, that you are nearing the end of your troubles."

"Ha! You say so! You have heard something, Mr. Holmes; you have learned something! Where are the gems?"

"You would not think 1000 pounds apiece an excessive sum for them?"

"I would pay ten."

"That would be unnecessary. Three thousand will cover the matter. And there is a little reward, I fancy. Have you your check-book? Here is a pen. Better make it out for 4000 pounds."

With a dazed face the banker made out the required check. Holmes walked over to his desk, took out a little triangular piece of gold with three gems in it, and threw it down upon the table.

With a shriek of joy our client clutched it up.

"You have it!" he gasped. "I am saved! I am saved!"

The reaction of joy was as passionate as his grief had been, and he hugged his recovered gems to his bosom.

"There is one other thing you owe, Mr. Holder," said Sherlock Holmes rather sternly.

"Owe!" He caught up a pen. "Name the sum, and I will pay it."

"No, the debt is not to me. You owe a very humble apology to that noble lad, your son, who has carried himself in this matter as I should be proud to see my own son do, should I ever chance to have one."

"Then it was not Arthur who took them?"

"I told you yesterday, and I repeat to-day, that it was not."

"You are sure of it! Then let us hurry to him at once to let him know that the truth is known."

"He knows it already. When I had cleared it all up I had an interview with him, and finding that he would not tell me the story, I told it to him, on which he had to confess that I was right and to add the very few details which were not yet quite clear to me. Your news of this morning, however, may open his lips."

"For heaven's sake, tell me, then, what is this extraordinary mystery!"

"I will do so, and I will show you the steps by which I reached it. And let me say to you, first, that which it is hardest for me to say and for you to hear: there has been an understanding between Sir George Burnwell and your niece Mary. They have now fled together."

"My Mary? Impossible!"

"It is unfortunately more than possible; it is certain. Neither you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you admitted him into your family circle. He is one of the most dangerous men in England—a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience. Your niece knew nothing of such men. When he breathed his vows to her, as he had done to a hundred before her, she flattered herself that she alone had touched his heart. The devil knows best what he said, but at least she became his tool and was in the habit of seeing him nearly every evening."

"I cannot, and I will not, believe it!" cried the banker with an ashen face.

"I will tell you, then, what occurred in your house last night. Your niece, when you had, as she thought, gone to your room, slipped down and talked to her lover through the window which leads into the stable lane. His footmarks had pressed right through the snow, so long had he stood there. She told him of the coronet. His wicked lust for gold kindled at the news, and he bent her to his will. I have no doubt that she loved you, but there are women in whom the love of a lover extinguishes all other loves, and I think that she must have been one. She had hardly listened to his instructions when she saw you coming downstairs, on which she closed the window rapidly and told you about one of the servants' escapade with her wooden-legged lover, which was all perfectly true.

"Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you but he slept badly on account of his uneasiness about his club debts. In the middle of the night he heard a soft tread pass his door, so he rose and, looking out, was surprised to see his cousin walking very stealthily along the passage until she disappeared into your dressing-room. Petrified with astonishment, the lad slipped on some clothes and waited there in the dark to see what would come of this strange affair. Presently she emerged from the room again, and in the light of the passage-lamp your son saw that she carried the precious coronet in her hands. She passed down the stairs, and he, thrilling with horror, ran along and slipped behind the curtain near your door, whence he could see what passed in the hall beneath. He saw her stealthily open the

window, hand out the coronet to someone in the **gloom**, and then closing it once more **hurry** back to her room, passing quite close to where he stood hid behind the curtain.

"As **long** as she was on the scene he could not take any **action** without a **horrible** exposure of the woman whom he **loved**. But the instant that she was gone he realised how crushing a **misfortune** this would be for you, and how all-important it was to set it right. He rushed down, just as he was, in his bare feet, opened the window, sprang out into the snow, and ran down the lane, where he could see a **dark** figure in the moonlight. **Sir** George Burnwell tried to get away, but Arthur caught him, and there was a **struggle** between them, your lad tugging at one side of the coronet, and his **opponent** at the other. In the scuffle, your son struck **Sir** George and cut him over the eye. Then something **suddenly** snapped, and your son, finding that he had the coronet in his hands, rushed back, closed the window, ascended to your room, and had just observed that the coronet had been twisted in the **struggle** and was endeavouring to straighten it when you appeared upon the scene."

"Is it possible?" gasped the **banker**.

"You then roused his **anger** by calling him names at a moment when he felt that he had **deserved** your warmest thanks. He could not **explain** the **true** state of affairs without betraying one who certainly **deserved** little enough consideration at his hands. He took the more chivalrous view, however, and **preserved** her **secret**."

"And that was why she **shrieked** and fainted when she saw the coronet," **cried** Mr. Holder. "Oh, my **God**! what a **blind fool** I have been! And his asking to be allowed to go out for five minutes! The **dear fellow** wanted to see if the missing piece were at the scene of the **struggle**. How **cruelly** I have misjudged him!"

"When I **arrived** at the house," continued Holmes, "I at once went very **carefully** round it to observe if there were any traces in the snow which might help me. I knew that none had **fallen** since the evening before, and also that there had been a strong frost to **preserve impressions**. I passed along the tradesmen's path, but **found** it all trampled down and indistinguishable. Just beyond it, however, at the far side of the kitchen door, a woman had stood and **talked** with a man, whose round **impressions** on one side **showed** that he had a wooden leg. I could even tell that they had been **disturbed**, for the woman had run back swiftly to the door, as was **shown** by the deep toe and light **heel** marks, while Wooden-leg had **waited** a little, and then had gone away. I **thought** at the **time** that this might be the maid and her **sweetheart**, of whom you had already spoken to me, and **inquiry showed** it was so. I passed round the **garden** without seeing anything more than random **tracks**,

which I took to be the **police**; but when I got into the **stable** lane a very **long** and complex story was written in the snow in front of me.

"There was a double line of **tracks** of a booted man, and a second double line which I saw with **delight** belonged to a man with naked feet. I was at once **convinced** from what you had told me that the latter was your son. The first had walked both ways, but the other had run swiftly, and as his tread was **marked** in places over the **depression** of the boot, it was **obvious** that he had passed after the other. I followed them up and **found** they **led** to the hall window, where Boots had **worn** all the snow away while **waiting**. Then I walked to the other end, which was a hundred yards or more down the lane. I saw where Boots had faced round, where the snow was cut up as though there had been a **struggle**, and, **finally**, where a few drops of blood had **fallen**, to **show** me that I was not **mistaken**. Boots had then run down the lane, and another little **smudge** of blood **showed** that it was he who had been **hurt**. When he came to the highroad at the other end, I **found** that the **pavement** had been cleared, so there was an end to that **clue**.

"On entering the house, however, I examined, as you remember, the sill and **framework** of the hall window with my lens, and I could at once see that someone had passed out. I could distinguish the outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in coming in. I was then beginning to be able to form an opinion as to what had occurred. A man had **waited** outside the window; someone had brought the **gems**; the **deed** had been overseen by your son; he had pursued the **thief**; had **struggled** with him; they had each tugged at the coronet, their **united strength** causing **injuries** which neither alone could have effected. He had returned with the prize, but had left a fragment in the grasp of his **opponent**. So far I was clear. The **question** now was, who was the man and who was it brought him the coronet?

"It is an old **maxim** of mine that when you have excluded the **impossible**, whatever **remains**, however improbable, must be the **truth**. Now, I knew that it was not you who had brought it down, so there only remained your niece and the maids. But if it were the maids, why should your son allow himself to be accused in their place? There could be no possible **reason**. As he **loved** his cousin, however, there was an **excellent** explanation why he should **retain** her secret—the more so as the **secret** was a **disgraceful** one. When I remembered that you had seen her at that window, and how she had fainted on seeing the coronet again, my **conjecture** became a **certainty**.

"And who could it be who was her **confederate**? A **lover** evidently, for who else could outweigh the **love** and **gratitude** which she must feel to you? I knew that you went out little, and that your

circle of friends was a very limited one. But among them was Sir George Burnwell. I had heard of him before as being a man of evil reputation among women. It must have been he who wore those boots and retained the missing gems. Even though he knew that Arthur had discovered him, he might still flatter himself that he was safe, for the lad could not say a word without compromising his own family.

"Well, your own good sense will suggest what measures I took next. I went in the shape of a loafer to Sir George's house, managed to pick up an acquaintance with his valet, learned that his master had cut his head the night before, and, finally, at the expense of six shillings, made all sure by buying a pair of his cast-off shoes. With these I journeyed down to Streatham and saw that they exactly fitted the tracks."

"I saw an ill-dressed vagabond in the lane yesterday evening," said Mr. Holder.

"Precisely. It was I. I found that I had my man, so I came home and changed my clothes. It was a delicate part which I had to play then, for I saw that a prosecution must be avoided to avert scandal, and I knew that so astute a villain would see that our hands were tied in the matter. I went and saw him. At first, of course, he denied everything. But when I gave him every particular that had occurred, he tried to bluster and took down a life-preserver from the wall. I knew my man, however, and I clapped a pistol to his head before he could strike. Then he became a little more reasonable. I told him that we would give him a price for the stones he held—1000 pounds apiece. That brought out the first signs of grief that he had shown. 'Why, dash it all!' said he, 'I've let them go at six hundred for the three!' I soon managed to get the address of the receiver who had them, on promising him that there would be no prosecution. Off I set to him, and after much chaffering I got our stones at 1000 pounds apiece. Then I looked in upon your son, told him that all was right, and eventually got to my bed about two o'clock, after what I may call a really hard day's work."

"A day which has saved England from a great public scandal," said the banker, rising. "Sir, I cannot find words to thank you, but you shall not find me ungrateful for what you have done. Your skill has indeed exceeded all that I have heard of it. And now I must fly to my dear boy to apologise to him for the wrong which I have done him. As to what you tell me of poor Mary, it goes to my very heart. Not even your skill can inform me where she is now."

"I think that we may safely say," returned Holmes, "that she is wherever Sir George Burnwell is. It is equally certain, too, that whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than sufficient punishment."

XII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES

"To the man who loves art for its own sake," remarked Sherlock Holmes, tossing aside the advertisement sheet of the Daily Telegraph, "it is frequently in its least important and lowliest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived. It is pleasant to me to observe, Watson, that you have so far grasped this truth that in these little records of our cases which you have been good enough to draw up, and, I am bound to say, occasionally to embellish, you have given prominence not so much to the many causes célèbres and sensational trials in which I have figured but rather to those incidents which may have been trivial in themselves, but which have given room for those faculties of deduction and of logical synthesis which I have made my special province."

"And yet," said I, smiling, "I cannot quite hold myself absolved from the charge of sensationalism which has been urged against my records."

"You have erred, perhaps," he observed, taking up a glowing cinder with the tongs and lighting with it the long cherry-wood pipe which was wont to replace his clay when he was in a disputatious rather than a meditative mood—"you have erred perhaps in attempting to put colour and life into each of your statements instead of confining yourself to the task of placing upon record that severe reasoning from cause to effect which is really the only notable feature about the thing."

"It seems to me that I have done you full justice in the matter," I remarked with some coldness, for I was repelled by the egotism which I had more than once observed to be a strong factor in my friend's singular character.

"No, it is not selfishness or conceit," said he, answering, as was his wont, my thoughts rather than my words. "If I claim full justice for my art, it is because it is an impersonal thing—a thing beyond myself. Crime is common. Logic is rare. Therefore it is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales."

It was a cold morning of the early spring, and we sat after breakfast on either side of a cheery fire in the old room at Baker Street. A thick fog rolled down between the lines of dun-coloured houses, and the opposing windows loomed like dark, shapeless blurs through the heavy yellow wreaths. Our gas was lit and shone on the white cloth and glimmer of china and metal, for the table had not been cleared yet. Sherlock Holmes had been silent all the morning, dipping continuously into the advertisement columns of a succession of papers until at last, having apparently given up his search, he had emerged in no very

sweet temper to lecture me upon my literary shortcomings.

"At the same time," he remarked after a pause, during which he had sat puffing at his long pipe and gazing down into the fire, "you can hardly be open to a charge of sensationalism, for out of these cases which you have been so kind as to interest yourself in, a fair proportion do not treat of crime, in its legal sense, at all. The small matter in which I endeavoured to help the King of Bohemia, the singular experience of Miss Mary Sutherland, the problem connected with the man with the twisted lip, and the incident of the noble bachelor, were all matters which are outside the pale of the law. But in avoiding the sensational, I fear that you may have bordered on the trivial."

"The end may have been so," I answered, "but the methods I hold to have been novel and of interest."

"Pshaw, my dear fellow, what do the public, the great unobservant public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of analysis and deduction! But, indeed, if you are trivial, I cannot blame you, for the days of the great cases are past. Man, or at least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality. As to my own little practice, it seems to be degenerating into an agency for recovering lost lead pencils and giving advice to young ladies from boarding-schools. I think that I have touched bottom at last, however. This note I had this morning marks my zero-point, I fancy. Read it!" He tossed a crumpled letter across to me.

It was dated from Montague Place upon the preceding evening, and ran thus:

"DEAR MR. HOLMES:-I am very anxious to consult you as to whether I should or should not accept a situation which has been offered to me as governess. I shall call at half-past ten to-morrow if I do not inconvenience you. Yours faithfully,

"VIOLET HUNTER."

"Do you know the young lady?" I asked.

"Not I."

"It is half-past ten now."

"Yes, and I have no doubt that is her ring."

"It may turn out to be of more interest than you think. You remember that the affair of the blue carbuncle, which appeared to be a mere whim at first, developed into a serious investigation. It may be so in this case, also."

"Well, let us hope so. But our doubts will very soon be solved, for here, unless I am much mistaken, is the person in question."

As he spoke the door opened and a young lady entered the room. She was plainly but neatly dressed, with a bright, quick face, freckled like a plover's egg, and with the brisk manner of a

woman who has had her own way to make in the world.

"You will **excuse** my troubling you, I am sure," said she, as my **companion** rose to greet her, "but I have had a very strange experience, and as I have no parents or relations of any sort from whom I could ask **advice**, I **thought** that perhaps you would be **kind** enough to tell me what I should do."

"**Pray** take a seat, Miss **Hunter**. I shall be **happy** to do anything that I can to **serve** you."

I could see that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner and **speech** of his new client. He looked her over in his searching fashion, and then composed himself, with his lids drooping and his finger-tips together, to listen to her story.

"I have been a **governess** for five years," said she, "in the family of **Colonel** Spence Munro, but two months ago the **colonel** received an appointment at Halifax, in Nova Scotia, and took his **children** over to America with him, so that I **found** myself without a situation. I advertised, and I answered advertisements, but without **success**. At last the little **money** which I had **saved** began to run short, and I was at my **wit's** end as to what I should do.

"There is a well-known agency for **governesses** in the West End called Westaway's, and there I used to call about once a week in order to see whether anything had turned up which might suit me. Westaway was the name of the founder of the business, but it is really **managed** by Miss Stoper. She sits in her own little office, and the ladies who are **seeking** employment **wait** in an anteroom, and are then **shown** in one by one, when she consults her ledgers and sees whether she has anything which would suit them.

"Well, when I called last week I was **shown** into the little office as **usual**, but I **found** that Miss Stoper was not alone. A prodigiously stout man with a very **smiling** face and a great heavy chin which rolled down in fold upon fold over his throat sat at her **elbow** with a pair of glasses on his **nose**, looking very **earnestly** at the ladies who entered. As I came in he gave quite a **jump** in his chair and turned quickly to Miss Stoper.

"That will do," said he; "I could not ask for anything better.

Capital! capital!" He seemed quite enthusiastic and rubbed his hands together in the most **genial** fashion. He was such a comfortable-looking man that it was quite a pleasure to look at him.

"You are looking for a situation, miss?" he asked.

"Yes, **sir**."

"As **governess**?"

"Yes, **sir**."

"And what **salary** do you ask?"

"I had 4 **pounds** a month in my last place with **Colonel** Spence Munro."

"Oh, tut, tut! sweating-rank sweating!' he cried, throwing his fat hands out into the air like a man who is in a boiling passion. 'How could anyone offer so pitiful a sum to a lady with such attractions and accomplishments?'

"My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine,' said I. 'A little French, a little German, music, and drawing-'

"Tut, tut!' he cried. 'This is all quite beside the question. The point is, have you or have you not the bearing and deportment of a lady? There it is in a nutshell. If you have not, you are not fitted for the rearing of a child who may some day play a considerable part in the history of the country. But if you have why, then, how could any gentleman ask you to condescend to accept anything under the three figures? Your salary with me, madam, would commence at 100 pounds a year.'

"You may imagine, Mr. Holmes, that to me, destitute as I was, such an offer seemed almost too good to be true. The gentleman, however, seeing perhaps the look of incredulity upon my face, opened a pocket-book and took out a note.

"It is also my custom,' said he, smiling in the most pleasant fashion until his eyes were just two little shining slits amid the white creases of his face, 'to advance to my young ladies half their salary beforehand, so that they may meet any little expenses of their journey and their wardrobe.'

"It seemed to me that I had never met so fascinating and so thoughtful a man. As I was already in debt to my tradesmen, the advance was a great convenience, and yet there was something unnatural about the whole transaction which made me wish to know a little more before I quite committed myself.

"May I ask where you live, sir?' said I.

"Hampshire. Charming rural place. The Copper Beeches, five miles on the far side of Winchester. It is the most lovely country, my dear young lady, and the dearest old country-house.'

"And my duties, sir? I should be glad to know what they would be.'

"One child-one dear little romper just six years old. Oh, if you could see him killing cockroaches with a slipper! Smack! smack! smack! Three gone before you could wink!' He leaned back in his chair and laughed his eyes into his head again.

"I was a little startled at the nature of the child's amusement, but the father's laughter made me think that perhaps he was joking.

"My sole duties, then,' I asked, 'are to take charge of a single child?'

"No, no, not the sole, not the sole, my dear young lady,' he cried. 'Your duty would be, as I am sure your good sense would suggest, to obey any little commands my wife might give, provided

always that they were such commands as a lady might with propriety obey. You see no difficulty, heh?"

"I should be happy to make myself useful."

"Quite so. In dress now, for example. We are faddy people, you know—faddy but kind-hearted. If you were asked to wear any dress which we might give you, you would not object to our little whim. Heh?"

"No," said I, considerably astonished at his words.

"Or to sit here, or sit there, that would not be offensive to you?"

"Oh, no."

"Or to cut your hair quite short before you come to us?"

"I could hardly believe my ears. As you may observe, Mr. Holmes, my hair is somewhat luxuriant, and of a rather peculiar tint of chestnut. It has been considered artistic. I could not dream of sacrificing it in this offhand fashion.

"I am afraid that that is quite impossible," said I. He had been watching me eagerly out of his small eyes, and I could see a shadow pass over his face as I spoke.

"I am afraid that it is quite essential," said he. "It is a little fancy of my wife's, and ladies' fancies, you know, madam, ladies' fancies must be consulted. And so you won't cut your hair?"

"No, sir, I really could not," I answered firmly.

"Ah, very well; then that quite settles the matter. It is a pity, because in other respects you would really have done very nicely. In that case, Miss Stoper, I had best inspect a few more of your young ladies."

The manageress had sat all this while busy with her papers without a word to either of us, but she glanced at me now with so much annoyance upon her face that I could not help suspecting that she had lost a handsome commission through my refusal.

"Do you desire your name to be kept upon the books?" she asked.

"If you please, Miss Stoper."

"Well, really, it seems rather useless, since you refuse the most excellent offers in this fashion," said she sharply. "You can hardly expect us to exert ourselves to find another such opening for you. Good-day to you, Miss Hunter." She struck a gong upon the table, and I was shown out by the page.

Well, Mr. Holmes, when I got back to my lodgings and found little enough in the cupboard, and two or three bills upon the table, I began to ask myself whether I had not done a very foolish thing. After all, if these people had strange fads and expected obedience on the most extraordinary matters, they were at least ready to pay for their eccentricity. Very few governesses in England are getting 100 pounds a year. Besides,

what use was my hair to me? Many people are improved by wearing it short and perhaps I should be among the number. Next day I was inclined to think that I had made a mistake, and by the day after I was sure of it. I had almost overcome my pride so far as to go back to the agency and inquire whether the place was still open when I received this letter from the gentleman himself. I have it here and I will read it to you:

”The Copper Beeches, near Winchester.

”DEAR MISS HUNTER:—Miss Stoper has very kindly given me your address, and I write from here to ask you whether you have reconsidered your decision. My wife is very anxious that you should come, for she has been much attracted by my description of you. We are willing to give 30 pounds a quarter, or 120 pounds a year, so as to recompense you for any little inconvenience which our fads may cause you. They are not very exacting, after all. My wife is fond of a particular shade of electric blue and would like you to wear such a dress indoors in the morning. You need not, however, go to the expense of purchasing one, as we have one belonging to my dear daughter Alice (now in Philadelphia), which would, I should think, fit you very well. Then, as to sitting here or there, or amusing yourself in any manner indicated, that need cause you no inconvenience. As regards your hair, it is no doubt a pity, especially as I could not help remarking its beauty during our short interview, but I am afraid that I must remain firm upon this point, and I only hope that the increased salary may recompense you for the loss. Your duties, as far as the child is concerned, are very light. Now do try to come, and I shall meet you with the dog-cart at Winchester. Let me know your train. Yours faithfully, JEPHRO RUCASTLE.’

”That is the letter which I have just received, Mr. Holmes, and my mind is made up that I will accept it. I thought, however, that before taking the final step I should like to submit the whole matter to your consideration.”

”Well, Miss Hunter, if your mind is made up, that settles the question,” said Holmes, smiling.

”But you would not advise me to refuse?”

”I confess that it is not the situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for.”

”What is the meaning of it all, Mr. Holmes?”

”Ah, I have no data. I cannot tell. Perhaps you have yourself formed some opinion?”

”Well, there seems to me to be only one possible solution. Mr. Rucastle seemed to be a very kind, good-natured man. Is it not possible that his wife is a lunatic, that he desires to keep the matter quiet for fear she should be taken to an asylum, and that he humours her fancies in every way in order to prevent an

outbreak?"

"That is a possible solution—in **fact**, as matters stand, it is the most probable one. But in any **case** it does not seem to be a nice **household** for a **young** lady."

"But the **money**, Mr. Holmes, the **money**!"

"Well, yes, of course the **pay** is good—too **good**. That is what makes me **uneasy**. Why should they give you 120 **pounds** a year, when they could have their **pick** for 40 **pounds**? There must be some strong **reason** behind."

"I **thought** that if I told you the circumstances you would understand afterwards if I wanted your help. I should feel so much stronger if I felt that you were at the back of me."

"Oh, you may carry that feeling away with you. I **assure** you that your little **problem** **promises** to be the most **interesting** which has come my way for some months. There is something distinctly novel about some of the **features**. If you should find yourself in **doubt** or in **danger**—"

"**Danger**! What **danger** do you **foresee**?"

Holmes shook his head gravely. "It would cease to be a **danger** if we could define it," said he. "But at any **time**, day or night, a telegram would bring me down to your help."

"That is enough." She rose briskly from her chair with the **anxiety** all swept from her face. "I shall go down to Hampshire quite easy in my mind now. I shall write to Mr. Rucastle at once, sacrifice my poor hair to-night, and **start** for Winchester **to-morrow**." With a few **grateful words** to Holmes she bade us both good-night and bustled off upon her way.

"At least," said I as we heard her quick, firm steps descending the stairs, "she seems to be a **young** lady who is very well able to take care of herself."

"And she would need to be," said Holmes gravely. "I am much **mistaken** if we do not hear from her before many days are past." It was not very **long** before my **friend's prediction** was fulfilled. A fortnight went by, during which I frequently **found** my **thoughts** turning in her direction and wondering what strange side-alley of human experience this **lonely** woman had strayed into. The unusual **salary**, the curious conditions, the light duties, all pointed to something **abnormal**, though whether a fad or a plot, or whether the man were a **philanthropist** or a **villain**, it was quite beyond my powers to determine. As to Holmes, I observed that he sat frequently for half an hour on end, with knitted brows and an abstracted air, but he swept the matter away with a wave of his hand when I mentioned it. "Data! data! data!" he **cried** impatiently. "I can't make bricks without clay." And yet he would always wind up by **muttering** that no sister of his should ever have accepted such a situation.

The telegram which we eventually received came late one night just as I was thinking of turning in and Holmes was settling down to one of those all-night chemical researches which he frequently indulged in, when I would leave him stooping over a retort and a test-tube at night and find him in the same position when I came down to breakfast in the morning. He opened the yellow envelope, and then, glancing at the message, threw it across to me.

"Just look up the trains in Bradshaw," said he, and turned back to his chemical studies.

The summons was a brief and urgent one.

"Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday to-morrow," it said. "Do come! I am at my wit's end. HUNTER."

"Will you come with me?" asked Holmes, glancing up.

"I should wish to."

"Just look it up, then."

"There is a train at half-past nine," said I, glancing over my Bradshaw. "It is due at Winchester at 11:30."

"That will do very nicely. Then perhaps I had better postpone my analysis of the acetones, as we may need to be at our best in the morning."

By eleven o'clock the next day we were well upon our way to the old English capital. Holmes had been buried in the morning papers all the way down, but after we had passed the Hampshire border he threw them down and began to admire the scenery. It was an ideal spring day, a light blue sky, flecked with little fleecy white clouds drifting across from west to east. The sun was shining very brightly, and yet there was an exhilarating nip in the air, which set an edge to a man's energy. All over the countryside, away to the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and grey roofs of the farm-steadings peeped out from amid the light green of the new foliage.

"Are they not fresh and beautiful?" I cried with all the enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street.

But Holmes shook his head gravely.

"Do you know, Watson," said he, "that it is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?"

"They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin

than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.”

”You horrify me!”

”But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard’s blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. Had this lady who appeals to us for help gone to live in Winchester, I should never have had a fear for her. It is the five miles of country which makes the danger. Still, it is clear that she is not personally threatened.”

”No. If she can come to Winchester to meet us she can get away.”

”Quite so. She has her freedom.”

”What CAN be the matter, then? Can you suggest no explanation?”

”I have devised seven separate explanations, each of which would cover the facts as far as we know them. But which of these is correct can only be determined by the fresh information which we shall no doubt find waiting for us. Well, there is the tower of the cathedral, and we shall soon learn all that Miss Hunter has to tell.”

The Black Swan is an inn of repute in the High Street, at no distance from the station, and there we found the young lady waiting for us. She had engaged a sitting-room, and our lunch awaited us upon the table.

”I am so delighted that you have come,” she said earnestly. ”It is so very kind of you both; but indeed I do not know what I should do. Your advice will be altogether invaluable to me.”

”Pray tell us what has happened to you.”

”I will do so, and I must be quick, for I have promised Mr. Rucastle to be back before three. I got his leave to come into town this morning, though he little knew for what purpose.”

”Let us have everything in its due order.” Holmes thrust his long thin legs out towards the fire and composed himself to listen.

”In the first place, I may say that I have met, on the whole, with no actual ill-treatment from Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle. It is only fair to them to say that. But I cannot understand them, and I am not easy in my mind about them.”

”What can you not understand?”

”Their reasons for their conduct. But you shall have it all just as it occurred. When I came down, Mr. Rucastle met me here and

drove me in his dog-cart to the Copper Beeches. It is, as he said, beautifully situated, but it is not beautiful in itself, for it is a large square block of a house, whitewashed, but all stained and streaked with damp and bad weather. There are grounds round it, woods on three sides, and on the fourth a field which slopes down to the Southampton highroad, which curves past about a hundred yards from the front door. This ground in front belongs to the house, but the woods all round are part of Lord Southerton's preserves. A clump of copper beeches immediately in front of the hall door has given its name to the place.

"I was driven over by my employer, who was as amiable as ever, and was introduced by him that evening to his wife and the child. There was no truth, Mr. Holmes, in the conjecture which seemed to us to be probable in your rooms at Baker Street. Mrs. Rucastle is not mad. I found her to be a silent, pale-faced woman, much younger than her husband, not more than thirty, I should think, while he can hardly be less than forty-five. From their conversation I have gathered that they have been married about seven years, that he was a widower, and that his only child by the first wife was the daughter who has gone to Philadelphia. Mr. Rucastle told me in private that the reason why she had left them was that she had an unreasoning aversion to her stepmother. As the daughter could not have been less than twenty, I can quite imagine that her position must have been uncomfortable with her father's young wife.

"Mrs. Rucastle seemed to me to be colourless in mind as well as in feature. She impressed me neither favourably nor the reverse. She was a nonentity. It was easy to see that she was passionately devoted both to her husband and to her little son. Her light grey eyes wandered continually from one to the other, noting every little want and forestalling it if possible. He was kind to her also in his bluff, boisterous fashion, and on the whole they seemed to be a happy couple. And yet she had some secret sorrow, this woman. She would often be lost in deep thought, with the saddest look upon her face. More than once I have surprised her in tears. I have thought sometimes that it was the disposition of her child which weighed upon her mind, for I have never met so utterly spoiled and so ill-natured a little creature. He is small for his age, with a head which is quite disproportionately large. His whole life appears to be spent in an alternation between savage fits of passion and gloomy intervals of sulking. Giving pain to any creature weaker than himself seems to be his one idea of amusement, and he shows quite remarkable talent in planning the capture of mice, little birds, and insects. But I would rather not talk about the creature, Mr. Holmes, and, indeed, he has little to do with my story."

"I am glad of all details," remarked my friend, "whether they seem to you to be relevant or not."

"I shall try not to miss anything of importance. The one unpleasant thing about the house, which struck me at once, was the appearance and conduct of the servants. There are only two, a man and his wife. Toller, for that is his name, is a rough, uncouth man, with grizzled hair and whiskers, and a perpetual smell of drink. Twice since I have been with them he has been quite drunk, and yet Mr. Rucastle seemed to take no notice of it. His wife is a very tall and strong woman with a sour face, as silent as Mrs. Rucastle and much less amiable. They are a most unpleasant couple, but fortunately I spend most of my time in the nursery and my own room, which are next to each other in one corner of the building.

"For two days after my arrival at the Copper Beeches my life was very quiet; on the third, Mrs. Rucastle came down just after breakfast and whispered something to her husband.

"'Oh, yes,' said he, turning to me, 'we are very much obliged to you, Miss Hunter, for falling in with our whims so far as to cut your hair. I assure you that it has not detracted in the tiniest iota from your appearance. We shall now see how the electric-blue dress will become you. You will find it laid out upon the bed in your room, and if you would be so good as to put it on we should both be extremely obliged.'

"The dress which I found waiting for me was of a peculiar shade of blue. It was of excellent material, a sort of beige, but it bore unmistakable signs of having been worn before. It could not have been a better fit if I had been measured for it. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle expressed a delight at the look of it, which seemed quite exaggerated in its vehemence. They were waiting for me in the drawing-room, which is a very large room, stretching along the entire front of the house, with three long windows reaching down to the floor. A chair had been placed close to the central window, with its back turned towards it. In this I was asked to sit, and then Mr. Rucastle, walking up and down on the other side of the room, began to tell me a series of the funniest stories that I have ever listened to. You cannot imagine how comical he was, and I laughed until I was quite weary. Mrs. Rucastle, however, who has evidently no sense of humour, never so much as smiled, but sat with her hands in her lap, and a sad, anxious look upon her face. After an hour or so, Mr. Rucastle suddenly remarked that it was time to commence the duties of the day, and that I might change my dress and go to little Edward in the nursery.

"Two days later this same performance was gone through under exactly similar circumstances. Again I changed my dress, again I

sat in the window, and again I laughed very heartily at the funny stories of which my employer had an immense répertoire, and which he told inimitably. Then he handed me a yellow-backed novel, and moving my chair a little sideways, that my own shadow might not fall upon the page, he begged me to read aloud to him. I read for about ten minutes, beginning in the heart of a chapter, and then suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he ordered me to cease and to change my dress.

"You can easily imagine, Mr. Holmes, how curious I became as to what the meaning of this extraordinary performance could possibly be. They were always very careful, I observed, to turn my face away from the window, so that I became consumed with the desire to see what was going on behind my back. At first it seemed to be impossible, but I soon devised a means. My hand-mirror had been broken, so a happy thought seized me, and I concealed a piece of the glass in my handkerchief. On the next occasion, in the midst of my laughter, I put my handkerchief up to my eyes, and was able with a little management to see all that there was behind me. I confess that I was disappointed. There was nothing. At least that was my first impression. At the second glance, however, I perceived that there was a man standing in the Southampton Road, a small bearded man in a grey suit, who seemed to be looking in my direction. The road is an important highway, and there are usually people there. This man, however, was leaning against the railings which bordered our field and was looking earnestly up. I lowered my handkerchief and glanced at Mrs. Rucastle to find her eyes fixed upon me with a most searching gaze. She said nothing, but I am convinced that she had divined that I had a mirror in my hand and had seen what was behind me. She rose at once.

"'Jephro,' said she, 'there is an impertinent fellow upon the road there who stares up at Miss Hunter.'

"'No friend of yours, Miss Hunter?'" he asked.

"'No, I know no one in these parts.'

"'Dear me! How very impertinent! Kindly turn round and motion to him to go away.'

"'Surely it would be better to take no notice.'

"'No, no, we should have him loitering here always. Kindly turn round and wave him away like that.'

"I did as I was told, and at the same instant Mrs. Rucastle drew down the blind. That was a week ago, and from that time I have not sat again in the window, nor have I worn the blue dress, nor seen the man in the road."

"Pray continue," said Holmes. "Your narrative promises to be a most interesting one."

"You will find it rather disconnected, I fear, and there may prove to be little relation between the different incidents of

which I speak. On the very first day that I was at the Copper Beeches, Mr. Rucastle took me to a **small outhouse** which stands near the kitchen door. As we approached it I heard the sharp rattling of a chain, and the sound as of a large animal moving about.

"Look in here!" said Mr. Rucastle, **showing** me a slit between two planks. 'Is he not a **beauty?**'

"I looked through and was conscious of two **glowing** eyes, and of a **vague** figure huddled up in the **darkness**.

"Don't be **frightened**," said my employer, **laughing** at the **start** which I had given. 'It's only Carlo, my mastiff. I call him mine, but really old Toller, my groom, is the only man who can do anything with him. We feed him once a day, and not too much then, so that he is always as keen as mustard. Toller lets him loose every night, and **God** help the trespasser whom he lays his **fangs** upon. For **goodness**' sake don't you ever on any pretext set your foot over the threshold at night, for it's as much as your life is **worth**.'

"The **warning** was no idle one, for two nights later I **happened** to look out of my bedroom window about two o'clock in the morning. It was a **beautiful** moonlight night, and the lawn in front of the house was silvered over and almost as bright as day. I was standing, **rapt** in the **peaceful beauty** of the scene, when I was aware that something was moving under the shadow of the copper beeches. As it emerged into the moonshine I saw what it was. It was a **giant** dog, as large as a **calf**, **tawny** tinted, with hanging jowl, **black muzzle**, and huge projecting bones. It walked slowly across the lawn and **vanished** into the shadow upon the other side. That **dreadful sentinel** sent a chill to my heart which I do not think that any **burglar** could have done.

"And now I have a very strange experience to tell you. I had, as you know, cut off my hair in London, and I had placed it in a great coil at the **bottom** of my trunk. One evening, after the **child** was in bed, I began to **amuse** myself by examining the furniture of my room and by rearranging my own little things. There was an old chest of drawers in the room, the two upper ones empty and open, the lower one locked. I had **filled** the first two with my linen, and as I had still much to pack away I was naturally annoyed at not having the use of the third drawer. It struck me that it might have been fastened by a mere **oversight**, so I took out my bunch of keys and tried to open it. The very first key fitted to **perfection**, and I drew the drawer open. There was only one thing in it, but I am sure that you would never **guess** what it was. It was my coil of hair.

"I took it up and examined it. It was of the same peculiar tint, and the same thickness. But then the impossibility of the thing

obtruded itself upon me. How could my hair have been locked in the drawer? With trembling hands I undid my trunk, turned out the contents, and drew from the bottom my own hair. I laid the two tresses together, and I assure you that they were identical. Was it not extraordinary? Puzzle as I would, I could make nothing at all of what it meant. I returned the strange hair to the drawer, and I said nothing of the matter to the Rucastles as I felt that I had put myself in the wrong by opening a drawer which they had locked.

"I am naturally observant, as you may have remarked, Mr. Holmes, and I soon had a pretty good plan of the whole house in my head. There was one wing, however, which appeared not to be inhabited at all. A door which faced that which led into the quarters of the Tollers opened into this suite, but it was invariably locked. One day, however, as I ascended the stair, I met Mr. Rucastle coming out through this door, his keys in his hand, and a look on his face which made him a very different person to the round, jovial man to whom I was accustomed. His cheeks were red, his brow was all crinkled with anger, and the veins stood out at his temples with passion. He locked the door and hurried past me without a word or a look.

"This aroused my curiosity, so when I went out for a walk in the grounds with my charge, I strolled round to the side from which I could see the windows of this part of the house. There were four of them in a row, three of which were simply dirty, while the fourth was shuttered up. They were evidently all deserted. As I strolled up and down, glancing at them occasionally, Mr. Rucastle came out to me, looking as merry and jovial as ever.

"'Ah!' said he, 'you must not think me rude if I passed you without a word, my dear young lady. I was preoccupied with business matters.'

"I assured him that I was not offended. 'By the way,' said I, 'you seem to have quite a suite of spare rooms up there, and one of them has the shutters up.'

"He looked surprised and, as it seemed to me, a little startled at my remark.

"'Photography is one of my hobbies,' said he. 'I have made my dark room up there. But, dear me! what an observant young lady we have come upon. Who would have believed it? Who would have ever believed it?' He spoke in a jesting tone, but there was no jest in his eyes as he looked at me. I read suspicion there and annoyance, but no jest.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, from the moment that I understood that there was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know, I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty—a

feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place. They talk of woman's instinct; perhaps it was woman's instinct which gave me that feeling. At any rate, it was there, and I was keenly on the lookout for any chance to pass the forbidden door.

"It was only yesterday that the chance came. I may tell you that, besides Mr. Rucastle, both Toller and his wife find something to do in these deserted rooms, and I once saw him carrying a large black linen bag with him through the door. Recently he has been drinking hard, and yesterday evening he was very drunk; and when I came upstairs there was the key in the door. I have no doubt at all that he had left it there. Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle were both downstairs, and the child was with them, so that I had an admirable opportunity. I turned the key gently in the lock, opened the door, and slipped through.

"There was a little passage in front of me, unpapered and uncarpeted, which turned at a right angle at the farther end. Round this corner were three doors in a line, the first and third of which were open. They each led into an empty room, dusty and cheerless, with two windows in the one and one in the other, so thick with dirt that the evening light glimmered dimly through them. The centre door was closed, and across the outside of it had been fastened one of the broad bars of an iron bed, padlocked at one end to a ring in the wall, and fastened at the other with stout cord. The door itself was locked as well, and the key was not there. This barricaded door corresponded clearly with the shuttered window outside, and yet I could see by the glimmer from beneath it that the room was not in darkness. Evidently there was a skylight which let in light from above. As I stood in the passage gazing at the sinister door and wondering what secret it might veil, I suddenly heard the sound of steps within the room and saw a shadow pass backward and forward against the little slit of dim light which shone out from under the door. A mad, unreasoning terror rose up in me at the sight, Mr. Holmes. My overstrung nerves failed me suddenly, and I turned and ran—ran as though some dreadful hand were behind me clutching at the skirt of my dress. I rushed down the passage, through the door, and straight into the arms of Mr. Rucastle, who was waiting outside.

"'So,' said he, smiling, 'it was you, then. I thought that it must be when I saw the door open.'

"'Oh, I am so frightened!' I panted.

"'My dear young lady! my dear young lady!'—you cannot think how caressing and soothing his manner was—and what has frightened you, my dear young lady?"

"But his voice was just a little too coaxing. He overdid it. I

was keenly on my **guard** against him.

"I was **foolish** enough to go into the empty wing," I answered.

"But it is so **lonely** and eerie in this dim light that I was **frightened** and ran out again. Oh, it is so **dreadfully** still in there!"

"Only that?" said he, looking at me keenly.

"Why, what did you think?" I asked.

"Why do you think that I lock this door?"

"I am sure that I do not know."

"It is to keep people out who have no business there. Do you see?" He was still **smiling** in the most **amiable** manner.

"I am sure if I had known—"

"Well, then, you know now. And if you ever put your foot over that threshold again—here in an instant the **smile** hardened into a **grin** of **rage**, and he **glared** down at me with the face of a demon—"I'll throw you to the mastiff."

"I was so terrified that I do not know what I did. I suppose that I must have rushed past him into my room. I remember nothing until I **found** myself **lying** on my bed trembling all over. Then I **thought** of you, Mr. Holmes. I could not live there longer without some **advice**. I was **frightened** of the house, of the man, of the woman, of the **servants**, even of the **child**. They were all **horrible** to me. If I could only bring you down all would be well. Of course I might have **fled** from the house, but my **curiosity** was almost as strong as my **fears**. My mind was soon made up. I would send you a wire. I put on my hat and cloak, went down to the office, which is about half a mile from the house, and then returned, feeling very much easier. A **horrible doubt** came into my mind as I approached the door lest the dog might be loose, but I remembered that Toller had drunk himself into a state of insensibility that evening, and I knew that he was the only one in the **household** who had any **influence** with the **savage creature**, or who would venture to set him free. I **slipped** in in safety and lay awake half the night in my **joy** at the **thought** of seeing you. I had no **difficulty** in getting **leave** to come into Winchester this morning, but I must be back before three o'clock, for Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle are going on a **visit**, and will be away all the evening, so that I must look after the **child**. Now I have told you all my **adventures**, Mr. Holmes, and I should be very **glad** if you could tell me what it all means, and, above all, what I should do."

Holmes and I had listened spellbound to this **extraordinary** story. My **friend** rose now and paced up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, and an expression of the most profound gravity upon his face.

"Is Toller still drunk?" he asked.

"Yes. I heard his wife tell Mrs. Rucastle that she could do nothing with him."

"That is well. And the Rucastles go out to-night?"

"Yes."

"Is there a cellar with a good strong lock?"

"Yes, the wine-cellar."

"You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a very brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter. Do you think that you could perform one more feat? I should not ask it of you if I did not think you a quite exceptional woman."

"I will try. What is it?"

"We shall be at the Copper Beeches by seven o'clock, my friend and I. The Rucastles will be gone by that time, and Toller will, we hope, be incapable. There only remains Mrs. Toller, who might give the alarm. If you could send her into the cellar on some errand, and then turn the key upon her, you would facilitate matters immensely."

"I will do it."

"Excellent! We shall then look thoroughly into the affair. Of course there is only one feasible explanation. You have been brought there to personate someone, and the real person is imprisoned in this chamber. That is obvious. As to who this prisoner is, I have no doubt that it is the daughter, Miss Alice Rucastle, if I remember right, who was said to have gone to America. You were chosen, doubtless, as resembling her in height, figure, and the colour of your hair. Hers had been cut off, very possibly in some illness through which she has passed, and so, of course, yours had to be sacrificed also. By a curious chance you came upon her tresses. The man in the road was undoubtedly some friend of hers—possibly her fiancé—and no doubt, as you wore the girl's dress and were so like her, he was convinced from your laughter, whenever he saw you, and afterwards from your gesture, that Miss Rucastle was perfectly happy, and that she no longer desired his attentions. The dog is let loose at night to prevent him from endeavouring to communicate with her. So much is fairly clear. The most serious point in the case is the disposition of the child."

"What on earth has that to do with it?" I ejaculated.

"My dear Watson, you as a medical man are continually gaining light as to the tendencies of a child by the study of the parents. Don't you see that the converse is equally valid. I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children. This child's disposition is abnormally cruel, merely for cruelty's sake, and whether he derives this from his smiling father, as I should suspect, or from his mother, it bodes evil for the poor girl who is in their

power.”

”I am sure that you are right, Mr. Holmes,” **cried** our client. ”A thousand things come back to me which make me certain that you have **hit** it. Oh, let us **lose** not an instant in bringing help to this poor **creature**.”

”We must be circumspect, for we are **dealing** with a very **cunning** man. We can do nothing until seven o’clock. At that hour we shall be with you, and it will not be **long** before we solve the **mystery**.”

We were as **good** as our **word**, for it was just seven when we reached the Copper Beeches, having put up our trap at a wayside public-house. The group of **trees**, with their **dark** leaves shining like burnished metal in the light of the setting **sun**, were sufficient to mark the house even had Miss **Hunter** not been standing **smiling** on the door-step.

”Have you **managed** it?” asked Holmes.

A loud thudding **noise** came from somewhere downstairs. ”That is Mrs. Toller in the cellar,” said she. ”Her husband **lies** snoring on the kitchen rug. Here are his keys, which are the duplicates of Mr. Rucastle’s.”

”You have done well indeed!” **cried** Holmes with **enthusiasm**. ”Now **lead** the way, and we shall soon see the end of this **black** business.”

We passed up the stair, unlocked the door, followed on down a passage, and **found** ourselves in front of the **barricade** which Miss **Hunter** had described. Holmes cut the cord and **removed** the transverse bar. Then he tried the various keys in the lock, but without **success**. No sound came from within, and at the silence Holmes’ face clouded over.

”I **trust** that we are not too **late**,” said he. ”I think, Miss **Hunter**, that we had better go in without you. Now, Watson, put your **shoulder** to it, and we shall see whether we cannot make our way in.”

It was an old **rickety** door and gave at once before our **united strength**. Together we rushed into the room. It was empty. There was no furniture **save** a little pallet bed, a **small** table, and a basketful of linen. The skylight above was open, and the **prisoner** gone.

”There has been some villainy here,” said Holmes; ”this **beauty** has **guessed** Miss **Hunter’s** intentions and has carried his **victim** off.”

”But how?”

”Through the skylight. We shall soon see how he **managed** it.” He swung himself up onto the roof. ”Ah, yes,” he **cried**, ”here’s the end of a **long** light ladder against the eaves. That is how he did it.”

"But it is impossible," said Miss Hunter; "the ladder was not there when the Rucastles went away."

"He has come back and done it. I tell you that he is a clever and dangerous man. I should not be very much surprised if this were he whose step I hear now upon the stair. I think, Watson, that it would be as well for you to have your pistol ready."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a man appeared at the door of the room, a very fat and burly man, with a heavy stick in his hand. Miss Hunter screamed and shrunk against the wall at the sight of him, but Sherlock Holmes sprang forward and confronted him.

"You villain!" said he, "where's your daughter?"

The fat man cast his eyes round, and then up at the open skylight.

"It is for me to ask you that," he shrieked, "you thieves! Spies and thieves! I have caught you, have I? You are in my power. I'll serve you!" He turned and clattered down the stairs as hard as he could go.

"He's gone for the dog!" cried Miss Hunter.

"I have my revolver," said I.

"Better close the front door," cried Holmes, and we all rushed down the stairs together. We had hardly reached the hall when we heard the baying of a hound, and then a scream of agony, with a horrible worrying sound which it was dreadful to listen to. An elderly man with a red face and shaking limbs came staggering out at a side door.

"My God!" he cried. "Someone has loosed the dog. It's not been fed for two days. Quick, quick, or it'll be too late!"

Holmes and I rushed out and round the angle of the house, with Toller hurrying behind us. There was the huge famished brute, its black muzzle buried in Rucastle's throat, while he writhed and screamed upon the ground. Running up, I blew its brains out, and it fell over with its keen white teeth still meeting in the great creases of his neck. With much labour we separated them and carried him, living but horribly mangled, into the house. We laid him upon the drawing-room sofa, and having dispatched the sobered Toller to bear the news to his wife, I did what I could to relieve his pain. We were all assembled round him when the door opened, and a tall, gaunt woman entered the room.

"Mrs. Toller!" cried Miss Hunter.

"Yes, miss. Mr. Rucastle let me out when he came back before he went up to you. Ah, miss, it is a pity you didn't let me know what you were planning, for I would have told you that your pains were wasted."

"Ha!" said Holmes, looking keenly at her. "It is clear that Mrs. Toller knows more about this matter than anyone else."

"Yes, **sir**, I do, and I am **ready** enough to tell what I know."

"Then, **pray**, sit down, and let us hear it for there are several points on which I must **confess** that I am still in the **dark**."

"I will soon make it clear to you," said she; "and I'd have done so before now if I could ha' got out from the cellar. If there's police-court business over this, you'll remember that I was the one that stood your **friend**, and that I was Miss Alice's **friend** too."

"She was never **happy** at home, Miss Alice wasn't, from the **time** that her **father** married again. She was slighted like and had no say in anything, but it never really became **bad** for her until after she met Mr. Fowler at a **friend's** house. As well as I could **learn**, Miss Alice had rights of her own by will, but she was so **quiet** and **patient**, she was, that she never said a **word** about them but just left everything in Mr. Rucastle's hands. He knew he was **safe** with her; but when there was a **chance** of a husband coming **forward**, who would ask for all that the **law** would give him, then her **father** **thought** it **time** to put a stop on it. He wanted her to sign a paper, so that whether she married or not, he could use her **money**. When she wouldn't do it, he kept on **worrying** her until she got brain-fever, and for six weeks was at **death's** door. Then she got better at last, all **worn** to a shadow, and with her **beautiful** hair cut off; but that didn't make no **change** in her **young** man, and he stuck to her as **true** as man could be."

"Ah," said Holmes, "I think that what you have been **good** enough to tell us makes the matter **fairly** clear, and that I can deduce all that **remains**. Mr. Rucastle then, I presume, took to this **system** of **imprisonment**?"

"Yes, **sir**."

"And brought Miss **Hunter** down from London in order to get rid of the disagreeable **persistence** of Mr. Fowler."

"That was it, **sir**."

"But Mr. Fowler being a persevering man, as a **good** seaman should be, **blockaded** the house, and having met you **succeeded** by certain **arguments**, metallic or otherwise, in **convincing** you that your **interests** were the same as his."

"Mr. Fowler was a very kind-spoken, free-handed **gentleman**," said Mrs. Toller serenely.

"And in this way he **managed** that your **good** man should have no want of drink, and that a ladder should be **ready** at the moment when your **master** had gone out."

"You have it, **sir**, just as it **happened**."

"I am sure we owe you an **apology**, Mrs. Toller," said Holmes, "for you have certainly cleared up everything which puzzled us. And here comes the country surgeon and Mrs. Rucastle, so I think, Watson, that we had best **escort** Miss **Hunter** back to Winchester,

as it seems to me that our locus standi now is rather a questionable one.”

And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the copper beeches in front of the door. Mr. Rucastle survived, but was always a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of his devoted wife. They still live with their old servants, who probably know so much of Rucastle’s past life that he finds it difficult to part from them. Mr. Fowler and Miss Rucastle were married, by special license, in Southampton the day after their flight, and he is now the holder of a government appointment in the island of Mauritius. As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe that she has met with considerable success.

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