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The Adventure of the Red Circle

By

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

"Well, Mrs. Warren, I cannot see that you have any particular cause for

uneasiness, nor do I understand why I, whose time is of some value,

should interfere in the matter. I really have other things to engage

me." So spoke Sherlock Holmes and turned back to the great scrapbook

in which he was arranging and indexing some of his recent material.

But the landlady had the pertinacity and also the cunning of her sex.

She held her ground firmly.

"You arranged an affair for a lodger of mine last year," she said--"Mr.

Fairdale Hobbs."

"Ah, yes--a simple matter."

"But he would never cease talking of it--your kindness, sir, and the

way in which you brought light into the darkness. I remembered his

words when I was in doubt and darkness myself. I know you could if you

only would."

Holmes was accessible upon the side of flattery, and also, to do him

justice, upon the side of kindliness. The two forces made him lay down

his gum-brush with a sigh of resignation and push back his chair.

"Well, well, Mrs. Warren, let us hear about it, then. You don't object

to tobacco, I take it? Thank you, Watson--the matches! You are uneasy,

as I understand, because your new lodger remains in his rooms and you

cannot see him. Why, bless you, Mrs. Warren, if I were your lodger you

often would not see me for weeks on end."

"No doubt, sir; but this is different. It frightens me, Mr. Holmes. I

can't sleep for fright. To hear his quick step moving here and moving

there from early morning to late at night, and yet never to catch so

much as a glimpse of him--it's more than I can stand. My husband is as

nervous over it as I am, but he is out at his work all day, while I get

no rest from it. What is he hiding for? What has he done? Except for

the girl, I am all alone in the house with him, and it's more than my

nerves can stand."

Holmes leaned forward and laid his long, thin fingers upon the woman's

shoulder. He had an almost hypnotic power of soothing when he wished.

The scared look faded from her eyes, and her agitated features smoothed

into their usual commonplace. She sat down in the chair which he had

indicated.

"If I take it up I must understand every detail," said he. "Take time

to consider. The smallest point may be the most essential. You say

that the man came ten days ago and paid you for a fortnight's board and

lodging?"

"He asked my terms, sir. I said fifty shillings a week. There is a

small sitting-room and bedroom, and all complete, at the top of the

house."

"Well?"

"He said, 'I'll pay you five pounds a week if I can have it on my own

terms.' I'm a poor woman, sir, and Mr. Warren earns little, and the

money meant much to me. He took out a ten-pound note, and he held it

out to me then and there. 'You can have the same every fortnight for a

long time to come if you keep the terms,' he said. 'If not, I'll have

no more to do with you.'

"What were the terms?"

"Well, sir, they were that he was to have a key of the house. That was

all right. Lodgers often have them. Also, that he was to be left

entirely to himself and never, upon any excuse, to be disturbed."

"Nothing wonderful in that, surely?"

"Not in reason, sir. But this is out of all reason. He has been there

for ten days, and neither Mr. Warren, nor I, nor the girl has once set

eyes upon him. We can hear that quick step of his pacing up and down,

up and down, night, morning, and noon; but except on that first night

he had never once gone out of the house."

"Oh, he went out the first night, did he?"

"Yes, sir, and returned very late--after we were all in bed. He told

me after he had taken the rooms that he would do so and asked me not to

bar the door. I heard him come up the stair after midnight."

"But his meals?"

"It was his particular direction that we should always, when he rang,

leave his meal upon a chair, outside his door. Then he rings again

when he has finished, and we take it down from the same chair. If he

wants anything else he prints it on a slip of paper and leaves it."

"Prints it?"

"Yes, sir; prints it in pencil. Just the word, nothing more. Here's

the one I brought to show you--soap. Here's another--match. This is

one he left the first morning--daily gazette. I leave that paper with

his breakfast every morning."

"Dear me, Watson," said Homes, staring with great curiosity at the

slips of foolscap which the landlady had handed to him, "this is

certainly a little unusual. Seclusion I can understand; but why print?

Printing is a clumsy process. Why not write? What would it suggest,

Watson?"

"That he desired to conceal his handwriting."

"But why? What can it matter to him that his landlady should have a

word of his writing? Still, it may be as you say. Then, again, why

such laconic messages?"

"I cannot imagine."

"It opens a pleasing field for intelligent speculation. The words are

written with a broad-pointed, violet-tinted pencil of a not unusual

pattern. You will observe that the paper is torn away at the side here

after the printing was done, so that the 's' of 'soap' is partly gone.

Suggestive, Watson, is it not?"

"Of caution?"

"Exactly. There was evidently some mark, some thumbprint, something

which might give a clue to the person's identity. Now. Mrs. Warren,

you say that the man was of middle size, dark, and bearded. What age

would he be?"

"Youngish, sir--not over thirty."

"Well, can you give me no further indications?"

"He spoke good English, sir, and yet I thought he was a foreigner by

his accent."

"And he was well dressed?"

"Very smartly dressed, sir--quite the gentleman. Dark clothes--nothing

you would note."

"He gave no name?"

"No, sir."

"And has had no letters or callers?"

"None."

"But surely you or the girl enter his room of a morning?"

"No, sir; he looks after himself entirely."

"Dear me! that is certainly remarkable. What about his luggage?"

"He had one big brown bag with him--nothing else."

"Well, we don't seem to have much material to help us. Do you say

nothing has come out of that room--absolutely nothing?"

The landlady drew an envelope from her bag; from it she shook out two

burnt matches and a cigarette-end upon the table.

"They were on his tray this morning. I brought them because I had

heard that you can read great things out of small ones."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"There is nothing here," said he. "The matches have, of course, been

used to light cigarettes. That is obvious from the shortness of the

burnt end. Half the match is consumed in lighting a pipe or cigar.

But, dear me! this cigarette stub is certainly remarkable. The

gentleman was bearded and moustached, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't understand that. I should say that only a clean-shaven man

could have smoked this. Why, Watson, even your modest moustache would

have been singed."

"A holder?" I suggested.

"No, no; the end is matted. I suppose there could not be two people in

your rooms, Mrs. Warren?"

"No, sir. He eats so little that I often wonder it can keep life in

one."

"Well, I think we must wait for a little more material. After all, you

have nothing to complain of. You have received your rent, and he is

not a troublesome lodger, though he is certainly an unusual one. He

pays you well, and if he chooses to lie concealed it is no direct

business of yours. We have no excuse for an intrusion upon his privacy

until we have some reason to think that there is a guilty reason for

it. I've taken up the matter, and I won't lose sight of it. Report to

me if anything fresh occurs, and rely upon my assistance if it should

be needed.

"There are certainly some points of interest in this case, Watson," he

remarked when the landlady had left us. "It may, of course, be

trivial--individual eccentricity; or it may be very much deeper than

appears on the surface. The first thing that strikes one is the obvious

possibility that the person now in the rooms may be entirely different

from the one who engaged them."

"Why should you think so?"

"Well, apart from this cigarette-end, was it not suggestive that the

only time the lodger went out was immediately after his taking the

rooms? He came back--or someone came back--when all witnesses were out

of the way. We have no proof that the person who came back was the

person who went out. Then, again, the man who took the rooms spoke

English well. This other, however, prints 'match' when it should have

been 'matches.' I can imagine that the word was taken out of a

dictionary, which would give the noun but not the plural. The laconic

style may be to conceal the absence of knowledge of English. Yes,

Watson, there are good reasons to suspect that there has been a

substitution of lodgers."

"But for what possible end?"

"Ah! there lies our problem. There is one rather obvious line of

investigation." He took down the great book in which, day by day, he

filed the agony columns of the various London journals. "Dear me!" said

he, turning over the pages, "what a chorus of groans, cries, and

bleatings! What a rag-bag of singular happenings! But surely the most

valuable hunting-ground that ever was given to a student of the

unusual! This person is alone and cannot be approached by letter

without a breach of that absolute secrecy which is desired. How is any

news or any message to reach him from without? Obviously by

advertisement through a newspaper. There seems no other way, and

fortunately we need concern ourselves with the one paper only. Here

are the Daily Gazette extracts of the last fortnight. 'Lady with a

black boa at Prince's Skating Club'--that we may pass. 'Surely Jimmy

will not break his mother's heart'--that appears to be irrelevant. 'If

the lady who fainted on Brixton bus'--she does not interest me. 'Every

day my heart longs--' Bleat, Watson--unmitigated bleat! Ah, this is a

little more possible. Listen to this: 'Be patient. Will find some

sure means of communications. Meanwhile, this column. G.' That is

two days after Mrs. Warren's lodger arrived. It sounds plausible, does

it not? The mysterious one could understand English, even if he could

not print it. Let us see if we can pick up the trace again. Yes, here

we are--three days later. 'Am making successful arrangements.

Patience and prudence. The clouds will pass. G.' Nothing for a week

after that. Then comes something much more definite: 'The path is

clearing. If I find chance signal message remember code agreed--One A,

two B, and so on. You will hear soon. G.' That was in yesterday's

paper, and there is nothing in to-day's. It's all very appropriate to

Mrs. Warren's lodger. If we wait a little, Watson, I don't doubt that

the affair will grow more intelligible."

So it proved; for in the morning I found my friend standing on the

hearthrug with his back to the fire and a smile of complete

satisfaction upon his face.

"How's this, Watson?" he cried, picking up the paper from the table.

"'High red house with white stone facings. Third floor. Second window

left. After dusk. G.' That is definite enough. I think after

breakfast we must make a little reconnaissance of Mrs. Warren's

neighbourhood. Ah, Mrs. Warren! what news do you bring us this

morning?"

Our client had suddenly burst into the room with an explosive energy

which told of some new and momentous development.

"It's a police matter, Mr. Holmes!" she cried. "I'll have no more of

it! He shall pack out of there with his baggage. I would have gone

straight up and told him so, only I thought it was but fair to you to

take your opinion first. But I'm at the end of my patience, and when

it comes to knocking my old man about--"

"Knocking Mr. Warren about?"

"Using him roughly, anyway."

"But who used him roughly?"

"Ah! that's what we want to know! It was this morning, sir. Mr.

Warren is a timekeeper at Morton and Waylight's, in Tottenham Court

Road. He has to be out of the house before seven. Well, this morning

he had not gone ten paces down the road when two men came up behind

him, threw a coat over his head, and bundled him into a cab that was

beside the curb. They drove him an hour, and then opened the door and

shot him out. He lay in the roadway so shaken in his wits that he

never saw what became of the cab. When he picked himself up he found he

was on Hampstead Heath; so he took a bus home, and there he lies now on

his sofa, while I came straight round to tell you what had happened."

"Most interesting," said Holmes. "Did he observe the appearance of

these men--did he hear them talk?"

"No; he is clean dazed. He just knows that he was lifted up as if by

magic and dropped as if by magic. Two at least were in it, and maybe

three."

"And you connect this attack with your lodger?"

"Well, we've lived there fifteen years and no such happenings ever came

before. I've had enough of him. Money's not everything. I'll have him

out of my house before the day is done."

"Wait a bit, Mrs. Warren. Do nothing rash. I begin to think that this

affair may be very much more important than appeared at first sight.

It is clear now that some danger is threatening your lodger. It is

equally clear that his enemies, lying in wait for him near your door,

mistook your husband for him in the foggy morning light. On

discovering their mistake they released him. What they would have done

had it not been a mistake, we can only conjecture."

"Well, what am I to do, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have a great fancy to see this lodger of yours, Mrs. Warren."

"I don't see how that is to be managed, unless you break in the door.

I always hear him unlock it as I go down the stair after I leave the

tray."

"He has to take the tray in. Surely we could conceal ourselves and see

him do it."

The landlady thought for a moment.

"Well, sir, there's the box-room opposite. I could arrange a

looking-glass, maybe, and if you were behind the door--"

"Excellent!" said Holmes. "When does he lunch?"

"About one, sir."

"Then Dr. Watson and I will come round in time. For the present, Mrs.

Warren, good-bye."

At half-past twelve we found ourselves upon the steps of Mrs. Warren's

house--a high, thin, yellow-brick edifice in Great Orme Street, a

narrow thoroughfare at the northeast side of the British Museum.

Standing as it does near the corner of the street, it commands a view

down Howe Street, with its more pretentious houses. Holmes pointed with

a chuckle to one of these, a row of residential flats, which projected

so that they could not fail to catch the eye.

"See, Watson!" said he. "'High red house with stone facings.' There is

the signal station all right. We know the place, and we know the code;

so surely our task should be simple. There's a 'to let' card in that

window. It is evidently an empty flat to which the confederate has

access. Well, Mrs. Warren, what now?"

"I have it all ready for you. If you will both come up and leave your

boots below on the landing, I'll put you there now."

It was an excellent hiding-place which she had arranged. The mirror

was so placed that, seated in the dark, we could very plainly see the

door opposite. We had hardly settled down in it, and Mrs. Warren left

us, when a distant tinkle announced that our mysterious neighbour had

rung. Presently the landlady appeared with the tray, laid it down upon

a chair beside the closed door, and then, treading heavily, departed.

Crouching together in the angle of the door, we kept our eyes fixed

upon the mirror. Suddenly, as the landlady's footsteps died away, there

was the creak of a turning key, the handle revolved, and two thin hands

darted out and lifted the tray from the chair. An instant later it was

hurriedly replaced, and I caught a glimpse of a dark, beautiful,

horrified face glaring at the narrow opening of the box-room. Then the

door crashed to, the key turned once more, and all was silence. Holmes

twitched my sleeve, and together we stole down the stair.

"I will call again in the evening," said he to the expectant landlady.

"I think, Watson, we can discuss this business better in our own

quarters."

"My surmise, as you saw, proved to be correct," said he, speaking from

the depths of his easy-chair. "There has been a substitution of

lodgers. What I did not foresee is that we should find a woman, and no

ordinary woman, Watson."

"She saw us."

"Well, she saw something to alarm her. That is certain. The general

sequence of events is pretty clear, is it not? A couple seek refuge in

London from a very terrible and instant danger. The measure of that

danger is the rigour of their precautions. The man, who has some work

which he must do, desires to leave the woman in absolute safety while

he does it. It is not an easy problem, but he solved it in an original

fashion, and so effectively that her presence was not even known to the

landlady who supplies her with food. The printed messages, as is now

evident, were to prevent her sex being discovered by her writing. The

man cannot come near the woman, or he will guide their enemies to her.

Since he cannot communicate with her direct, he has recourse to the

agony column of a paper. So far all is clear."

"But what is at the root of it?"

"Ah, yes, Watson--severely practical, as usual! What is at the root of

it all? Mrs. Warren's whimsical problem enlarges somewhat and assumes

a more sinister aspect as we proceed. This much we can say: that it

is no ordinary love escapade. You saw the woman's face at the sign of

danger. We have heard, too, of the attack upon the landlord, which was

undoubtedly meant for the lodger. These alarms, and the desperate need

for secrecy, argue that the matter is one of life or death. The attack

upon Mr. Warren further shows that the enemy, whoever they are, are

themselves not aware of the substitution of the female lodger for the

male. It is very curious and complex, Watson."

"Why should you go further in it? What have you to gain from it?"

"What, indeed? It is art for art's sake, Watson. I suppose when you

doctored you found yourself studying cases without thought of a fee?"

"For my education, Holmes."

"Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the

greatest for the last. This is an instructive case. There is neither

money nor credit in it, and yet one would wish to tidy it up. When

dusk comes we should find ourselves one stage advanced in our

investigation."

When we returned to Mrs. Warren's rooms, the gloom of a London winter

evening had thickened into one gray curtain, a dead monotone of colour,

broken only by the sharp yellow squares of the windows and the blurred

haloes of the gas-lamps. As we peered from the darkened sitting-room

of the lodging-house, one more dim light glimmered high up through the

obscurity.

"Someone is moving in that room," said Holmes in a whisper, his gaunt

and eager face thrust forward to the window-pane. "Yes, I can see his

shadow. There he is again! He has a candle in his hand. Now he is

peering across. He wants to be sure that she is on the lookout. Now

he begins to flash. Take the message also, Watson, that we may check

each other. A single flash--that is A, surely. Now, then. How many

did you make it? Twenty. So did I. That should mean T. AT--that's

intelligible enough. Another T. Surely this is the beginning of a

second word. Now, then--TENTA. Dead stop. That can't be all, Watson?

ATTENTA gives no sense. Nor is it any better as three words AT, TEN,

TA, unless T. A. are a person's initials. There it goes again! What's

that? ATTE--why, it is the same message over again. Curious, Watson,

very curious. Now he is off once more! AT--why he is repeating it for

the third time. ATTENTA three times! How often will he repeat it?

No, that seems to be the finish. He has withdrawn from the window.

What do you make of it, Watson?"

"A cipher message, Holmes."

My companion gave a sudden chuckle of comprehension. "And not a very

obscure cipher, Watson," said he. "Why, of course, it is Italian! The

A means that it is addressed to a woman. 'Beware! Beware! Beware!'

How's that, Watson?

"I believe you have hit it."

"Not a doubt of it. It is a very urgent message, thrice repeated to

make it more so. But beware of what? Wait a bit, he is coming to the

window once more."

Again we saw the dim silhouette of a crouching man and the whisk of the

small flame across the window as the signals were renewed. They came

more rapidly than before--so rapid that it was hard to follow them.

"PERICOLO--pericolo--eh, what's that, Watson? 'Danger,' isn't it?

Yes, by Jove, it's a danger signal. There he goes again! PERI.

Halloa, what on earth--"

The light had suddenly gone out, the glimmering square of window had

disappeared, and the third floor formed a dark band round the lofty

building, with its tiers of shining casements. That last warning cry

had been suddenly cut short. How, and by whom? The same thought

occurred on the instant to us both. Holmes sprang up from where he

crouched by the window.

"This is serious, Watson," he cried. "There is some devilry going

forward! Why should such a message stop in such a way? I should put

Scotland Yard in touch with this business--and yet, it is too pressing

for us to leave."

"Shall I go for the police?"

"We must define the situation a little more clearly. It may bear some

more innocent interpretation. Come, Watson, let us go across ourselves

and see what we can make of it."

Two

As we walked rapidly down Howe Street I glanced back at the building

which we had left. There, dimly outlined at the top window, I could

see the shadow of a head, a woman's head, gazing tensely, rigidly, out

into the night, waiting with breathless suspense for the renewal of

that interrupted message. At the doorway of the Howe Street flats a

man, muffled in a cravat and greatcoat, was leaning against the

railing. He started as the hall-light fell upon our faces.

"Holmes!" he cried.

"Why, Gregson!" said my companion as he shook hands with the Scotland

Yard detective. "Journeys end with lovers' meetings. What brings you

here?"

"The same reasons that bring you, I expect," said Gregson. "How you

got on to it I can't imagine."

"Different threads, but leading up to the same tangle. I've been

taking the signals."

"Signals?"

"Yes, from that window. They broke off in the middle. We came over to

see the reason. But since it is safe in your hands I see no object in

continuing this business."

"Wait a bit!" cried Gregson eagerly. "I'll do you this justice, Mr.

Holmes, that I was never in a case yet that I didn't feel stronger for

having you on my side. There's only the one exit to these flats, so we

have him safe."

"Who is he?"

"Well, well, we score over you for once, Mr. Holmes. You must give us

best this time." He struck his stick sharply upon the ground, on which

a cabman, his whip in his hand, sauntered over from a four-wheeler

which stood on the far side of the street. "May I introduce you to Mr.

Sherlock Holmes?" he said to the cabman. "This is Mr. Leverton, of

Pinkerton's American Agency."

"The hero of the Long Island cave mystery?" said Holmes. "Sir, I am

pleased to meet you."

The American, a quiet, businesslike young man, with a clean-shaven,

hatchet face, flushed up at the words of commendation. "I am on the

trail of my life now, Mr. Holmes," said he. "If I can get Gorgiano--"

"What! Gorgiano of the Red Circle?"

"Oh, he has a European fame, has he? Well, we've learned all about him

in America. We KNOW he is at the bottom of fifty murders, and yet we

have nothing positive we can take him on. I tracked him over from New

York, and I've been close to him for a week in London, waiting some

excuse to get my hand on his collar. Mr. Gregson and I ran him to

ground in that big tenement house, and there's only one door, so he

can't slip us. There's three folk come out since he went in, but I'll

swear he wasn't one of them."

"Mr. Holmes talks of signals," said Gregson. "I expect, as usual, he

knows a good deal that we don't."

In a few clear words Holmes explained the situation as it had appeared

to us. The American struck his hands together with vexation.

"He's on to us!" he cried.

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, it figures out that way, does it not? Here he is, sending out

messages to an accomplice--there are several of his gang in London.

Then suddenly, just as by your own account he was telling them that

there was danger, he broke short off. What could it mean except that

from the window he had suddenly either caught sight of us in the

street, or in some way come to understand how close the danger was, and

that he must act right away if he was to avoid it? What do you

suggest, Mr. Holmes?"

"That we go up at once and see for ourselves."

"But we have no warrant for his arrest."

"He is in unoccupied premises under suspicious circumstances," said

Gregson. "That is good enough for the moment. When we have him by the

heels we can see if New York can't help us to keep him. I'll take the

responsibility of arresting him now."

Our official detectives may blunder in the matter of intelligence, but

never in that of courage. Gregson climbed the stair to arrest this

desperate murderer with the same absolutely quiet and businesslike

bearing with which he would have ascended the official staircase of

Scotland Yard. The Pinkerton man had tried to push past him, but

Gregson had firmly elbowed him back. London dangers were the privilege

of the London force.

The door of the left-hand flat upon the third landing was standing

ajar. Gregson pushed it open. Within all was absolute silence and

darkness. I struck a match and lit the detective's lantern. As I did

so, and as the flicker steadied into a flame, we all gave a gasp of

surprise. On the deal boards of the carpetless floor there was

outlined a fresh track of blood. The red steps pointed towards us and

led away from an inner room, the door of which was closed. Gregson

flung it open and held his light full blaze in front of him, while we

all peered eagerly over his shoulders.

In the middle of the floor of the empty room was huddled the figure of

an enormous man, his clean-shaven, swarthy face grotesquely horrible in

its contortion and his head encircled by a ghastly crimson halo of

blood, lying in a broad wet circle upon the white woodwork. His knees

were drawn up, his hands thrown out in agony, and from the centre of

his broad, brown, upturned throat there projected the white haft of a

knife driven blade-deep into his body. Giant as he was, the man must

have gone down like a pole-axed ox before that terrific blow. Beside

his right hand a most formidable horn-handled, two-edged dagger lay

upon the floor, and near it a black kid glove.

"By George! it's Black Gorgiano himself!" cried the American detective.

"Someone has got ahead of us this time."

"Here is the candle in the window, Mr. Holmes," said Gregson. "Why,

whatever are you doing?"

Holmes had stepped across, had lit the candle, and was passing it

backward and forward across the window-panes. Then he peered into the

darkness, blew the candle out, and threw it on the floor.

"I rather think that will be helpful," said he. He came over and stood

in deep thought while the two professionals were examining the body.

"You say that three people came out from the flat while you were

waiting downstairs," said he at last. "Did you observe them closely?"

"Yes, I did."

"Was there a fellow about thirty, black-bearded, dark, of middle size?"

"Yes; he was the last to pass me."

"That is your man, I fancy. I can give you his description, and we

have a very excellent outline of his footmark. That should be enough

for you."

"Not much, Mr. Holmes, among the millions of London."

"Perhaps not. That is why I thought it best to summon this lady to your

aid."

We all turned round at the words. There, framed in the doorway, was a

tall and beautiful woman--the mysterious lodger of Bloomsbury. Slowly

she advanced, her face pale and drawn with a frightful apprehension,

her eyes fixed and staring, her terrified gaze riveted upon the dark

figure on the floor.

"You have killed him!" she muttered. "Oh, Dio mio, you have killed

him!" Then I heard a sudden sharp intake of her breath, and she sprang

into the air with a cry of joy. Round and round the room she danced,

her hands clapping, her dark eyes gleaming with delighted wonder, and a

thousand pretty Italian exclamations pouring from her lips. It was

terrible and amazing to see such a woman so convulsed with joy at such

a sight. Suddenly she stopped and gazed at us all with a questioning

stare.

"But you! You are police, are you not? You have killed Giuseppe

Gorgiano. Is it not so?"

"We are police, madam."

She looked round into the shadows of the room.

"But where, then, is Gennaro?" she asked. "He is my husband, Gennaro

Lucca. I am Emilia Lucca, and we are both from New York. Where is

Gennaro? He called me this moment from this window, and I ran with all

my speed."

"It was I who called," said Holmes.

"You! How could you call?"

"Your cipher was not difficult, madam. Your presence here was

desirable. I knew that I had only to flash 'Vieni' and you would surely

come."

The beautiful Italian looked with awe at my companion.

"I do not understand how you know these things," she said. "Giuseppe

Gorgiano--how did he--" She paused, and then suddenly her face lit up

with pride and delight. "Now I see it! My Gennaro! My splendid,

beautiful Gennaro, who has guarded me safe from all harm, he did it,

with his own strong hand he killed the monster! Oh, Gennaro, how

wonderful you are! What woman could ever be worthy of such a man?"

"Well, Mrs. Lucca," said the prosaic Gregson, laying his hand upon the

lady's sleeve with as little sentiment as if she were a Notting Hill

hooligan, "I am not very clear yet who you are or what you are; but

you've said enough to make it very clear that we shall want you at the

Yard."

"One moment, Gregson," said Holmes. "I rather fancy that this lady may

be as anxious to give us information as we can be to get it. You

understand, madam, that your husband will be arrested and tried for the

death of the man who lies before us? What you say may be used in

evidence. But if you think that he has acted from motives which are

not criminal, and which he would wish to have known, then you cannot

serve him better than by telling us the whole story."

"Now that Gorgiano is dead we fear nothing," said the lady. "He was a

devil and a monster, and there can be no judge in the world who would

punish my husband for having killed him."

"In that case," said Holmes, "my suggestion is that we lock this door,

leave things as we found them, go with this lady to her room, and form

our opinion after we have heard what it is that she has to say to us."

Half an hour later we were seated, all four, in the small sitting-room

of Signora Lucca, listening to her remarkable narrative of those

sinister events, the ending of which we had chanced to witness. She

spoke in rapid and fluent but very unconventional English, which, for

the sake of clearness, I will make grammatical.

"I was born in Posilippo, near Naples," said she, "and was the daughter

of Augusto Barelli, who was the chief lawyer and once the deputy of

that part. Gennaro was in my father's employment, and I came to love

him, as any woman must. He had neither money nor position--nothing but

his beauty and strength and energy--so my father forbade the match. We

fled together, were married at Bari, and sold my jewels to gain the

money which would take us to America. This was four years ago, and we

have been in New York ever since.

"Fortune was very good to us at first. Gennaro was able to do a

service to an Italian gentleman--he saved him from some ruffians in the

place called the Bowery, and so made a powerful friend. His name was

Tito Castalotte, and he was the senior partner of the great firm of

Castalotte and Zamba, who are the chief fruit importers of New York.

Signor Zamba is an invalid, and our new friend Castalotte has all power

within the firm, which employs more than three hundred men. He took my

husband into his employment, made him head of a department, and showed

his good-will towards him in every way. Signor Castalotte was a

bachelor, and I believe that he felt as if Gennaro was his son, and

both my husband and I loved him as if he were our father. We had taken

and furnished a little house in Brooklyn, and our whole future seemed

assured when that black cloud appeared which was soon to overspread our

sky.

"One night, when Gennaro returned from his work, he brought a

fellow-countryman back with him. His name was Gorgiano, and he had

come also from Posilippo. He was a huge man, as you can testify, for

you have looked upon his corpse. Not only was his body that of a giant

but everything about him was grotesque, gigantic, and terrifying. His

voice was like thunder in our little house. There was scarce room for

the whirl of his great arms as he talked. His thoughts, his emotions,

his passions, all were exaggerated and monstrous. He talked, or rather

roared, with such energy that others could but sit and listen, cowed

with the mighty stream of words. His eyes blazed at you and held you

at his mercy. He was a terrible and wonderful man. I thank God that

he is dead!

"He came again and again. Yet I was aware that Gennaro was no more

happy than I was in his presence. My poor husband would sit pale and

listless, listening to the endless raving upon politics and upon social

questions which made up our visitor's conversation. Gennaro said

nothing, but I, who knew him so well, could read in his face some

emotion which I had never seen there before. At first I thought that

it was dislike. And then, gradually, I understood that it was more

than dislike. It was fear--a deep, secret, shrinking fear. That

night--the night that I read his terror--I put my arms round him and I

implored him by his love for me and by all that he held dear to hold

nothing from me, and to tell me why this huge man overshadowed him so.

"He told me, and my own heart grew cold as ice as I listened. My poor

Gennaro, in his wild and fiery days, when all the world seemed against

him and his mind was driven half mad by the injustices of life, had

joined a Neapolitan society, the Red Circle, which was allied to the

old Carbonari. The oaths and secrets of this brotherhood were

frightful, but once within its rule no escape was possible. When we

had fled to America Gennaro thought that he had cast it all off

forever. What was his horror one evening to meet in the streets the

very man who had initiated him in Naples, the giant Gorgiano, a man who

had earned the name of 'Death' in the south of Italy, for he was red to

the elbow in murder! He had come to New York to avoid the Italian

police, and he had already planted a branch of this dreadful society in

his new home. All this Gennaro told me and showed me a summons which

he had received that very day, a Red Circle drawn upon the head of it

telling him that a lodge would be held upon a certain date, and that

his presence at it was required and ordered.

"That was bad enough, but worse was to come. I had noticed for some

time that when Gorgiano came to us, as he constantly did, in the

evening, he spoke much to me; and even when his words were to my

husband those terrible, glaring, wild-beast eyes of his were always

turned upon me. One night his secret came out. I had awakened what he

called 'love' within him--the love of a brute--a savage. Gennaro had

not yet returned when he came. He pushed his way in, seized me in his

mighty arms, hugged me in his bear's embrace, covered me with kisses,

and implored me to come away with him. I was struggling and screaming

when Gennaro entered and attacked him. He struck Gennaro senseless and

fled from the house which he was never more to enter. It was a deadly

enemy that we made that night.

"A few days later came the meeting. Gennaro returned from it with a

face which told me that something dreadful had occurred. It was worse

than we could have imagined possible. The funds of the society were

raised by blackmailing rich Italians and threatening them with violence

should they refuse the money. It seems that Castalotte, our dear friend

and benefactor, had been approached. He had refused to yield to

threats, and he had handed the notices to the police. It was resolved

now that such an example should be made of them as would prevent any

other victim from rebelling. At the meeting it was arranged that he and

his house should be blown up with dynamite. There was a drawing of

lots as to who should carry out the deed. Gennaro saw our enemy's

cruel face smiling at him as he dipped his hand in the bag. No doubt it

had been prearranged in some fashion, for it was the fatal disc with

the Red Circle upon it, the mandate for murder, which lay upon his

palm. He was to kill his best friend, or he was to expose himself and

me to the vengeance of his comrades. It was part of their fiendish

system to punish those whom they feared or hated by injuring not only

their own persons but those whom they loved, and it was the knowledge

of this which hung as a terror over my poor Gennaro's head and drove

him nearly crazy with apprehension.

"All that night we sat together, our arms round each other, each

strengthening each for the troubles that lay before us. The very next

evening had been fixed for the attempt. By midday my husband and I

were on our way to London, but not before he had given our benefactor

full warning of this danger, and had also left such information for the

police as would safeguard his life for the future.

"The rest, gentlemen, you know for yourselves. We were sure that our

enemies would be behind us like our own shadows. Gorgiano had his

private reasons for vengeance, but in any case we knew how ruthless,

cunning, and untiring he could be. Both Italy and America are full of

stories of his dreadful powers. If ever they were exerted it would be

now. My darling made use of the few clear days which our start had

given us in arranging for a refuge for me in such a fashion that no

possible danger could reach me. For his own part, he wished to be free

that he might communicate both with the American and with the Italian

police. I do not myself know where he lived, or how. All that I

learned was through the columns of a newspaper. But once as I looked

through my window, I saw two Italians watching the house, and I

understood that in some way Gorgiano had found our retreat. Finally

Gennaro told me, through the paper, that he would signal to me from a

certain window, but when the signals came they were nothing but

warnings, which were suddenly interrupted. It is very clear to me now

that he knew Gorgiano to be close upon him, and that, thank God! he was

ready for him when he came. And now, gentleman, I would ask you

whether we have anything to fear from the law, or whether any judge

upon earth would condemn my Gennaro for what he has done?"

"Well, Mr. Gregson," said the American, looking across at the official,

"I don't know what your British point of view may be, but I guess that

in New York this lady's husband will receive a pretty general vote of

thanks."

"She will have to come with me and see the chief," Gregson answered.

"If what she says is corroborated, I do not think she or her husband

has much to fear. But what I can't make head or tail of, Mr. Holmes,

is how on earth YOU got yourself mixed up in the matter."

"Education, Gregson, education. Still seeking knowledge at the old

university. Well, Watson, you have one more specimen of the tragic and

grotesque to add to your collection. By the way, it is not eight

o'clock, and a Wagner night at Covent Garden! If we hurry, we might be

in time for the second act."

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